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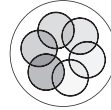
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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR  
CHICANA AND CHICANO  
STUDIES



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*Beginning a  
New Millennium of Chicana and  
Chicano Scholarship:*

SELECTED PROCEEDINGS *of the*  
2001 NACCS CONFERENCE



*Edited by*  
**Jaime H. García**

*Beginning a New Millennium of  
Chicana and Chicano Scholarship:*

SELECTED PROCEEDINGS *of the* 2001 NACCS CONFERENCE

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR CHICANA AND CHICANO STUDIES

*Edited by Jaime H. García*

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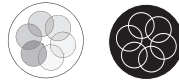
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T A B L E O F  
C O N T E N T S



*Beginning a  
New Millennium of Chicana and  
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INTRODUCTION



## *Beginning a New Millennium of Chicana and Chicano Scholarship*

The theme of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies 2001 conference was *I-uan g ceksan, Tuchá Aria Wa Frontierapo, Borrando Fronteras, Erasing Borders: La Educación, Salud, Inmigración e Historia del Pueblo*. The theme brings together the cultures and identities that shape us as Chicanas and Chicanos and our communities. In the spirit of the conference theme the proceedings contains papers delivered at the conference that examine the borders and intersections in which we find ourselves. Each of the papers contained here explore the manner in which Chicanas and Chicanos experience the area of community, education, literature, performance arts, and sexuality.

Reflective of that diversity are the comments of NACCS Scholars Cherrie Moraga and Cordelia Candelaria, which are reprinted from the June 2001 issue of *noticias de NACCS*. Cherrie comments on her work as a Chicana lesbian scholar while Cordelia briefly discusses her work and presents two. Similarly, the Cerventes Premio student papers examine the areas of history and sexuality. In *La Planta es Vida: Plants and Curandrismo on San Antonio's Westside*, the graduate student

winning paper by Elizabeth de la Portilla, the history of curanderismo in San Antonio is examined. Yvette Saavedra interrogates the conceptions of sexuality of Chicana lesbians in relation to the broader Chicano community in her paper titled *Chicana Scism: The Relationship between Chicana Feminists and Chicana Feminists Lesbians*.

The second section of these selected proceedings contains two papers dealing with issues in Chicano communities. Both papers address forms of violence in our communities, on examining racial profiling and the other examining ways to the role of art in addressing violence. In his paper, Johnson examines the importance of collaboration between Chicano and African communities in working to end racial profiling. Martinez examines the use of art in addressing violence in communities in her paper.

Section Three of the proceedings both the historical and contemporary state of education are examined. In the Yosso, Villalpando, Bernal, and Solórzano paper a proposed theoretical framework for conducting and interpreting research in Chicano education utilizing critical race theory and postmodern perspectives is presented. Heidenreich examines the treatment of Chicano populations in schools in the 19th century. Together the papers provide a contrast of where Chicanos have been in the educational process in 19th century United States and what we can achieve if alternative theoretical frameworks are used in educational research involving Chicano students.

Literature is the focus of the fourth section of these selected proceedings. Each of the papers speaks to the complexity of identities in the Chicano community. In his paper, Anderson analyzes Rudolfo Anaya's *Jalamanta* to delineate how the understanding the past roles taken by persons in Chicano communities can provide guidance to current challenges faced. Cantú examines four autobiographical texts to give light to what it was like growing up on the U.S./Mexico borderlands early in the twentieth century. Mayan themes in Chicano literature are the focus of Martínez's paper.



Three of the four selections in the section focusing on performance arts deal with music while the fourth deals with art as enacted. Holscher and Fernández examine the status of *narcocorridos* and the rise in popularity of this musical form in certain segments. In his entry San Miguel's contribution examines the development of *musica Tejana* throughout the twentieth century. The contributions of Chicano rap as a reflection of the marginalization experienced by Chicano inner city youth is the focus of McFarland's paper. Mayorga's paper presents an analysis and interpretation of Chicano performance art as resistance to dominating powers.

The final section of these selected proceedings deal with sexuality. Two of the three selection deal with identity as seen in literature while the third provides a self-analysis of identity. Rodríguez Kessler utilizes Rodríguez's *Hunger of Memory* and Villarreal's *Pocho* to examine identity of non-heterosexual Chicano men situated in a homophobic society. Examining the works of John Rechy, Pérez follows changes in the descriptions and actions of gay male characters and the result of those developments on identity in gay male culture. Pendleton Jimenez presents a portrait of a drag king by examining her identity as a Chicana drag king living in Toronto.

The selected papers contained in these proceedings are just some of the areas of scholarship that Chicanas and Chicanos are pursuing as we enter into a new millennium. These and other lines of research will contribute to our understanding of the diversity found in Chicano communities and the borders and intersections that we shape and challenge as we move to develop as scholars, activists, and individuals. It is hoped that these papers will spark discussion and new avenues of research as Chicana and Chicano scholars and activists proceed into the new millennium and challenge ourselves and the broader society.

The papers presented in these proceedings are to be considered works in progress. Presenters at the 2001 National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies conference were invited to submit their work as presented. Thus, other than minor editing and formatting, papers are

in the form in which they were heard at the conference. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of NACCS authors used formats accepted in their respective disciplines. Any digression from standard formats is the result of attempting to bring some uniformity to the final printed proceedings.

Thanks to those individual of the Coordinating Committee who assisted in the completion of this project. Julia Curry Rodriguez and Kathryn Blackmer Reyes assisted with the logistics of contacting presenters to submit manuscripts. Thanks to Raul Coronado Jr. for collecting and organizing manuscripts submitted. Special thanks to Yolanda Chavez Leyva, Deborah Vargas, and José Ibarra-Virgen who assisted in reading manuscripts submitted for consideration.

*Jaime H. García*

JANUARY 2004

SECTION  
ONE



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*NACCS Scholars and  
Cervantes Student  
Premio*



CHAPTER  
ONE



*Cherrie Moraga*  
*2001 NACCS Scholar Award Speech*

Gracias. Well I think it's befitting that Jorge introduced me in this context. All the words that were read were really beautiful. One of those things about being an artist or being a writer is contingent on feeling very *loca*, most of the time. It's necessary, if you don't feel *loca* when you're doing it, you're doing something wrong. And, I mean it quite sincerely so it requires you to be alone a lot. And, in the places where you're not alone there is no guarantee that anybody's listening. What I want to thank you for is listening. I don't say thank you, I thank you just for listening to me. I thank you for listening to us. I always have felt that whether to love the good fortune or privilege I was able to speak, and to write. But certainly it wasn't about having books at home. It's not about having a library book.

I was very glad that I was born in 1952. Because when I came of age I came to age, I think, in my opinion at one of the best possible times. Which is to come of age at a time in which you believe that the future meant progressive politics. Because, everybody was doing progressive

politics, Chicanos, Blacks, Queers, Feminists, all of these. And one was rolling into the next, and into the next, into the next. So I am grateful that I came of age at that time because if I had not come of age at that time I personally, and I say that with all the “we’s” behind me that have had a similar experience, I personally would never have written a line. Because, I wrote in the context of a movement. And those movements were multifaceted. Those movements, for me, were places of rejection and acceptance, rejection and acceptance, rejection and acceptance. But it was always in the context of a movement that I felt that I had the right to write. Outside of that we would still be writing trying to imitate the white man.

Its very significant that, in fact, also that I am sharing this stage, this honor, with Cordelia and that Jorge introduced me. Because I have to credit the two of them for being two of the people I remember quite distinctly for having the guts to speak favorably and critically in a good way, intelligently, and take Chicana lesbians seriously. This was in 1986 that I believe that Jorge wrote this review of *Giving Up the Ghost*. And also around the same time Cordelia had invited me, to speak at the University of Colorado, in Boulder. And I can’t tell you, I remember getting Jorge’s review. I went “Damn, a Chicano wrote this!” I mean this, this was an amazing moment in history. You don’t know that, but it was somebody who had the willingness to look at a play by a Chicana lesbian as a love story. And a line I remember so much from this was he wrote something like “It would be a shame if people just thought of this work as...” you know, like those categories, Chicana plays, Lesbian plays, all of the great categories to be in. But he was saying it was art. He was saying it was art. That made a world of difference to me. So whenever you sort of wonder about the relationship sometimes between criticism and art, those are those beautiful moments that have a potential of happening.

And it was right around the same time that I came to campus over there in Colorado, but then I started, I got this notion that possibly there was a community there. I’m not going to read the chapter

opener, but what I wanted to talk about was as Cordelia had first said in her discourse of being a *veterana de tres guerras* you know, of going though what it was she knew as Chicano studies. This was not the war I fought. I did not be, I have not been active in NACCS. I have come a few times, but this has not been my battleground. And I really want to honor and respect particularly in all of those women like the women's caucus and all of those organizers from the lesbian caucus. All those women, when I use to hear the names Emma and Deena. You know its like, you'd hear these names, but I wasn't doing work here. I heard about the formation of these caucuses for the first time trying to raise specifics about gender politics and lesbian/gay politics. So I honor and credit them tonight.

But it was a war to get here. And, the battle that I remember that, I'm holding this book *Loving in the War Years* because this is a new edition that came out 20 years after some of the first poems in here. Some of the first poems were written in 1977. When I wrote this book I was living in New York City. When I finished the book in 1983 it came out and it was after *This Bridge Called My Back*, and I finished the book, I gave it to my publisher and Rudy Anaya had written a thing about the "Tenements of New York." It was a very beautiful little blurb and I thought there was some possibility here, the godfather of Chicano literature could write about a dyke. It was a good piece of work.

Again, those things are very important to me. But, I was terrified. I though even though I was living at New York at the time it was almost the distance of New York that allowed me publish the book. I published the book and New York was not far enough. I had to leave the country. I needed to go to México. So, I went to México, and I remember being in a little hotel in the D.F. And, my girlfriend at the time went ahead and sent me *Loving in the War Years* any way. And, I was trying to get away from it. And, quite honestly I have to confess I was terrified. I was terrified because I had never read the words lesbian and Chicana in the same line unless somebody was putting us down.

I remember that early work of *La Chicana*. That old book *La Chicana* by Mirandé. And, it hurt me so much, I read that thing about calling us witches and, you know, white women and witches and, you know, trivializing it. It hurt me to my core. Again, it didn't hurt just me it hurt us. And, it doesn't make me proud to talk about dehumanization. I think being a victim is really unpleasant and I don't get anything off about it.

So when I put those words down I was really frightened and the people I was frightened of was you all. It was, it was you all. I mean, it was you all 20 years ago. Because it doesn't matter what white people say about me. It hurts you the most when your family rejects you. And so I went to México and the book came anyway and I read it and I was terrified. And, what I realized, is that it was around and the book came out in '83 and there was a just little bit of a lag time but suddenly there was a readership. There were some people reading it, the book, the work, you know. Later it became Gloria Anzaldúa's work. But more importantly later there came bodies, students, you all.

I think one of the greatest privileges for me has been to teach Chicano, gay, lesbian, all Mexicans. Not only Chicanos, but the queer ones, even the ones that you know before they do. It's a privilege to teach them. What I really respect and what I still really believe is that we have to learn from queer Chicanos and Latinos. We are forced to reckon with our bodies. Our bodies remain the sight of our desire, and our oppression. And so that's why all the heterosexual feminists have learned so much from lesbians. Because, we were forced to define what sexuality period meant. Because my sexuality is so much formed by heterosexuality, my mother's like a high fem. I understand heterosexuality. My job is to try to figure out how to be a lesbian in that, in Chicano heterosexuality. So we taught heterosexual women an enormous amount about themselves.

I would advise the men, the heterosexual men in the audience, start listening to the young gay men. They really aren't interested in you in

that way. But they have an enormous amount to teach you about masculinity. And about what it means to be a man because they go to bed with you. The men they go to bed with are not different than you. So my little brothers taught me a lot because your generation didn't have the courage to look at it. Your generation of men do not have the courage to look at how you desire. And your inability to do that has hurt you as much as it's hurts me. You know feminism is just about the all of us getting free. It's about healing our family and those little brothers are doing it. And I'm pointing them out specifically because my generation of queer men couldn't do it, didn't do it. But AIDS changed those boys. They had to do it, because they weren't going live if they didn't figure out what their bodies were doing and why they're doing it.

So I would encourage you to follow them as these young generations of young men to learn that because I have an enormous amount of faith in our capacity as men and women to build out families. And I don't care what your gender is or what your, you know, who you want to be with. None of that matters except to the degree 'til we understand we're all in this spectrum together. And I am steadfast committed to healing our families.

I want to thank you so much for helping me and us feel a little less *loca*. I am filled with hope and a great depth of gratitude to all of you. This is a very important moment for me to be able to stand in front of you and say these words today, my thoughts for probably about 20 years. Thank you so much.



CHAPTER  
TWO



*Cordelia Candalaria*  
*2001 NACCS Scholar Award Speech*

Muy agradecida. That was quite an inspiration just to hear. Each of those credits reminds me of all the dishwashing and the sweeping and the mopping that went on behind the scenes to produce that work. So, it's so nice to hear it from the other side. Thank you so much, Julia [Curry Rodríguez].

I also want to thank the current NACCS leadership and those of you who are doing the dishwashing and the planning and all of the infrastructural work that's necessary to keep things going in Chicana/o studies around the country. Part of the beauty of our scholarship is that we think getting our hands dirty is all right, even as we never want to lose sight of our intellectual and scholarly goals. It's crucial not to forget that and we are about producing research based knowledge as we keep our hands and feet in the community. That's been part of our uniqueness and they go together.

To those of you who wrote on my behalf, thank you for such a beautiful surprised. I'm very honored to share this with a pathbreaking group of

other people: Rodolfo Acuña, Luis Leal, Margarita Melville, Americo Paredes. Tey Diana Rebolledo, Ada Riddell Sosa, Julian Samora and all of the rest. And of course, to receive it this year along with my colega and inspiration, Cherríe Moraga, means so much to me and is such a testament to the collective will and energy and creativity that Chicana/o studies cultural workers. Thanks as well to my family—husband, son, parents, siblings: todos—without whom it wouldn't have been possible, or even very fulfilling.

But, also recall it wasn't always this way. Because there were exclusionary agendas we had to confront along the way. Tonight I'd like to express some of my gratitude with dos poemas que salieron de diferentes conferencias de NACCS. The first one was written in many ways my salvation from the stress and depression that resulted from a very heated and lively and animated meeting of the PAC, the Political Action Committee. Anybody here remember those PAC meetings? Anyway, the first poem is called *Raíces Misteriosas* and describes one stage of my working out some of the PAC ideological and identity debates. The second was written a few years afterwards. Taken together, they're sort of a document of my association with the Association, a kind of "portrait of the profesora as a MEChista on the NAC(C)S continuum." They try to capture that stress, conflict, uncertainty, and sacredness of that process. Allow me some poetic license, colegas. Con su permiso.



## *Raíces Misteriosas*

[sing: alla en el rancho grande  
alla nunca vivía  
ni conocía  
ni entendía]

It was just a song of the past  
Of that past before youth  
Herencia de mis abuelos  
Y de los d'ellos.

A time, they say, of romance  
When golondrinas winged through open sky  
And freedom lived unfettered in the soul.

[sing: en la tierra morena,  
cielito lindo, vienen bajando,  
un par d'ojitos negros, cielito lindo,  
et ceterrrrrrraahhh]

Pero otros dicen “¡Mentiras!”  
It was a time of work and dust  
And chains that held the mind and spirit  
Ignorant, esclavos del pinche patrón.

[sing: borachita me voy para la cap-i-tal—]

So here I am  
Pulled by the strains of music  
And my past unsure of any of it  
Yet forced to sing

[sing: Como una paloma por su cu  
cu ru cu cu—]

Aver que dejo a mis hijos:

Canciones  
Lagrimas  
Ambos.



The second poem has an interesting history in that it was first published in Germany by Dieter Herms, some of you remember Dieter and his important effort to raise consciousness in Europe about our work. So I'll give credit to *Die zeitgenössische Literatur de Chicanos*. As bad my German is, you can probably appreciate how interesting it was to help Dieter translate this into German. Written in the form of a conversation with my little sister who represents all of the "little" sisters and brothers, including myself, because we all start out inocentes. And, of course, there's a pun on *manita* because, as some of you know, I am a *manita* de Nuevo Mexico. Thank you.



### *Explaining Aztlán to a 'Manita*

In the beginning, 'manita, God ended the chaos y ¡milagro!  
gave us the earth and Aztlán.

"¿'Mana, que es 'que es'?"

What do you mean, "What is 'what is'?"

"What you said, 'God ended the 'que es'—?"

Oh, no! "Que es" no es "chaos"—o, posiblemente, sí es.

But let me explain:

you asked about that word on the wall at your school:

### AZTLÁN

you said.

Pues, in the beginning algunos hablaban de "Uno,"

De nomas Un Fundamental. But isn't there more?

Like. . . .

Aztlán is Logos

like in the beginning was the word

the Word made flesh among us —

-flesh, 'manita, como carne—spiritual meat

of our faith en La Virgen, nuestra Guadalupe,

and the blessed fruit de su vientre, Jesús.

Or, is it really only a paradoxical fauna,  
or even fungus, of faith grown heavy among us,  
a weary global Church of martyred mujeres,  
heavy as Vatican gold in the martyred padre's alter  
in El Salvador, Guatemala, Ubiquita.

Sí Aztlán es locus  
like that place where our ancestors,  
los primeros jefecitos y abuelitas came from long ago.  
That locus “al norte, cerca al sol.”  
No, ‘hita, not “loco” but locus,  
un lugar, como barrio o campo,  
como pueblo o hogar—allí—anyplace We are.

Pero parece tambien que Aztlán is logic, ‘manita, logic—  
that distant source of law now hidden from it.  
The logic of how well you can define the geographical axis  
relative to the ideological axioms  
to arrive at an historical determinism  
that intersects time/space with race/class/ and gender:

Si, gender, para un feminismo bien hecho.  
A feminism that revives the power of nosotros, ‘manita,  
our thought, feeling, and action  
that revives the truth of peace and justice para todos,  
peace and justice for all—for a change.

The ALL that finally includes la mama, la abuela, la criada,  
la obrera, la santa y tambien la puta who got her reputación  
from centuries of men who never lost theirs.  
Only such a revival can guarantee a survival worth sharing.  
Femenismo, sister, the only liberation movement  
that sees the folly and fallacy of absolute phallicism!  
Hey! that's cla-a-a-a-s-s-sy!, ‘manita!  
Well, maybe, too classy.

Because what we really need is classlessness.  
You know, ‘manita, the classless-US that defines  
those “¿y que?” words

E-quity / E quality and even E-equilibrium—  
that classless state of consciousness  
that is both nation and notion  
both inner and outer  
both you/me and s/he/we—  
that state of mind that becomes a state of being  
a state of freeing us from class.

Yes, that’s it! Aztlán is a model not a metaphysics.  
It’s a model for the masses—

no, ‘manita, not like “misa,”  
for that mass is sometimes a chimera  
and even a crime.

I mean Aztlán is a model for mass movements—

no, not “mass media”—  
that’s mostly a cult of public sedation  
that obstructs real human relations—  
mass marketing’s a prison not our paradigm.

## Aztlán is the paradigm.

The paradigm that looks at power  
through the oldest ojos of all, sister,  
the radical revolutionary’s eyes.

Why oldest?

Because todo—todo—¡TODO es revolucionario!  
es revolucionario!

like the revolving globe  
like day and night revolutionizes time and space everyday

like “night and day you are the one”  
is love and revolutionary power  
like life fertilized by death.

Why oldest?  
Because all—All—ALL is rad i cal!  
De las raíces de abajo  
from the seed underneath, kid,  
the seed beneath the pyramid of elite power  
to be overturned so the seed of our power,  
NOSOTROS, can lead a new way.

See, ‘manita, how your pretty graffiti at school  
led us to discover what we need to recover?  
Aztlán es un buen mestizaje  
of identity  
of idea  
of ideology

And if we work it together con el Borinquen de los barrios  
with urban factories and border maquilas  
with tribal rez’s and campos de pieza de todo  
y con TODO las razas del rainbow  
en un mezclamiento natural—  
then from Nicaragua to Namibia  
from El Paso to el norte  
de Los Angeles a los rincones mas allá  
y tambien dentro la casa y por  
la causa femenista—  
-hacemos un nuevo renacimiento.

And all around our U~N~I~T~Y will turn things  
NWOD EDISPU  
‘Manita: that’s the RIGHT SIDE UP!  
with the same cosmic >>>>> FORCE>>>>>  
that warms the earth  
[at NACCS in Tucson, Arizona on April 6, 2001]

Then we’ll know—Then we’ll be—  
A Z T L A N



CHAPTER  
THREE



*Elizabeth de la Portilla*

CERVANTES GRADUATE RECIPIENT

*La Planta es la Vida:  
Plants and Curanderismo on  
San Antonio's Westside*

INTRODUCTION

Not long ago I traveled to Eagle Pass on the Texas-Mexico border with Jacinto Madrigal, a yerbero (herbalist) I have known and studied with for the last several years. It is a three-hour drive more or less from San Antonio where we both live and it is our habit to talk and tell stories along the way. Our talks always contain a new lesson for me, another opportunity to learn about plants as he sees them. Mr. Madrigal is an expert in these matters. For him, plants are more than a way to treat an illness, they are the essence of life itself. He is acknowledged by the community as a *curandero*, a healer, though he prefers the title of *yerbero*.



San Antonio represents a gateway to the borderland region because of its proximity to the *frontera* (150 miles) and because the city's infrastructure facilitates the movement of goods and individuals to and from the border area. Much has been written on the border experience and how its residents are shaped by the circuitous flow of commerce and culture ( e.g., Martinez, 1994; Anzaldúa, 1987; Limón, 1991) What emerges is a regional culture which reflects the influences of two nations, the U.S. and Mexico, an area of fluid space (Alvarez 1995:447). In my research, I examine the tradition of *curanderismo* and how it is part of the negotiating process between cultures and what role *curanderos* play in the social and cultural identity construction of the individuals who seek their help. My background is in anthropology and I make use of theories from medical anthropology, phenomenology and ethnobotany in my research. This paper is reflective of these bodies of work. There is first a discussion of the history of *curanderismo*, then its structure, and its practice in San Antonio.

Ethnobotany is not an area of great academic familiarity but I find that it adds an important aspect to my work. Different disciplines, ecology, biology, chemistry, and anthropology examine the relationship people have with their natural environment in order to understand food, medical, and health traditions as well as elements of culture construction. While these aspects are part of my work, I keep Richard Ford's description of ethnobotany uppermost in my mind, "Ethnobotany is the study of direct interrelations between humans and plants" (Ford, 1994:44). There is a wide body of literature in ethnobotany, much of it concerning the chemical analysis and practical application of botanical materials by non-western peoples. But the selection, use, and discussion of plants can also give us a way to understand how *all* people *think* about plants that in turn demonstrate how the world at large is viewed. The fact that medicinal plants are purchased from a *botanica* or a supermarket instead of harvested directly by the people who use them does not alter the significant place these materials hold in *curanderismo*.

Three summers ago, I had a car wreck. I never saw the other car, just brakes screeching, a loud bang and then the relentless sound of my car horn. Someone tugged me out of the slouched position I found myself in and put a dirty bandana to my bloody nose. I was lucky in two ways, one it wasn't a serious accident and two, it happened in front of a shop owned by Berta, a *curandera* with whom I work. The people who pulled me out of the car were folks from the neighborhood; others, whom I had seen drift in and out of her shop, spoke to the police on my behalf and the woman who called Berta from a neighbor's house, owns a business on the same block. Berta came flying down the sidewalk, or so it seemed to me, looking more frightened than I felt.

My niece was phoned to take me home but before letting me go, Berta felt I needed to be treated for *susto*. I was unsteady, my hands wouldn't stop trembling. She said I was turning *amarilla*, meaning my face was drained of blood and I looked pale, a little yellow. *Amarillo* is also indicative of a form of *susto*, which precipitates soul loss. Berta in this case thought I was in danger of my soul taking flight and could possibly die. So into her shop we go, the neighbors trailing behind us and the guys from the neighborhood admonishing me to be more careful. Ever the anthropologist, I told my niece to retrieve the tape recorder from the wreckage of my car for this was a true ethnographic moment and I would be remiss in not recording every detail.

Holding an alum crystal, Berta passed her hand over my body three times, repeating prayers and entreating her guardian saints to take care of me and help me get over my shock. She perfumed my hair and speaking loudly in my right ear called my spirit back to me, just in case. I went home and rested, feeling a little better knowing someone was looking after my soul. This ritual was repeated the next two days and each evening she and Jacinto would call and check on me. They recommended teas to calm my nerves and bolstered my spirits with *consejos*. I gave myself over to their expert advice and felt secure in their care.

A curandera or curandero diagnosing a disruption in someone's life as an illness is a daily occurrence in Mexican and Mexican-American barrios. The ritual treatment of the illness along with the involvement of relatives or neighbors as needed is an integral part of the healing narrative. Sacred language, candles, incense, plants and other material objects are part of this narrative. These objects are thought to contain energy that the curandero can manipulate in order to effect a cure.

This idea of energy and its manipulation is at the foundation of *curanderismo*. *Curanderismo* is a traditional medicine system found in Latin America and in the U.S. and it is practiced by some segments of the Mexican and Mexican-American population. *Curanderismo* has been viewed as a tradition that draws on many influences. Its roots are in “the old and new worlds. When the Spanish conquistadores arrived in the new world they brought with them the most advanced medical knowledge of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” (Mayers, 1989: 284).

In the Americas there existed an effective medical and medico-botanical system at the time of the conquest. The *Codex Badianus* of 1552 and the *Florentine Codex* are early attempts by the Spanish to document Aztec botanical knowledge in a Western fashion (Furst 1995:108-130). It is clear to us that the Aztecs at the time of conquest used a model for defining illnesses and their cures, “An analysis of all the botanical fever remedies in *The Florentine Codex* has shown that 70 percent contained chemicals known to do what Aztec etiology required; that is, they were emically effective (Ortiz de Montellano 1990:158).

*Curanderismo* is a syncretic practice of existing indigenous medical and botanical knowledge with religious, symbolic, ritual and medical practices brought by the conquering Europeans. Through time elements of spiritualism have been added (Finkler, 1985; Greenfield, 1987) and European botanical elements added as substitutes for original indigenous materials. Robert Bye, an ethnobotanist and researcher who works extensively with *curandera/os* in Mexico, explained to me that certain plants are less commonly used in healing rituals as the Mexico-U.S. border is approached. An example of this is pirul (*Schinus molle* L.)

for mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), the former used in central and parts of northern Mexico but mesquite takes its place in Texas (Bye in conversation, June 2000).

The evolution of *curanderismo* parallels the process of change in the indigenous populations who were colonized by the Spanish. The medical tradition that came to the Americas was changed by contact with the people here, just as much as many of the native people themselves were changed into a mestizo population.

#### STRUCTURE OF CURANDERISMO

Central to its operation is the belief that the human body is in spiritual, physical, and mental harmony when in good health. Illness is the result of some type of disjuncture in this balance. The practitioners of *curanderismo* are called *curanderas* or *curanderos*. The healer is acknowledged by the community where they live as having a divine gift of healing (Mayers, 1989). This gift of healing is called a *don* and it is sometimes revealed to the healer in the form of a dream, vision or some type of divine visitation (Edgerton et al., 1970; Graham, 1976: 180).

*Curanderismo* is composed of three *niveles* (realms). There is a *nivel material*, the material realm in which healers cure by use of ritual objects, plants and prayer; *nivel espiritual* is healing conducted with the intercession of spiritual beings; *nivel mental* is healing conducted by the *curandera/o* manipulating her/his mental energy and healing through the laying on of hands. This involves visualization among other things and is the rarest of the different forms of healing (Trotter and Chavira, 1981: 61-66).

The *niveles* are spheres of supernatural or mental energy that healers tap. Organic and inorganic objects can embody the power these spheres are thought to hold. Berta works in two of the *niveles*, the material and mental. The *niveles* are an integral part of *curanderismo* and they provide the foundation from which *curanderos* work.

The healers I have spoken with do not see one *nivel* as more important than the other but they are equal in importance. The healers can access one or more of the realms to enact a healing, though specific training is needed in order to access each one effectively. The material realm focuses on the use of ritual objects and ritual performance to enact a cure. In the spiritual realm, the healer enters a trance and a benevolent force (a spirit for example) works through the healer to enact a cure. The healer is a link between the spiritual world and the physical. In the mental realm the healer uses his mind to change the illness, making it benign. (Trotter and Chavira, 1981)

By examining the description of *niveles* as conveyed by Trotter and Chavira there emerges a *narrative* of how Mexican-American culture is constructed, how the mythology of a people is played out, and how a collective lifeworld is approached. There are three *niveles*, the material, mental and spiritual, from which the healers draw their power. *Curanderismo* also dictates that these are also the three aspects that constitute a person's life, the body (material), the mind (mental) and the spirit. Each is separate yet integrated. And from Catholicism, which is inseparable from *curandersimo*, the number three often stands in for the three aspects of God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost) and again each is thought of as separate but integrated.

The *niveles* become a template (and unfolding narrative) of how life operates and how that is spread out over the construct of culture. It is a way to begin to understand how the culture sees itself and the approaches it uses to keep the body healthy and in balance. An approach to life is reflected in the structure of the realms and accessing them is a way to access the body. This allows for the idea that *curanderismo* reflects the cultural body and accessing that idea allows access to cultural analysis.

By examining the *niveles* through a phenomenological approach, we may be able to understand the basic underpinnings of this tradition. Phenomenology is a way of approaching the world, a way of breaking things down to essence. It helps us to understand what constitutes

experience, its process and how those experiences effect the individual and her/his reality; narrative redescription in the phenomenological vein “is a crucial and constitutive part of the ongoing activity of the lifeworld. Moreover, narrative activity reveals the link between discourse and practice, since the very structure of narrative is pregiven in the structure of everyday life.” (Jackson, 1996:39). Narrative arises from the everyday life activities of a people and as well it affirms what the group wants to know about itself. Within narrative, the use of analogy can be applied to link elements that have a relationship not immediately apparent. The way I apply narrative in this instance is in its broadest sense by viewing culture as a text.

*Curanderismo* gives us a way to understand certain aspects of cultural life as they are reflected in the structure of the realms. That is - objects and materials contain energy, people can manipulate energy; the spiritual world and the physical are closely aligned and are in contact with one another. Therefore, attitude and state of mind can effect one’s state of wellness.

The healers I have met in the course of my research construct their lives as healers in the manner described previously. Each of the healers I’ve interviewed recount stories of how their gift was revealed to them; true to the motif, most were made aware of their healing ability through a dream or a divine visitation. For some, it was a time of questioning personal identity. For others there was an implied expectation of their practice, having close relatives who were healers.

What these individuals have in common is that they are all Mexican, or Mexican-Americans and their healing ability came to them after some type of life experience called into question their existing way of life— the death of a relative, change in employment/economic status, psychological or emotional problems. In accepting their calling to become a *curandera/o*, they were able to come to terms with their changed lives. The experience of Berta is a good example of how this life passage happens.

She is one of the individuals who became a *curandera* after her gift was revealed to her in a dream at the age of fourteen. The circumstances surrounding her life (in Mexico) at the time of the dream were grim. Her father was an alcoholic and the family was very poor. She was very unhappy and told me in an interview that she felt desperate and confused. As she put it, “ So I was crying all the time and I was mad at God, because we don't have anything to eat, something is wrong, my father is drinking all the time, you see. And everything was wrong for me. I was mad all the time with God. But I was wrong, when I learned the truth, and when I knew everything I felt different.”<sup>1</sup>

The personal turmoil she felt left her when “I learned the truth”, the truth she explained to me is understanding that peace and stability come from allowing God to work through you, “when I knew everything I felt different.” She feels her calling to be a healer obligates her to pass this ‘lesson’ on to others. It has evolved into a personal philosophy that is reflected in her healing style; incorporating self-examination, ritual performance and the use of ritual material to enact a cure. When individuals come to be healed by her she is guided by her personal beliefs in curing them. The philosophy she has developed is in large part a reaction to the circumstances of her life — dysfunctional family, poverty, immigration to the U.S., being a single mother. She has experienced some of the same things her clients relate to her in the interviews she conducts before a healing ritual. She is empathic and observant. Her effectiveness as a healer lies in her determination not to allow adverse experiences to defeat her.

Her approach is echoed by the others I interviewed. Though each have stylistic differences, all the healers incorporate some aspect of self-reflection and ritual engagement for healing to be effective. Even Jacinto who does not consider himself a healer, complements his botanical cures with religious faith and self-reflection.

For the sake of discussion I'm focusing on four plants commonly used by healers and non-healers alike: rue (*Ruta graveolens*), epazote (*Chenopodium ambrosioides*), basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), and rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinale*). Though they are non-natives, their place in Mexican traditional medicine for a variety of ailments such as earaches, gastro-intestinal illnesses, insomnia and headaches (Stepp 2000; Heinrich, Rimpler and Barrera 1991; Nicholson and Arzeni 1992; Ortiz de Montellano 1990) is well documented. By extension of people and culture, similar use of these plants in South Texas and other U.S. Mexico border areas is also well known (Kay 1996, Trotter and Chavira 1981; Moore 1992; Ford 1975)

I work in the inner-city on San Antonio's westside where the neighborhoods are largely working class Mexican and Mexican-American. Here, the tradition of folk healing, *curanderismo*, is very visible. In my area there are 27 *botanicas*, where dried plants and ritual materials are sold. Flea markets are often a source for green and dried plants, but some of the more common ones, like those discussed in this paper, can also be found at nurseries, are grown from cuttings or found in grocery stores; a Super K-mart near my home carries *zacate de limón* and *estafiate* dried and sold in small packets.

In nearly all homes of clients I have visited there is *savila*, *romero*, or *epazote* growing in the yard. The *curanderos* often have several of each type growing as well as rue and basil. These they use in their practice and in keeping with their belief that plants like rue, basil and rosemary keep malevolent spirits from nearing the home.

I've interviewed 20 *curanderos* and *curanderas* as well as their clients. Transmittal of plant use and knowledge by non-healers is often inter-generational. Those interviewed refer to learning which plant to use from a parent or grandparent or the information came from a friend. The healers gain their knowledge in the same fashion and from having



been apprenticed to an individual or in a few cases in some type of group setting. Jacinto and Berta, introduced earlier are my primary consultants. They each reflect a method of healing distinct from one another. The former through the use of plants and the latter through prayer, counseling and the use of ritual material. While Berta makes use of plant material in her practice, she will often use a single plant or a special combination of plant(s) and incense in a healing ritual. Most of the healers interviewed practice in a similar fashion.

Jacinto often uses plants in combinations depending on the illness and its severity. Of all the people I've met so far, his expertise and knowledge of plants is the most extensive. He grows and process much of his own material both for personal use and for its sale. His plant stand at a weekend flea market is patronized by *curanderas/os* as well as non-specialists. He also experiments with different plants, constantly trying for that combination which he describes as '*superbueno*;' plants whose properties complement one another and will be of greater benefit as a result. For example a tea he sells as a tonic for people who are diabetic is an infusion of thirteen plants, among them, (common names) *cascara de nogal*, *toronjil*, *magnolia*, *savila*, and *marubillo*. These are in a combination of leaves, bark and flowers. He basis his selection of plants on what he has known to be effective, on published material, and information shared with clients and other healers.

Unlike Berta he does not conduct healing rituals for individuals outside of his family but he will advise and direct those who come to him on the preparation and use of medicinal plants. While Jacinto and Berta and the other healers vary in their methods when healing, how they think about plants links them together. For them plants are more than substances with curative properties, plants have a metaphysical aspect to them as well. The use of plants to cure illnesses caused by use of magic is common to many cultures. But my consultants describe plants (and other ritual objects) as possessing *poder*, meaning power or will. They are also thought to have a spirit, not in the sense of a soul but more akin to energy. It is because of this power and energy that plants,

especially those with known curative properties and a strong smell or taste, are effective in alleviating mental or emotionally based illnesses. This is in keeping with the writing of Trotter and Chavira's description of *niveles*.

Rue is an especially strong plant. The smoke from its leaves is used to cure earaches. The stems and leaves of the plants are also used in a *barrida* to heal someone who may be a victim of witchcraft. This plant is one of Jacinto's best sellers, up to 14 plants in a seven hour period. The person affected is ritually swept with a bundle of fresh rue while prayers are recited over them. Or rue can be used to magically cause someone harm. When I asked Jacinto why, he explained that some plants are *variable* (variable) depending on the intent of its user. Further he believes that the character of a person determines the smell he/she will associate with rue. If a person is of good character and intentions, the plant will have an agreeable aroma; someone who is of bad humor will find the plant has a noxious smell.

Berta is of the same mind, equating pleasant smelling plants with positive results. Pleasant smells are thought to draw helpful spiritual entities and to ward off those of mal-intent. Rue she believes is an especially powerful plant. Both feel that the plant has great sensitivity and if part of a plant is taken for purposes of witchcraft, the remainder will wither and die off.

Rosemary and basil are plants that are not variable. Their aromatic stems and leaves are used in *barridas* to cure insomnia and having it in your home or on your person is thought to bring good luck. As a tea they are used for insomnia and nervousness. These plants are believed to contain only positive energy.

*Epazote* as a tea is neither pleasant smelling nor tasting and its cross-cultural use to rid the body of intestinal parasites is well known. Berta uses this plant in *humosas* (burned as incense) or in a *barrida* to cure a person of what she calls *larvas mentales* (mental worms or parasites). For she believes, as other healers have voiced, that what affects the

physical body, effects the spiritual body in a like fashion. This idea, that what can manifest materially can manifest spiritually allows for something like '*larvas mentales*' to exist.

The selection and gauging effectiveness of plants for use in medicinal or spiritual illness by its smell is often reported by researchers (Ankli, Sticher, Heinrich 1999; Messer 1994; Messer, 1994; Nicholson and Arzeni, 1993). Both healers were asked why smell is such an important indicator of a plant's efficaciousness. Jacinto believes that it is the spirit of the plant we are encountering when we take in its aroma. Berta feels that it is through our sense of smell that we 'test' whatever we encounter before bringing it into our bodies, especially that which can't be seen.

Berta and Jacinto and the other healers hold a special place in a hierarchy of knowledge concerning plant use and belief. Their status is gained through study and perceived effectiveness by the community. They are highly specialized and have in place a philosophy of healing based on tradition and personal experience.

When the healers describe plants as having power and spirit it is the basic tenets of *curanderismo* they are referencing. Why a particular plant is chosen in a certain instance, as in the case of *epazote* for *larvas mentales*, requires an understanding of how illness is culturally defined.

Arthur Kleinman gives us a definition of illness as a culturally constructed occurrence with culturally defined parameters and solutions (A. Kleinman, 1980) and as such we can say that there are illness idioms pertinent to cultures which individuals can access to express somatized emotional distress. Illness can be a way for an individual to express fear, suffering and vulnerability in a culturally accepted manner. Traditional healers are in a sense translators of somatized distress. They can "read" the meaning of a person's illness in a way which goes beyond the physical. When a *curandero* or *curandera* determine that a client's illness stems from a sense of loss of control, the patient is encouraged to become an active agent in the curing process.

The bodily experience (of illness) cannot be separated from the cultural engagement of the individual with the world. In this fashion we can look to bodily experience as another point of cultural analysis. Thomas J. Csordas writes, “Critical to our purpose is the understanding that in normal perception one’s body is in no sense an object, but always the subject of perception. One does not perceive one’s body, one is one’s body and perceives *with* it both in the sense that is a perfectly familiar tool (Mauss, 1950) and in the sense that self and body are perfectly coexistent” (Csordas in Gaines 1992: 154).

The pressures to acculturate, to deal with economics, labor, social agencies, can be glossed on to the malevolent forces people feel come at them from outside the body. Embodiment of those forces manifests as illness. Michael Jackson is useful in this regard, he echoes the sentiment expressed by Csordas when he states that, “Meaning should not be reduced to that which can be thought or said, since meaning may exist simply in the doing and in what is manifestly accomplished by action.” (Jackson, 1996: 32). Likewise, Robert Desjarlais writes, “that the category of experience which many take to be universal, natural, and supremely authentic, is not an existential given but rather a historically and culturally constituted process predicated on a range of cultural, social, and political forces.” (DeJarlais in Jackson, 1996: 70)

In thinking about the transformative nature of the visions the healers experienced, described in the previous section, we can begin to understand what DeJarlais means in this passage. There are elements in each of their experiences that affect social construction of the individual in a particular way. By claiming divine intervention they “gave up” agency to a superior force and in doing so reconstructed their identity. The pressures from the outside (outside the culture, outside the body) did make them ill but the process was cut short by a supernatural occurrence. The memory of this intercession is made real every time they heal someone. They become agents of change.

Berta believes that we can heal ourselves in the same manner she applies in her practice. By doing so, she is trying to get people to deal

with conflicts cloaked as illness. These conflicts arise in the day to day activities of people, occasionally they are not readily resolvable or the answer is not apparent and they come to her for help. While these experiences are on the surface not alike, they are composed and affected by shared values and attitudes. So her cures deal with cultural tools, religious and spiritual traditions, emphasizing ties to culture, community and family, which are shared cultural traits. She uses her life experiences empathetically; she is like a map that people follow to find themselves. But ultimately, she believes, we live in a reality of our own making.

This is not to say that illnesses coming before a healer are free of a biomedical component and this is addressed. But what the healer is frequently concerned with is the underlying spiritual and emotional state of the person as well as the physical. The healing of the client is dependent on the ‘correct’ interpretation of what the client is experiencing. Before any healing ritual occurs the *curandera/o* will interview the individual. Questions asked will deal with marital problems, conflicts with neighbors, friends, or family, and about money or legal problems. All of this is taken into account in determining the cause of a person’s illness.

What follows after the interview is a ritual healing or cleansing of the person and his spirit in order to bring the body, mind and soul into harmony, so that the flow of energy which is believed to be in constant motion within us, is re-established (Trotter and Chavira: 63). Illnesses block that energy and cause the individual to become disconnected with his environment; a good *curandera/o* knows this and will work at correcting the situation. By doing so, the problems suffered by the individual will be resolved, because they are the symptoms of the person’s disconnection with her/himself and her/his surroundings manifested into reality. The harmony of ‘being’ experienced by an individual is mirrored in his environment. The pragmatics are that the healer will have counseled the afflicted person by incorporating the problems manifested into the cure. The person will be urged to “make things right” (Berta’s phrase) in order for the cure to be effective.

For example, if Berta interprets the anxieties and distress a client is experiencing as *larva mentales*, the use of *epazote* would seem a logical choice to her as well as to her client. There is cultural knowledge shared by her and her client and this includes the understanding that the body reflects one's state of the mind. The same properties that make it effective in expelling intestinal worms are evoked in a spiritual manner to rid her mind of the illness caused by her troubles. Because of the power and energy the epazote is thought to possess, it is a positive step in her recovery.

Knowing which plant to use increases the efficacy of the healing ritual and it gives the ailing person a measure of control and active involvement because often the preparation of the plants as a treatment is done by the individual or a family member.

*Curanderos* work to bring a person into harmony, with themselves, their family and community. They are active agents, in that they take purposeful steps in helping the individual reconnect with his/her community (Madsen 1964: 105; Trotter and Chavira: 51); which in turn can enhance the individual's chances of economic and social survival. In my barrio this of particular importance, given that the westside serves as a gateway community for many recently Mexicanos.

When Berta or another healer performs an act of healing, the client afterwards is not the same person she or he was before becoming ill. What occurs is a slight transformation psychologically and spiritually because in order to get well you have to learn the lessons (re: healing) the *curandero* is trying to get across. This is what Berta means when she says we all create our own reality, meaning each one of us creates ourselves, our own identity. What she provides is a foundation through the strengthening of traditional mores. She believes that our bodies reflect that reality. The tradition bears this out. Illness of the spirit is often talked about in terms of the body. As in the case of *larvas mentales* (mental worms), which can infect the mind in much the same way, real worms infect the stomach. The ritual touching and movement

of hands and materials over the body in a healing ceremony is repetitive and has less to do with affecting the physical body, than affecting what the body contains—the life force—that is the primary focus. The physical body will reflect the process enacted because it is tightly bound to the spiritual and mental processes of a person. Here once again is the idea of the material object's contained energy acting upon the physically contained energy. It is the play of culture on the body. A symbolic reminder to the client of how he/she is socially constructed.

Emily Martin speaks to this in her work, the play of culture on the body by focusing on the idea of process and transformation (Martin, 1994:14,15). Taking a cue from her, examining changes in *curanderismo* and its practice over the years, can yield information on changes in Mexican-American culture in its power relations with mainstream American culture. Martin in her book writes, “My focus will be on *change* rather than on *habit*, on processes from which people learn that may *not* have been in place since childhood and process that may contain a degree of intention of the part of those wishing to perpetuate them.” (Martin: 15).

The people I work with are in daily contact with situations that call for them to move away from what is traditionally comfortable. They are called upon to have a measure of flexibility in order to survive. The practice is not disappearing as some early ethnographers thought but evolving in order to meet challenges faced by our communities.

My fieldwork lately has taken me to the door of two sisters, Lizzie and Joanne who call their practice “cheap therapy”. Their center is a remodeled garage and their clientele is mostly women. The way they practice *curanderismo* is a blend of the standards and some new age elements, including crystals, aura readings, chakras and acupressure, as well as referrals to women shelters, social programs and job leads. While critics may deny them the status of “traditional” *curanderas* because of these incorporations, what they demonstrate in their practice is exactly the method by which *curanderismo* has continued to flourish these past five centuries. The tradition's greatest asset is its

plasticity. Being flexible allows the culture to co-exist with, and flourish in the face of, a politically dominant structure that is culturally foreign in many ways. The two cultures are in constant dialogue, in constant negotiation and interaction.

As well, *curanderismo* offers an inexpensive, reliable source of health care for both physical and mental ailments. This is not to say that it replaces conventional medicine but it augments it in different ways. It is highly accessible and provides treatment for types of cultural illnesses that many people believe mainstream doctors can not cure. For illnesses that are not culturally defined or resist curing by a healer, a doctor will be visited (Alegria et al., 1977). Studies have shown that individuals will often incorporate a dual system of medicine, combining *curanderismo* with mainstream medical treatment (Mayers, 1989; Urdaneta et al. 1995; Trotter 1982).

*La candelaria* is coming soon, February 2. On this day, Jacinto has explained to me, people all over Mexico will sow the seeds of the spring planting. Here he says, it hardly matters; nurseries with their big hot houses have long since started their seeds and by February 2, small plants of every kind will be available. They won't survive a planting but people in their longing for the greening of the next season will buy them anyway. On this day he will sow his seeds of *ruda*, *romero*, *estafiate* and *albacar*. Then cover them with plastic or large panes of glass which will trap the meager rays of the winter sun. I'll dutifully record the number of pots and tin cans filled with dirt and tiny seeds, take photos of the process and record all the proceedings.

At some point he'll look at me and say, "*La planta es la vida*" and will again tell me his stories; of how much our lives are entwined with the world around us, even without our knowing it. And I have learned that plants are not just a metaphor for life but also for how we think about life.





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## *Footnotes*

<sup>1</sup> All quotes attribute to Berta in this paper are from an interview I conducted with her in June, 1994

CHAPTER  
FOUR



*Yvette Saavedra*

CERVANTES UNDERGRADUATE RECIPIENT

*Chicana Schism:  
The Relationship Between Chicana Feminist  
and Chicana Feminist Lesbians*

We are civil rights workers and activists, and we have joined coalitions to defend human rights on an international level. As lesbians, however, we have just started to come together. Our energy is divided along many issues that demand we repress part of our identity in order to be accepted. This is where the struggle really begins, and we need each other to withstand the pressure.

—JUANITA RAMOS, *COMPAÑERAS:  
LATINA LESBIANS AN ANTHOLOGY* (1994)

The marginalization and oppression of Chicana lesbians, by heterosexual Chicana feminists, was produced using re-adaptations of the heterosexual and militant imperatives of Chicanismo. As seen in

the previous chapter, heterosexual Chicana feminists were not inclusive of all women, particularly Chicana lesbians. The two part-commitment of Chicana feminists did not allow superficial acknowledgement of the plight of Chicana lesbians, much less support in issues of sexuality. The end result of lesbian-baiting, along with charges of being a *Malinchista*, did not provide for active resistance to the oppression and repression of Chicana lesbians.<sup>1</sup>

Next, I will discuss the elements in the development of Chicana lesbian feminist discourse and ideology. First, I look at the development of a lesbian identity within Chicano culture, by deconstructing the identity defined by Chicano culture and showing how Chicana lesbians develop their own identity amidst negative perceptions and circumstances. Second, I will discuss the reconciling of sexual and racial identity, and cultural dissonance. The intertwining of lesbian identity with racial identity to represent the new experience of Chicana lesbians, and the rejection of this *experience* by Chicano culture will also be discussed. I argue that while Chicana feminists did challenge gender roles and confront sexism, the exclusion of lesbians is representative of limiting gender ideals carried over from the Chicano movement. These were created and adapted to keep lesbians quiet and in the margins. In allowing for the repression of the lesbian voice within the Chicana movement, heterosexual feminists were creating the same environment men had created for them within the Chicano movement. They replaced a sexist environment with highly heterosexist and homophobic conditions. Perhaps they were indeed powerless, in the sense of institutional power or privilege. But they were public intellectuals as well, and leaders. Thus, they can be criticized from that standpoint.<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, I will discuss the Modification of Chicana feminism and the creation of Chicana lesbian feminism. By reaffirming their existence and experiences Chicana lesbians expanded Chicana feminism to include their oppression. This expansion resulted in the creation of an actual Chicana lesbian feminism, discourse, and a new language of resistance.

Chicana lesbians are seen as a threat to the structure of Chicano culture. The heterosexual imperative and compulsory heterosexuality do not allow for an identity that deviates from set gender roles and expectations. The virgin / whore dichotomy is the basis for the label of “deviant” which is given to Chicana lesbians. Their deviation from these ascribed roles produces a negative perception, and results in homophobia within Chicano culture. Homophobia and negative ideas are then internalized and causes the denial of lesbian identity, and existence. As a result of the lack of definition in the culture, Chicana lesbians are forced to define and create their own identities. While grappling with the search for identity, lesbians find themselves in opposition to the familial, cultural, religious, and, many times, personal beliefs regarding gender and sexuality. The confusion results in separation from their family and culture. Separation and isolation as a theme in developing a lesbian identity is described in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and illustrated by the work of Cherríe Moraga (1983), and serves as a means of lesbians finding and shaping their identity. For example the following passage from Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* illustrates the complexities of identity and homeland:

To this day I’m not sure where I found the strength to leave the source, the mother, disengage from my family, *mi tierra, mi gente*, and all that picture stood for. I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me...Being a lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I made the choice to bequeer (for some it is genetically inherent).<sup>3</sup>

In this passage, Anzaldúa presents the complexities that lesbians face prior to the process of self-identification and acceptance. It is also representative of lesbians being forced to distance themselves from a culture that is not open to them. In the passage, Anzaldúa makes a

direct reference to the virgin / whore dichotomy. The use of the word ‘mother’ is a direct reference to the good, pure mother—in this case her culture—the goodness that this represents is directly connected to the virgin ideal. In the phrase ‘my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me’ refers to the lesbian identity that had been suppressed by the virgin ideal imposed on her by her family and culture. Anzaldúa feels that by leaving her mother, to find her intrinsic nature, she is rejecting the goodness of the virgin ideal, while embracing the evil of the whore ideal. This feeling is also expressed in Moraga’s “A Long Line of Vendidas” in *Loving In The War Years*:

I did not move away from other Chicanos because I did not love my people. I gradually became anglicized because I thought it was the only option available to me toward gaining autonomy as a person without being sexually stigmatized.<sup>4</sup>

In this passage, Moraga tells of not having left her people and culture out of dislike, rather, like Anzaldúa, she had to leave to find her ‘intrinsic nature.’ These two examples reaffirm that heterosexuality is compulsory in Chicano culture and that to detour from normal expectations is to reject the culture temporarily, in an attempt to remove oneself from the cultural expectations that stifle individual development. Once distance from the culturally-determined gender restrictions is achieved, the Chicana lesbian is able to see herself as an autonomous person in control of her sexuality.<sup>5</sup>

By “coming out” Chicana lesbians are giving voice to the resistance that their existence represents. The verbal and physical objection to male dominance represents a threat to the structure of Chicano culture by usurping male control, and signifies the willingness of lesbians to confront and reclaim Chicana sexuality and, as a result, define themselves. Carla Trujillo, in “Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in The Chicano Community,” discusses the importance of reclaiming Chicana sexuality in order to redress the negative portrayals of lesbians,

A Chicana lesbian must learn to love herself, before she can love another. Loving that other woman not only validates one's sexuality, but also that of the other woman, by the very act of loving... The effort to consciously reclaim our sexual selves forces Chicanas to either confront their own sexuality or, in refusing, castigate lesbians as *vendidas* to the race, blasphemers to the church. atrocities against nature, or some combination.<sup>6</sup>

This view touches on various issues of Chicana sexuality that are pertinent to the discussion of Chicana lesbian identity. In Chicano culture, women are taught to dislike, and even fear their bodies. They are taught that sex for any purpose other than reproduction is wrong. Trujillo states that in order for a Chicana lesbian to love another woman she must first overcome the negative issues related to sexuality. This statement shows the choices Chicana lesbians have in creating their identities; they either verbalize their resistance, or are forever oppressed by the compulsory heterosexuality of their culture. They love themselves, or do not. Similarly, the body becomes the site of their expressions of love, cultural as well as physical. They “embody” culture in this way.

#### RECONCILING RACE AND SEXUALITY: DOES ONE PRECLUDE THE OTHER?

In the last paragraph of Moraga's *Loving In The War Years*, the interconnectedness of racial and sexual identity is apparent, “I am a lesbian. And I am Chicana. These are two inseparable facts of my life. I can't talk or write about one without the other.”<sup>7</sup> The connection between these two identities is a recurrent theme in the writings of Chicana lesbians. The majority of writings in anthologies of Chicana / Latina lesbians point to the difficulty experienced in connecting lesbian identity with racial identity. The difficulties are a result of the Chicano culture's appropriation of lesbianism to Anglo culture. The belief that lesbianism is a white disease, and the resistance of



lesbians to patriarchal views results in the invisibility of lesbians in Chicano culture. Lesbians then reach out to Anglo culture for a space to exist, as seen in Moraga's autobiography:

I gradually became anglicized because I thought it was the only option available to me toward gaining autonomy as a person without being really stigmatized.<sup>8</sup>

Many times Chicanas find that they are not accepted because of their race. The rejection that is experienced by Chicana lesbians places them in two worlds that do not want them. I argue that this rejection produces a diaspora and "border culture" based on sexuality and race, rather than on race and migration.<sup>9</sup>

The diaspora experienced by Chicana lesbians is similar to the "doubled relationship or dual loyalties that migrants, exiles, and refugees have; their connections to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement with 'back home.'"<sup>10</sup> The parallel between these groups and lesbians is that while Chicana lesbians' racial identity is that of an oppressed people, they are seen as outsiders within their culture because of their sexuality. This leads to a double oppression. The conflict of loyalties is comparable to the experience of Chicanos in the United States. In this situation, Chicanos feel that they are a culture within a culture, and are faced with the dilemma of loyalty.<sup>11</sup> The situation applies to Chicana lesbians as well; in Chicano culture they are regarded as *vendidas* for being lesbians, and in American culture they are seen as the racial "other" by Anglo American lesbians. As a result, they are placed in the position of choosing which identity dominates:

It's an interesting path, one that continually slips in and out of the white, the catholic, the Mexican, the indigenous, the instincts. In and out of my head. It makes for *loquería*, the crazies.<sup>12</sup>

This decision is difficult because the two worlds blur together and soon become difficult to discern. This is seen in the preceding passage from Anzaldúa's work.

Diaspora is not the only way to characterize the experiences of Chicana lesbians. Their difficulty to live in one culture results in the development of a border culture. Anzaldúa in describing the border, states, in what has been her most quoted passage:

The U.S - Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country— a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.<sup>13</sup>

This description obviously parallels how Chicano culture's compulsory heterosexuality is a border set up to keep Chicano's safe and distinguish between them and the Anglo's sexually-deviant ways. Therefore Chicana lesbians are the inhabitants of the area between Chicano culture and Anglo culture, or what Anzaldúa calls the borderlands. The experience of being trapped between two worlds is not only applicable to the cultural experience of Chicanos/ as in the U.S, but also applies to the relationship between race and sexuality. For example, when Chicanos have successfully migrated to the U.S., a cultural border is set up going the other way because it is perceived that Anglo culture lacks morals, especially with regards to sexuality. Since lesbians, according to Chicanos, have given in to their desires, they have crossed this border and therefore are forced to reconcile their sexuality and culture.

Each day Chicana lesbians cross borders merely by living both of their identities. Rather than choosing one identity Chicana lesbians have chosen both, as exemplified in Natasha López's "Trying to be Dyke and Chicana":

call me Chicana  
walking with whiteness  
into more whiteness  
feeling my darkness  
call me Chicana  
annoyed with being called Spanish  
wishing whiteness would understand  
call me Chicana  
call me Dyke  
Chyk-ana<sup>14</sup>

The poem represents the confusion experienced while trying to bridge both Anglo and Chicano culture. In the line, ‘walking with whiteness’ López is referring to her sexuality. Since lesbianism is seen as something from Anglo culture, she is equating walking with whiteness; she is walking with the whiteness that is in her. While she feels submerged in white culture she still feels her ‘darkness’, the darkness of her culture propels her to identify as Chicana. With the line ‘wishing whiteness would understand’ López indicates the racism she experiences in Anglo culture because of her race. The poem narrates the process of the author attempting to develop her identity—finally she decides that the only way to accurately represent herself is to compromise using the label, Chyk-ana, like Dyk-ana. Jaqueline Martínez, in “Speaking as a Chicana,” says that coming out as a lesbian allowed her the space necessary to make connections between her ethnic identity and her sexuality. Martínez state that she now understands the oppression she faced as both a Chicana within Chicano culture, as lesbian within Anglo culture. She has made connections between the invisibility she has suffered in both. By making themselves visible Chicana lesbians have tried to eradicate social injustice. However, Chicano culture is not willing to accept them. While Chicano culture has become more open to the existence of lesbian sexuality it has not made strides to change homophobic and heterosexist ideologies. It is this unyielding, traditional, homophobic ideology that made it difficult for Chicana lesbian feminist activists to intergrate into the Chicana feminist movement.

THE SOCIALIZATION OF LESBIANS INTO THE  
CHICANA FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Heterosexual Chicana feminists did not readily accept the move of lesbians into the feminist movement. The Chicana feminists were successful in challenging and confronting sexism and gender inequality within the Chicano movement; however, they never fully separated from its patriarchal roots and developed their own ideologies. The ideologies that they developed were replicas of those in the male movement, but they were changed to incorporate gender. The ideology's major weakness was the assumption of homogeneity amongst Chicanas: the limited view that Chicana meant heterosexual. The ideologies of the heterosexual and militant imperatives were re-created and adapted to keep women quiet and in the margins. By using the same ideologies, heterosexual feminists were allowing for the repression of the lesbian voice within the Chicana movement, and were guilty of creating highly heterosexist and homophobic conditions. They were in actuality redirecting the gender oppression and sexism to which men had subjected them in the Chicano movement, and allowing for the oppression of women who were different from them.

In interviews conducted thus far, I have found that the attitudes of Chicana feminists towards lesbians were “for the most part homophobic,<sup>169</sup>” non-accepting and unsupportive of the needs of Chicana lesbians as represented in the following personal account,

I never joined any white women's organizations and immediately joined an organization called Lesbians of Color (LOC) in 1979. Although we shared similar oppressions with African American women, the Latinas in the group decided to form a separate organization, Lesbians Latinamericans. As a group we did go to some Chicana conferences to make our presence and issues known. Women were usually very friendly until they found out we were lesbians. I remember we attended a conference in Long

Beach, CA in 1980. One of us stood up in the plenary and read a manifesto that strongly stated our lesbianism and right to be at the conference, that we were part of every family, etc. She even shed tears. Yet, I remember not one person approached us, we were shunned. That experience alerted me to the ingrained homophobia in the Chicano/a community. Even Chicanas were not our allies. Thus I committed my activism to people of color and lesbian and gay issues.<sup>17</sup>

The environment described by the interviewee reflects one of marginalization and invisibility of lesbians, at the height of what many describe as an “activist” moment. This is the same environment that limited heterosexual Chicanas to the sphere of domesticity and a supporting role in the Chicano movement.<sup>18</sup> If Chicana women faced the same struggles why would they replicate their oppression and use it to silence others who desired the same freedom? The answer lies within the ideology of Chicana feminism; since the foundation for such an ideology was based on the inherently homophobic, heterosexual and militant imperatives the outcome was bound to be the repression of a group regarded lower on the social scale—lesbians. Perhaps only children and animals remained lower.

Unfortunately, Chicana lesbians did not find the links and support they had expected from the different feminist groups. After having experienced the homophobic attitude of the men of the Chicano movement, lesbians assumed that the common societal oppression that Chicanas experienced would be enough to unite the two groups. The statements of a Chicana lesbian activist, taken during an interview, portray the disappointment at having realized that the homophobia had not declined among the feminists:

**Q.** How was the Chicana movement similar to the male dominated movement?

**A.** Well, I think that some of the het [heterosexual] women had their own homophobia to deal with and mirrored the men’s homophobia so

that some of the movements, Chicana/o were very het family oriented in their nationalism.<sup>19</sup>

**Q.** Would you say that the homophobia was worse in the women's group or in Chicano Movement?

**A.** It felt worse when the het [heterosexual] women were homophobic because we expected thier feminism to make links, but some were threatened initially and didn't want lesbians to be too noisy.<sup>20</sup>

As indicated by these statements, lesbians and their concerns were not a top priority. This was evident by their marginalization and silencing of the lesbian and gay issue. The heterosexual Chicanas did not discuss lesbianism unless lesbians initiated it, and if a woman was found out to be a lesbian she experienced harassment, such as name calling, and was excluded from decisions having to do with the group.<sup>21</sup> After lesbians participated in the Chicana movement, and found imposed silence and marginalization, the "out" lesbians developed their own form of socialization—they socialized to it and they also remained apart from it. They worked towards a movement and discourse that would recognize their longtime contributions to the Chicano people, but would also allow them to continue working for their own liberation.

#### CHICANA LESBIAN FEMINISM

The social involvement of Chicana lesbians in a variety of causes is summed up in a quote from the "Introduction" in Juanita Ramos' *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians Anthology*, which was one of the first to gather Latina lesbian perspectives:

There are times in which we are forced to prioritize oppressions. It's a survival strategy Latina lesbians use. If you want to do a certain type of political work, and the group you work with isn't open yet to who you are, and what you want to do, then sometimes you say, 'Well, okay, in this group I'm just going to be this part of me.' Later on, as you get stronger about being a lesbian and become

clearer about lesbian oppression and how important it is to come out and be who you are, you become less willing to put up with those kinds of compromises.<sup>22</sup>

This quote by Mariana Romo-Carmona, obtained in an interview she conducted in the early 1970's with a Latina lesbian activist, exemplifies the way lesbians have put their interests aside and worked for a variety of causes. When the oppression became too overt, lesbians began to be more assertive and raised their voices when they were silenced. Similar to the tradition of heterosexual activism, Chicana lesbians have been at the forefront of feminist politics. The term Chicana feminist lesbian is not new; they have been around for a long time. What has occurred is the "erasure of the lesbians project or voice," from the historical accounts.<sup>23</sup> As a result of this erasure the activist work of Chicana lesbians is not recognized and they are mistakenly seen as a new group of the 1980's. After a long period of oppression lesbians began to collectively organize into their own groups and design their own feminism, discourse, and language of resistance.

Where heterosexual Chicanas failed to separate from Chicanismo, Chicana lesbians did so without looking back. In the development of Chicana lesbian discourse all the different goals of Chicana feminism were incorporated into the forming ideology, minus the homophobia and gender limitations of the heterosexual and militant imperatives.<sup>24</sup> The incorporation of the multiple approaches to forming Chicana lesbian ideologies provided space for the heterogeneity of Chicana lesbian activists. Unlike the heterosexual feminists who did not account for the different identities of the activists, lesbians allowed for difference in not only individual characteristics but also for the differences in oppression each woman faced. Some for example addressed classism, understanding that not all Chicanas lesbians were working-class, which was an assumption that Chicanismo demanded. Some addressed physical challenges. Some argued for inclusion of many types of sexual expression—overt, covert, and including celibacy. What Chicana lesbians achieved in allowing for the differences among

the women was a more complete kind of feminism that unlike heterosexual feminists, incorporated more than just gender oppression.

The various kinds of oppression that Chicana lesbian feminists tried to address is seen in the works of women like the writers Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, and graduate student E.D Hernández. Each of these women reflects an oppression they have faced in their life, such as homophobia, heterosexism, racism, classism, or a combination of these. The Chicana lesbian feminist approach kept in mind that not all women experienced oppression within the same context. For example, the following passage from Cherríe Moraga's *Loving In War Years* emphasizes:

It wasn't until I confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother's oppression—due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana— was realized. My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and oppression... In this country lesbianism is a poverty— as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppression.

The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression.<sup>25</sup>

The oppression that Moraga describes is that of race, class, gender and sexuality blended together to represent the formation of her Chicana lesbian identity. It allowed her not only to see her own oppressions but those of her mother as well. It was individuated, to a certain extent, but also linked critically through her mother, to community. Gloria Anzaldúa's "To Queer the Writer- Loca, escritora y Chicana," reflects the way in which her identity was formed:

Soy una puta mala, a phrase coined by Ariban, a tejana tortillera. 'Lesbian' doesn't name anything in my homeland. Unlike the word 'queer,' 'lesbian' came late into some of our lives. Call me de las otras. Call me loquita, jotita, marimacha, pajuelona,



lambisona, culera— these words I grew up hearing...these are the terms my community uses. I identify most closely with the Nahuatl term *patlache*. These terms situate me in South Texas Chicano/mexicano culture and in my experiences and *recuerdos*. These Spanish / Chicano words resonate in my head and evoke gut feeling and meanings.<sup>26</sup>

The excerpt from Anzaldúa shows that her identity was influenced by dynamics of the geography—*where* she grew up. By emphasizing that no English term applied to her because lesbianism was something that had no name in her, she is indicating how language and identity are joined together.

E.D Hernández takes the discussion in a different direction in from “Discussion, Discourse, and Direction: The Dilemmas of a Chicana Lesbian,” which shows yet another approach to understanding lesbian identity:

And as I grow older, the presence of sexism and its Third World *compadre*, *machismo*, are defecating on chicanas. The stench of their misogyny reeks through the cracks of *cantina*, *carne asada*, and *Catolicismo*. Y lo que arde más es que those who recognize the wrong in this behavior are threatened by expulsion in the community or are pushed asunder by economic persecution.<sup>27</sup>

This excerpt reflects the fact that Hernández’s identity is situated or marked by gender oppression and sexism than race, and class. While I am sure that other factors were involved her text reflects the mistreatment of women more than any other factor.

These three excerpts illustrate some of the different types of women that were Chicana lesbians. They provide evidence that the multiple approaches taken by Chicana lesbian feminists were more inclusive than those of their heterosexual counterparts, because they allowed for difference in approach, stance, and viewpoint.

While Chicana lesbians did use the various approaches of heterosexual feminists to develop their ideologies, it is important to point out that they did not rely on the heterosexual imperative. As stated in the previous chapter, the heterosexual imperative was used to keep women in the Chicano movement in their prescribed roles. When the imperative was used by Chicana feminists it put in place a heterosexual privilege, they felt would support unity with Chicano males. The unity that they sought came at the expense of Chicana lesbians' voice and representation. When Chicana lesbians came together as a collective group and raised their voices against oppression within Chicanismo, they did away with the heterosexual imperative. The resistance that the presence and the existence of Chicana lesbians posed to the heterosexual imperative disrupted the historic and continued oppression of the virgin / whore complex.

While the heterosexual imperative was not a factor in the development of Chicana lesbian discourse, the militant imperative was present. Chicanos had used this imperative to impose limitations on Chicanas' activist causes by stating that women could only be active in causes that would benefit the cause of the Chicano community as a whole. Later Chicana feminists re-adapted this to include the eradication of gender oppression; women could now work towards gender equality but had to be inclusive of the social injustice of all Chicanos as well. The way in which Chicana lesbians employed this imperative was different than its previous uses. Chicana lesbians' incorporated gender and a type of nationalism to work for the liberation of Chicanas.<sup>28</sup> The militancy that was used by Chicana lesbians was to reflect the pride in having bridged their two identities—Chicana and lesbian. Instead of fighting exclusively for rights of lesbians or the rights of Chicanas, the militant imperative of Chicana lesbian feminism re-affirmed and gave voice to the identity of the Chicana lesbian feminists thereby allowing them to fight for both and more.

The development of lesbian identity, the reconciling of sexual and racial identity, the socialization of lesbians into the Chicana movement, and the development of Chicana lesbian discourse implies

that there is a long history of Chicana lesbian activism that has been negated. In the course of my research on this topic, there is a vast amount of writing on Chicana feminism, while very rarely any of these mention the activism of Chicana feminist lesbians. The explanation for the lack of writings on lesbians and their marginalization is that first, heterosexual Chicanas simply do not recognize the role played by lesbians; or second, the large anti-lesbian sentiment in the Chicano movement and among the feminists did not allow women to “come out” as lesbians. The former explanation was given as a response during an interview I conducted with a Chicana feminist lesbian activist:

I think that many heterosexual women cannibalize from Chicana lesbians and other lesbians of color without any real recognition that Chicana lesbians have always been at the forefront of feminist politics. Now what you see in many publications or anthologies by heterosexual feminists is an erasure of the lesbian voice at the same time that our ideas, concepts, or politics are infused into their writings.<sup>29</sup>

This explanation is representative of the way in which Chicana feminist were terrified of being identified as lesbians. By not giving recognition to the work, or as the interviewee refers to them “ideas, concepts, or politics”, of Chicana lesbians, there would be nothing to sustain the charge that all the feminists are man-hating lesbians. While feminists’ presented these ideas and concepts as their own, they pushed Chicana lesbians further and further to the margins of the movement.

The latter explanation was given by the critic, Dionne Espinoza in her dissertation, “Pedagogies of Nationalism and Gender: Cultural Resistance in Selected Representational Practices Of Chicana/o Movement Activists, 1967-1972.” The work assesses and discusses female Brown Berets, a militant mostly Marxist, radical, urban group who promoted Chicanismo rather like the Black Panthers promoted African Americans. In her research, Espinoza found that none of the

female Berets, or activists she interviewed, had identified as being lesbian. Espinoza states:

I do not want to gloss over the experiences of women who identify explicitly as lesbians— a number whom could not be “out” during the movement because they rightly feared the condemnation of a homophobic community.<sup>30</sup>

I concur with Espinoza’s conclusion that the environment did not allow for lesbian activists to be out. But it would be wrong not to acknowledge that the fear of being labeled a lesbian, kept Chicana feminists from disclosing their sexuality. This homophobia and the worry of being found guilty by association, is what kept Chicana feminists from acknowledging the contributions of Chicana lesbian activists.

The continued criticism of the homophobia and exclusionary tactics of heterosexual Chicana feminists has provided the opportunity necessary to put together an important, if fragmented, history of Chicana feminist lesbians’ involvement in Chicano/a activism. The fragmented history of Chicana feminist lesbians has provided a new way of looking at oppression; no longer do the intersections of race, class and gender represent the full spectrum of oppression. In order to produce a thorough understanding of oppression we must deconstruct the *triple oppression* approach and construct a theory that is inclusive of sexuality. In reconstructing this approach we avoid, as Moraga states, “ranking the oppression,” and making a group invisible because they do not fit the convenient paradigms.

The deconstruction of the *triple oppression* approach has yielded several Chicano Studies scholars that account for sexuality. This deconstructionist approach is the result of several, highly respected, academics involved in the fight for recognition of lesbian and gay Chicano/as. It is through this generation of activists that change will come. The next generation of Chicano/a scholars are reaping the rewards of the knowledge that came out of the previous generation.

Scholars such as literary critic, Rita Cano Alcalá, and critic Dionne Espinoza are examples of the next generation of Chicano/a scholars. Their work is inclusive of all Chicanas, and they work towards a more complete representation of oppression.

The work of Chicana feminist lesbians has provided an open door to progress. The answer lies in replicating their more inclusive approach of studying race, class, gender and sexuality in combination that will lead us closer to social justice.



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Deena González, “Malinche As Lesbian: A Reconfiguration Of 500 Years Of Resistance,” *California Sociologist* 14, no. 1-2 (1991): 95.

<sup>2</sup> Historian Deena J. González, in criticizing the women who opposed other women does not deploy that they were public intellectuals and thus “open” to review. But they were.

<sup>3</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987). 16-19

<sup>4</sup> Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios*, (Berkeley: South End Press, 1983). 99.

<sup>5</sup> Tomás Almaguer, “Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove (New York: Routledge, 1993), 267.

<sup>6</sup> Carla Trujillo, “Chicana Lesbians Fear and Loathing In The Chicano Community”, in *Chicana Lesbians*, Carla Trujillo ed. (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1991), 187.

<sup>7</sup> Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios*, (Berkeley: South End Press, 1983). 142.

<sup>8</sup> Moraga, *Loving*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> José David Saldívar. *Criticism In The Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, And Ideology*. Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar, ed., Durham : Duke University Press, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, “Introduction” in *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg ed., (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>11</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*. 78-79.

<sup>12</sup> Anzaldúa. *Borderlands*. 16-19

- <sup>13</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*. 3.
- <sup>14</sup> Natashia López, “Trying to be Dyke and Chicana” in *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, Carla Trujillo ed. (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1991), 84.
- <sup>15</sup> Jaqueline Martínez, “Speaking As A Chicana” in *Speaking Chicana: Voice, Power, And Identity*, Letticia Galindo, and María Dolores Gonzales ed. (Tucson: University Of Arizona Press, 1999), 63-79
- <sup>16</sup> Personal, e-mail interview, Subject 1 November 1, 2000
- <sup>17</sup> Personal e-mail interview, Subject 2 November 22, 2000
- <sup>18</sup> Elvira Saragoza, “La Mujer in the Chicano Movement” in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writing*. Alma García. ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997) 77-78
- <sup>19</sup> Personal, e-mail interview, Subject 1, November 1, 2000
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid
- <sup>22</sup> Mariana Romo-Carmona, “Introduction” in *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians Anthology* , Juanita Ramos ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994) xxvii.
- <sup>23</sup> Personal e-mail interview, Subject 1, November 1, 2000
- <sup>24</sup> Alma García, “Introduction” in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*. Alma García ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 11.
- <sup>25</sup> Cherríe Moraga, *Loving In the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios*, (Berkeley: South End Press, 1983), 52.
- <sup>26</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “To(o) Queer the Writer- Loca, escritora y chicana” in *Living Chicana Theory*, Carla Trujillo. ed. (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1998) 263.
- <sup>27</sup> E.D Hernández, “Discussion, Discourse and Direction: The Dilemmas of a Chicana Lesbian” in *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, Carla Trujillo. ed. ( Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1991), 139.
- <sup>28</sup> Here, I use the term nationalism to imply a sense of pride in being Chicana, nationalism void of the heterosexist ideals of Chicano culture.
- <sup>29</sup> Personal e-mail interview, Subject 1, November 1, 2000.
- <sup>30</sup> Dionne Elaine Espinoza. “Pedagogies of Nationalism and Gender: Cultural Resistance in Selected Representational Practices Of Chicana/o Movement Activists, 1967-1972,” PhD. Diss. Cornell University. 1996), 196.

SECTION  
TWO



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*Community*



CHAPTER  
FIVE



*Kevin R. Johnson*

*The Case For African American and Latina/o  
Cooperation in Challenging Race Profiling  
in Law Enforcement*

The formal and informal targeting of African Americans, Latina/os, and other racial minorities for police stops on account of race, known popularly as race profiling, has grabbed national attention. Race-based enforcement of the United States immigration laws, which grew in importance as the U.S. government escalated efforts to deport undocumented immigrants in the 1990s, has just begun to gain public awareness. The two law enforcement practices share a common thread—both use race as a signal of potential unlawful conduct or status.

African Americans and Latina/os share mutual concerns with governmental reliance on race in the enforcement of the criminal and immigration laws. Both suffer civil rights deprivations resulting from the use of statistical probabilities by law enforcement officers. Overlapping interests create the potential for intellectual linkages and political alliances designed to remove the taint of race from law enforcement. More generally, the criminal justice system in the United



States, which skews enforcement, prosecution, and imprisonment toward young African American and Latina/o males, represents a legitimate target for concerted action. The common need and goal of reforming law enforcement creates the potential for far-reaching alliances.

Eliminating racial bias from law enforcement through multiracial coalitions – like all diverse alliances – will no doubt prove to be an arduous project, marked by setbacks as well as breakthroughs. Formidable barriers exist to the building of political coalitions between and among African Americans and Latina/os, as well as other minority communities. Importantly, the various groups may perceive themselves as having competing interests. Nonetheless, political realities dictate that alliances are essential to the quest for racial justice in the United States.

Part I of this Article sketches the legal problems with race profiling in criminal and border enforcement, showing how both forms adversely impact Latina/os and African Americans. Part II studies the common interests of Latina/os and African Americans in eliminating race-based law enforcement. Part III analyzes the efficacy of coalitions to remedy the racism at the core of law enforcement in the United States. The Article concludes that, difficult as it may be, collective action is essential to bring about much-needed racial reform in law enforcement.

## I. RACE PROFILING IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

Race profiling in both criminal and immigration law enforcement adversely affects African Americans, Latina/os, and other racial groups. Unfortunately, misconceptions and stereotypes result in law enforcement's excessive reliance on physical appearance as a proxy for legal wrongdoing. Intellectually and practically, race profiling in criminal law differs little in kind and substance from that employed in immigration enforcement. The reliance on race has proven difficult to eliminate from law enforcement. As history suggests, once race-based enforcement taints one aspect of law enforcement, it almost inevitably

infects other areas. Consequently, the most durable solution is to seek to remove race root and branch from all forms of law enforcement.

#### *A. Criminal Law Enforcement*

Few dispute that African American men are routinely stopped by police for “driving while Black.” This practice is the tip of the proverbial iceberg of discrimination against the African American community in this nation’s criminal justice system. Similarly, police officers stop Latina/os for “driving while brown.” As African Americans have been targets of law enforcement, police departments in urban metropolises like Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City, for many years have focused the criminal justice machinery on Latina/os.

Few deny the concrete harms of race profiling. When criminal investigation focuses on African Americans and Latina/os, more members of these groups will be arrested and convicted of crimes, thereby contributing to disparate incarceration rates. Importantly, race profiles punish, embarrass, and humiliate innocent people, whose skin color is used as a proxy for criminal conduct. Unfortunately, profiling, as part of a long history of discriminatory law enforcement, fosters a deep cynicism among racial minorities about the criminal justice system. Fearing the police, they may not cooperate in the reporting and investigation of criminal activity. Ultimately, the targeting of African Americans and Latina/os for police stops increases the likelihood that they will suffer police brutality.

Besides African Americans and Latina/os, Asian Americans at times are affected by racial profiling. The Wen Ho Lee case, in which an Asian American scientist was jailed on trumped up espionage charges, is a well-known example. Police in some localities also employ gang profiles to target Asian American youth.

To comply with the Constitution, police officers ordinarily must have individualized reasonable suspicion of criminal conduct before

conducting an investigatory police stop. (*United States v. Sokolow*, 490 U.S. 1, 7 (1989); *Terry v. Ohio*, 392 U.S. 1, 27 (1968)). Race profiles, based on alleged group propensities, generally violate the law. Unfortunately, the courts have not been particularly effective in removing race and racism from criminal law enforcement. The Supreme Court has repeatedly failed to recognize the racial context of criminal law enforcement or the racially-disparate implications of its decisions. Police departments across the country also have proven to be resistant to reform. Consequently, investigations and reports of race profiling continue.

### B. *Immigration Enforcement*

Judicially-sanctioned race profiling is central to the United States government's enforcement of the immigration laws. In *United States v. Brignoni-Ponce*, 422 U.S. 873, 886-87 (1975), the Supreme Court stated that “[t]he likelihood that any given person of Mexican ancestry is an alien is high enough to make Mexican appearance a relevant factor,” to the Border Patrol in making an immigration stop. Given this encouragement, Border Patrol officers routinely admit that a person’s “Hispanic appearance” contributed to the decision to question a person. Over the years, plaintiffs in lawsuits have regularly alleged that the Border Patrol relies almost exclusively on race in immigration enforcement.

Like race profiling in criminal law enforcement, race-based immigration enforcement fails at a number of levels. Dignitary harms to Latina/os lawfully in the United States, including embarrassment, humiliation, and other attacks on their membership in U.S. society, result from the unjustified interrogation of their citizenship status. The vast majority (roughly 90 percent) of the Latina/os in the United States are lawful immigrants or citizens, thereby making Latina/o ancestry not a particularly good indicia of undocumented status. That the Border Patrol targets persons of “Hispanic appearance” almost invariably contributes to the fact that *close to ninety percent* of all removals are of Mexican and Latin American citizens, even though they constitute slightly more than one-half of the total undocumented population in

the United States. Finally, race-based immigration enforcement may well contribute to well-documented Border Patrol abuse of persons of Mexican ancestry.

Importantly, race-based border enforcement adversely impacts racial minorities other than Latina/os. A U.S. General Accounting Office study of searches by U.S. Customs Service officers showed that Black women entering the country were more likely to be subject to intrusive searches than any other group; “Black women who were U.S. citizens . . . were 9 times more likely than White women who were U.S. citizens to be x-rayed after being frisked or patted down . . . . But on the basis of x-ray results, Black women who were U.S. citizens were less than half as likely to be found carrying contraband as White women who were U.S. citizens.” (U.S. Gen. Accounting Office, U.S. Customs Service: Better Targeting of Airline Passengers for Personal Searches Could Produce Better Results 2 (2000)). In one lawsuit, customs inspectors subjected an African American woman, a U.S. citizen, returning from Nigeria who complained about the treatment of a Nigerian citizen by inspectors, to a full pat down and strip search, and many other intrusive procedures, including examination of her rectal and vaginal cavities, in an unsuccessful hunt for drugs. (*Brent v. United States*, 66 F. Supp. 2d 1287 (S.D. Fla. 1999), *aff’d sub nom.*, *Brent v. Ashley*, 247 F.3d 1294 (11th Cir. 2001)). Incidents of discrimination in customs searches at ports of entry are regularly reported.

In addition, persons of African ancestry who arrive at airports often are presumed to be entering the country unlawfully. In *Orhorhaghe v. INS*, 38 F.3d 488, 498 (9th Cir. 1994), the court of appeals found that the INS was wrong to investigate a person’s immigration status based on his possession of a “Nigerian-sounding name,” which the court reasoned might serve as a proxy for race. Such abuses fit into a larger pattern of exclusion of immigrants of African ancestry from the United States. The pattern of race policing at the border reflects reliance on stereotypes about persons of African ancestry as lawbreakers, the same preconceptions that contributes to race profiling in domestic criminal law enforcement.

At the border, the law permits race profiling, just as it does in immigration law enforcement. Indeed, the Supreme Court has held that the U.S. government has free reign to conduct warrantless searches without probable cause at ports of entry. As the Court explained, “[s]ince the founding of our Republic, Congress has granted the Executive *plenary authority* to conduct routine searches and seizures at the border, without probable cause or a warrant, in order to regulate the collection of duties and to prevent the introduction of contraband into this country.” (United States v. Montoya de Hernandez, 473 U.S. 531, 537 (1985) (citations omitted) (emphasis added)). As one court emphasized in rejecting the challenge of a lawful U.S. immigrant from Nigeria to a search, the “contention that a border search is not routine [and thus subject to the requirement that a border officer have reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing] if motivated by ethnicity of a person *is groundless.*” (United States v. Ojebode, 957 F.2d 1218, 1223 (5th Cir. 1992) (emphasis added), *cert. denied*, 507 U.S. 923 (1993)).

Racial profiles in immigration enforcement affect other groups as well. The United States government has harshly treated persons of Arab ancestry, classified as suspected terrorists, in the name of fighting terrorism. Based on stereotypes of Arabs as terrorists, Congress enacted harsh immigration laws, which the Attorney General has enforced with vigor. Arab immigrants, and at times citizens, have suffered the full legal consequences. Similarly, persons of Asian ancestry have suffered from race-based immigration enforcement. In one case, a court ruled that the “appearance of being oriental” combined with other factors justified continued observation by an Immigration & Naturalization Service (INS) officer. (Cheung Tin Wong v. INS, 468 F.2d 1123, 1127 (D.C. Cir. 1972)). The Board of Immigration Appeals stated that “Oriental appearance, combined with the past history of illegal alien employment at that particular restaurant, and [an] anonymous tip” justified INS questioning of restaurant workers about their immigration status. (Matter of King and Yang, 16 I. & N. Dec. 502, 504-05 (BIA 1978)). Exemplified by the infamous Japanese internment during World War II, (Korematsu v. United States, 323 U.S. 214 (1944)), Asian Americans, whatever their immigration status, long have been

classified as foreigners, which makes them of presumptively suspect immigration status.

## II . SIMILAR HARMS, COMMON CONCERNS, AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT FORMS OF RACE-BASED LAW ENFORCEMENT

Similar harms to African Americans and Latina/os flow from the influence of race in the enforcement of the criminal and immigration laws. Importantly, race-based law enforcement is part of a larger series of institutions and cultural practices that relegate racial minorities to a caste-like, second class citizenship. Both African Americans and Latina/os have suffered serious limitations on their citizenship rights, often finding those rights manipulated through law. The only way that both groups can move toward full membership is by “de-racing” law enforcement.

Common concerns suggest the need for political coalitions generally challenging the use of race in law enforcement. The operation of the criminal justice system deeply shapes the lives of African Americans and Latina/os in the United States. These groups, both overrepresented in our jails and prisons, must work together politically to eradicate the endemic racism in the criminal justice system. Past successful multiracial coalitions suggest the possibility of future ones.

African Americans and Latina/os disproportionately suffer harms from race profiling in criminal law enforcement. Discrimination against Blacks and Browns in the criminal justice system are deeply interrelated. Not coincidentally, many lawsuits challenging race profiling by police departments claim that African Americans and Latina/os suffer discrimination due to profiling. Similarly, race-based border enforcement not only adversely affects Latina/os, but injures persons of African and Asian ancestry. Given the similar injuries caused by the influence of race on law enforcement, minorities have common interests in removing race from the enforcement calculus.

Because of the disparate racial impacts of the operation of the law, criminal law and immigration law scholarship have taken similar intellectual trajectories. As in the criminal law, attention is now being paid to the racial consequences of immigration law and its enforcement. Indeed, the use of race in both criminal law and immigration enforcement is interchangeable; intellectually, they are difficult to distinguish.

The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), which has a long history of violating the civil rights of Latinos/a and African Americans, offers a case study in the relationship between race-based criminal and immigration enforcement. During the Depression, the LAPD helped facilitate the forced repatriation – in the name of reducing the welfare rolls — of Mexican citizens and immigrants to Mexico. Later, during the infamous Zoot Suit riots in which white mobs attacked Mexican “gang” members during World War II, the LAPD declined to protect the minority crime victims. In 1992, the violence sparked by the legal vindication of police officers who brutalized Rodney King was followed by police abuse of African Americans and Latina/os, many of whom were rounded up by the LAPD and turned over to the INS for removal as part of the massive effort to quell the violence. Over the last few years, media attention has focused on the infamous LAPD Ramparts Division for its systematic violations of the civil rights of African American and Latina/o youth. Part of this unit’s unlawful strategy involved police cooperation with the INS, including street sweeps and arrests of Latina/os and turning over noncitizens who could not be subject to criminal prosecution due to the lack of evidence to the INS, all of which violated official departmental policy.

As this brief history of the LAPD suggests, local police often have assisted federal authorities in immigration enforcement, which has increased in recent years because Congress has moved toward giving local police greater authority in the enforcement of the immigration laws. Consider a few examples. Local police in Riverside County, California were videotaped beating two unarmed undocumented Mexican immigrants who tried to evade the Border Patrol. In a much-publicized effort to rid the community of undocumented immigrants,

local police in a Phoenix, Arizona suburb violated the constitutional rights of U.S. citizens and lawful immigrants of Mexican ancestry by stopping persons because of their skin color or their use of the Spanish language. One can expect civil rights violations when local authorities, who generally are not well-versed in the nuances of the immigration laws, seek to enforce those laws.

The racial focus of the “war on drugs” both in our cities and at our borders shows how criminal and border (customs and immigration) enforcement are deeply intertwined. Two notorious recent incidents of police brutality (Amadou Diallo, an immigrant from Guinea, and Abner Louima, a Haitian immigrant) involved immigrants of African ancestry. Police often use race profiles in traffic stops as a tool to uncover drugs, just as immigration and customs officers employ drug courier profiles at the border stops. The “War on Drugs” has distinctly racial impacts and results in the disproportionate incarceration of African Americans not in proportion to their drug use.

The detrimental use of race in law enforcement against different racial groups suggests the potential for coalitions between those groups designed to end the use of race in criminal and immigration enforcement. The use of race by governmental officials appears to be inextricably interrelated.

### III. THE EFFICACY OF MULTIRACIAL COALITIONS IN CHALLENGING RACE PROFILING IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

African Americans and Latina/os suffer common harms from race profiling in law enforcement. Consequently, collective action is more than justified to eliminate race-based law enforcement. However, cooperation between the African American and Latina/o communities in the United States on issues small and large faces formidable barriers. If permitted, the various barriers could prevent much-needed cooperation by African Americans and Latina/os on matters of pressing common concern.



In seeking to remedy the racism in the criminal justice system, we must acknowledge and address the formidable impediments to interracial cooperation. Not infrequently, the relations between African Americans and Latina/os have been marred by stress, strain, and conflict. Perceived economic and political competition, due in no small part to the changing demographics caused by immigration, have helped fuel such tension.

As a purely historical matter, durable coalitions between African Americans and Latina/os have not proven to be easy. Even intellectual exchanges among minority scholars about the efficacy of the Black/White paradigm in civil rights scholarship have at times been hostile. Conflict can be seen in dialogues between influential African American and Latina/o intellectuals. On the pages of the *New York Times*, African American sociologist Orlando Patterson criticized the publicity surrounding the 2000 Census as suggesting that Whites would soon be a minority because, in his words, many Latina/os are “white in every social sense of this term”; Patterson proceeded to blame the media reports of the decline of the white population and Latina/o inclusion in affirmative action programs for the loss of support for efforts to remedy past discrimination, and questioned whether coalitions between African Americans and Latinos could benefit Blacks. (Orlando Patterson, *Race by the Numbers*, N.Y. TIMES, May 8, 2001, at A27). Although the contention that Latina/os are functionally “white” ignores a rich history of well-documented discrimination suffered by persons of Mexican ancestry in the Southwest, as well as the colonization of the Puerto Rican people, it is a recurring issue that finds some support in U.S. history.

Nor are the barriers to coalitions simply intellectual ones. At the grass roots level, racism toward African Americans unquestionably exists in the Latina/o community. Nonblack minorities may differentiate themselves from Blacks. In turn, African Americans are not immune from nativist, anti-Latina/o sentiment. Nativism is a continuing problem among certain segments of the African American community. Such animosity works against broad-based coalitions between African Americans and Latina/os, even when the leadership reaches agreement.

Moreover, fault lines exist on substantive issues. Importantly, African Americans often have been concerned about the negative impacts of immigration on their community and less concerned than Latina/os with immigration enforcement as a civil rights issue. Many poor and working class African Americans have felt in competition with Latina/o immigrants for low skilled jobs and have seen some industries move from having predominately Black to Latina/o work forces. Some claim that employers prefer hiring undocumented Latina/os over domestic African Americans. The rivalry between blacks and Latinos/as is fueled by many factors, including the perception that Latinos/as are racially mobile group and African Americans are not. Such sentiments tend to foster African American support for immigration restrictions and heightened immigration enforcement.

Despite race and class differences, African Americans and Latina/os must recognize their common interests in removing race from law enforcement, immigration as well as criminal. Perhaps more so with respect to law enforcement than other civil rights issues, African Americans and Latina/os share common interests in extracting race from the justice system. By working together, they might best be able to improve and reform the system for the benefit for their respective communities. Political realities show the need for coalitions. The Bureau of the Census projects that, by 2050, Hispanics will constitute nearly twenty-five percent of the U.S. population. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports – Population Projections of the United States by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1995 to 2050, at 13 (1996) (Table J)). African Americans need Latina/os growing political numbers and the Latina/o community, which includes immigrants who cannot vote and a citizen population that at least until recently has a low voter turnout record, will require the assistance of the mobilized African American community. Both need the moral and political force of the other to challenge the devastating impact that law enforcement has on their communities. If either balks, neither stands to secure meaningful change of the status quo.

The classic prisoners dilemma offers useful insights about the potential for African American/Latina/o coalition. For example, Latina/os may see themselves as the beneficiaries of the profiling of Blacks by police while African Americans may believe that they benefit by race profiling of Latina/os in immigration enforcement. Once race is let out of the proverbial genie's bottle, however, it is difficult to limit where and when it will be considered by law enforcement authorities. The impacts on both African Americans and Latina/os in criminal and immigration enforcement reveals how law enforcement uses race against both groups in an indiscriminate fashion. If they do not cooperate, both will suffer.

Political coalitions between diverse communities are complex and often fragile. Building such alliances require significant time and effort. By necessity, such coalitions will be most feasible on narrow issues. Rather than engage in the difficult task of coalition building, the easy way out would be for minority groups to pursue independent agendas without regard to other minority groups. As Richard Delgado posed the question, will African Americans and Latina/os “be able to work together toward mutual goals – or [will] the current factionalism and distrust continue into the future, with the various minority groups competing for crumbs while majoritarian rule continue unabated?” (Richard Delgado, *Rodrigo's Fifteenth Chronicle: Racial Mixture, Latino-Critical Scholarship, and the Black-White Binary*, 75 TEX. L. REV. 1181, 1200 (1997) (footnote omitted)).

In considering strategic alliances Latina/o and African American leaders must consider the means of seeking to bring about meaningful social change. Both legal and political mechanisms may be used to challenge the use of race in law enforcement. Litigation may offer certain benefits, although it has its limits. Political action has the potential to bring about more drastic reforms and to create a means of enforcing the law. The use of race in law enforcement may prove to be a powerful organizing issue among minority communities, as well as sympathetic whites, especially in a time when color-blindness dominates the political landscape.

African Americans, Latina/os, and other racial minorities share common interests in eliminating race profiling from all — criminal and immigration — law enforcement. Race-based law enforcement damages all communities of color, immigrants and citizens alike, at our borders and in our cities. It is defeatist to contend that such coalitions are too complex to understand, too difficult to construct, and too amorphous in their goals. Despite the formidable challenges posed by multiracial coalitions, such alliances must be pursued and fostered in the fight for social justice by those truly committed to that goal.



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CHAPTER  
SIX



*Renée M. Martínez*

*Learning A New Way:  
Non-Violent Conflict Resolution and  
Community-Based Art Projects*

As I contemplated giving this presentation, I was reminded of what ten years ago would have been my own healthy skepticism regarding the topic of teaching non-violent conflict resolution through community-based art projects. Before becoming an artist, the activist, policy analyst and educator in me might have questioned the wisdom of directing human and other resources toward art — and to do so with such lofty goals as helping achieve peace. Yet these days, especially as an artist, and I am guessing others in this room might concur, I believe in and know the incredible power of art, and base this on what perhaps only could be called “the authority of the Soul.”

Activist, academician and artist Audre Lorde eloquently voices such conviction in her essay, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” where she implores Black women to use this art form as the “revelatory distillation of experience.” (Lorde, p.37) Lorde asserts that poetry (or more broadly, art), “...is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the

light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experience of our daily lives.” (Lorde, p. 37)

Lorde argues that this art provides not only the language to dream of change and revolution, but also the language to demand and implement them. And yet in this persuasive essay she also acknowledges that our children cannot survive on our dreams alone. Lorde reminds us that the children shout out, “If you want us to change the world someday, we at least have to live long enough to grow up!” (Lorde, p.38).

For me, this imperative brings us to the issue of the violence faced by our youth. According the Children’s Defense fund and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 1995 in the U.S. a child died from gunshot wounds every 2 hours, and 3 million children each year were reported abused or neglected. “In 1993, over one-third of male high school youth, and nearly 1 in 10 female students, reported that they had carried a weapon at least once during the previous 30 days. One in 7 male high school students reported carrying a gun within the prior month.” (Weitz, /chapter 1.html).

Violence is just one of many serious challenges and life conditions facing our young people. Referred to in the psychological and social policy literature as stress or risk factors, others include poverty, racism, discrimination, and unemployment. I focus on violence because it deeply permeates our children’s lives, and also because the stakes are very high. Society is just recently beginning to see this crisis of violence, especially as it impacts our children. For the past decade, one important voice of leadership in this arena has come from Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D., Assistant Dean for Government and Community Programs at the Harvard School of Public Health, and author of *Deadly Consequences: How Violence Is Destroying Our Teenage Population and a Plan To Begin Solving the Problem*.

She advocates a public health analysis of youth violence, and strategies that develop alternative and proactive intervention. Prothrow-Stith sees a need for more primary responses, such as prevention and education, and also secondary responses such as early intervention and behavior modification. These contrast with common societal tertiary responses, which for the most part are reactive and involve the criminal justice system, often emphasizing punishment and retribution. She points out that our society's de facto response to youth violence would be comparable to dealing with the public health issue of smoking-related lung cancer solely by surgically removing tumors in advanced cancer patients (a tertiary response with questionable success rates), rather than trying to prevent people from becoming smokers (a primary response), or helping them quit smoking (a secondary response). Prothrow-Stith and others argue for strategies that help cultivate a culture of non-violent alternatives for our children, and do so especially for those most at risk—young Men of Color living in poverty.

In the midst of our society's almost exclusive reliance on the criminal justice system to punitively address the issue of youth violence, more and more people, from a variety of perspectives, are advocating alternatives to such current limited strategies. For many of us, this recent trend is a welcome and long overdue change. Because for us, not only has it often felt as if an entire generation has been written off and vilified as so-called "super predators," but it seems a war has been waged against our youth. We know this even without horror stories of attempted summary executions of Latino youth by the Los Angeles Police Department.

Given the epidemic proportions of violence among youth, more and more individuals, communities, organizations and policy makers are anxious to find solutions to the crisis. Fortunately, the discussions are becoming more sophisticated in understanding the roots of risk, accounting for larger social contextual issues and the synergistic relationship of stress factors which shape our young people's adolescent development. The psychological literature is often cited for successful examples of "resiliency" or children's ability to survive adversity. As



the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development notes, community commitment is fundamental to any efforts for helping youth survive:

They must have sustained, caring relationships with adults; receive guidance in facing serious challenges; become a valued member of a constructive peer group; feel a sense of worth as a person; become socially competent; know how to use the support systems available to them; achieve a reliable basis for making informed choices; find constructive expression of the curiosity and exploration that strongly characterizes their ages; believe in a promising future with real opportunities; and find ways of being useful to others.

(Weitz, /chapter 1-1.html).

Increasingly, community-based art programs are becoming popular alternatives to helping provide our young people with creative non-violent spaces and activities. For many youngsters whose lives are touched by and at times engulfed in violence and destruction, such programs have the potential to provide avenues for creativity, self-expression, and non-violence. In doing so these programs can perhaps help make room for our children's energies and self-definition to be part of a constructive process, empowering them to voice their hopes and dreams.

The vital importance of art, and the value of teaching it to our children is not a new concept in Chicano communities. The transformative and educational properties of art are deeply embedded in the Chicano Movement and Chicano culture. Whether in the work of Teatro Campesino, or such art organizations as Los Angeles' Self Help Graphics (modeled in part after México City's socialist Taller Topografica Popular), or Chicano muralism, community-based art is part of our collective history and identity. What is now new, is the broad array of voices converging around a call for using art to address the many issues confronting our nation's youth.

In what might best be described as a classic situation of "politics makes strange bedfellows," interesting and previously unexpected partnerships

have popped up across the country. From this we find a national trend, supported on local and state levels, advocating the development and funding of youth art programs. While each voice has its own agenda, priorities and point of origin, the current common thread is art advocacy. From one corner we hear the community-based organizations who have and continue to offer successful art programs that usually provide ethnic/racial identity affirmation, coping skills development, personal empowerment and social service components. Add to this, voices outside but supportive of the community, which might be characterized as social planning in the settlement house tradition of using arts education as part of an individual's personal and social development; here too are voices of allies for equity in access to arts. There also are voices, generally philanthropic, which long ago brought this country our public libraries, parks and schools, with the intent of exposing the masses to "Culture" (with a capital "C"), and come from a well-intentioned but essentially ethnocentric and assimilationist missionary position.

The newer voices in this discussion are those of federal and local juvenile justice systems — perhaps for good and caring intentions, maybe out of desperation, or simply a realistic cost benefit analysis (where it is argued that an art program can have a per participant annual cost of \$850, versus a youth detention "boot camp" program with a \$28,000 annual price tag per person). Federal, state and local politicians have joined the mix, generally seeing art programs as possible solutions to what they often define as the problems of youth delinquency — which can include everything from gangs, drugs, violence and property crime. Concurrent with such arts program advocacy, and not entirely separate, are the increasing efforts in schools and communities toward teaching non-violent conflict resolution, anger management, empathy, tolerance, multicultural and diversity education, as well as other innovative endeavors, such as restorative justice efforts.

Like any coalition building, the most successful relationships are based upon knowing what each partner brings to the undertaking, and being very clear about what they can or can't be relied upon to do. In many

instances we and our community-based organizations are ahead of the trend, and bring well-honed experience and expertise. Our perspectives are essential, if only to help inform and balance those of partners who may be from outside our culture or communities, or those who may not share the profoundly personal commitment we have to our children. As the interest and funding for youth arts programs expands, community involvement must be part of project design and implementation.

A pivotal moment in the movement focusing attention on youth art programs came in 1994 when the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities was appointed and charged to "offer ideas about how we can provide children with safe havens to develop and explore their own creative and intellectual potentials." (Weitz, /introduction-1.html). The Committee issued the landmark report, *Coming Up Taller: Arts and Humanities Programs for Children and Youth At Risk*. It convincingly documents the transformative power of the arts in improving children's learning, and their social, academic and emotional development. (Weitz, /introduction-1.html, /introduction-2.html). As honorary Committee chair Hillary Rodham Clinton notes, "We know that the arts have the potential for obliterating the limits that are too often imposed on our lives. We know that they can take anyone, but particularly a child, and transport that child beyond the limits that circumstance has prescribed." (Weitz, /introduction-1.html)

*Coming Up Taller* discusses the need for technical assistance, financial support, and community links to public agencies. (Weitz, /chapter 5.html). The Committee also called for better assessment and evaluation of programs. In addition to conducting an in depth study of nine programs, they compiled a list of over two hundred successful community-based art programs across the nation. (Weitz, /appendix.html)

This report spawned many efforts including the annual *Coming Up Taller Awards* (co-sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts), which recognize successful programs. (*Coming Up Taller*, /awards.html). So too, it helped inspire many related arts efforts, influencing the growth of Americans for the Arts which helps provide resources,

public policy development, and serves as an information clearing house. One of the primary focal points of this consortium is promoting the arts to “rescue youth and deter crime.” (Americans for the Arts, /education/youth.html). They also helped develop the Institute for Community Development and the Arts, which promotes local public and private funding for the arts. The Institute represents a partnership of cities, counties, state legislatures, the NEA, President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities and the Bravo Film and Arts Network. (Americans for the Arts, /education/youth.html).

Another important NEA partnership that followed the directive of the Coming Up Taller proposal, was an effort to quantifiably document the success of youth arts programs. In spring of 1999, National Endowment for the Arts chair Bill Ivey gave testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives. He referred to the YouthARTS Art Program for at Youth At Risk, a research effort co-funded by the NEA, Department of Justice, Americans for Arts, and local arts councils in the cities of San Antonio, Portland (OR), and Atlanta. Citing preliminary data, he noted the impressive improvement in participants’ communication skills, ability to complete tasks, attitudes, self-esteem, school interest, resistance to negative peer pressure, and having fewer court referrals. He also announced the production of a multimedia tool kit to provide communities with information on art programs for at-risk youth. (National Endowment of the Arts, a.). These research results and the tool kit can be helpful in building new partnerships and identifying potential funding sources.

While violence prevention and non-conflict resolution may not be the explicit or central focus of most youth arts programs, all programs generally involve some component of team building or developing group communication skills. This may be done out of necessity — simply to manage group dynamics, or to facilitate working on a group product — or as a specific learning goal.

However in 1997, the NEA initiated an innovative program called the Partnership for Conflict Resolution Education in the Arts. Co-sponsored

with the Department of Juvenile Justice, it is part of a national education and training effort to advance the principle of conflict resolution, and the development of conflict education programs in youth initiatives. The partnership “seeks to benefit youth and their families by providing community arts programs that integrate conflict resolution principles in a personal, accountable, holistic and coordinated manner.” (NEA, c.). They contracted the National Center for Conflict Resolution Education to provide two-day workshops for arts-based youth programs. Program staff and artists, and representatives from collaborating community organizations participate in workshops. Thus far they have worked with roughly twenty programs nationwide. I very much hope that this type of training will become increasingly accessible to youth arts organizations.

We have hundreds of incredibly vital and successful community-based art programs currently serving our youth. I believe their work can only be enhanced by integrating non-violent conflict resolution into their existing efforts. And as new programs are initiated, I hope that this emphasis becomes an integral part of how we teach our children.

In “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” Audre Lorde reminds us that:

*...it is our dreams that point the way to freedom.  
Those dreams are made realizable through our  
poems that give us the strength and courage to see,  
to feel, to speak, and to dare.*

*If what we need to dream, to move our spirits most  
deeply and directly toward and through promise is  
discounted as a luxury, then we give up the core—  
the foundation—of our power...we give up the  
future of our worlds. (Lorde, p.39)*

Our young people are our most precious resource—the degree of risk they face in their lives is not exaggerated, and should never be underestimated. We must provide safe and supportive places for our

children to explore and grow into themselves, into their future selves. Providing opportunities for creativity and art may be one of our best hopes to offer our children safe passage to their future.



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\* Links in resources page may no longer be active.



SECTION  
THREE



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*Education*





CHAPTER  
SEVEN



*Tara Yosso,  
Octavio Villalpando,  
Dolores Delgado Bernal,  
Daniel G. Solórzano*  
*Critical Race Theory in Chicana/O Education*

This article extends our ongoing national discourse about the use of a growing body of scholarship in the field of education, critical race theory (CRT). As a collective, we share our work in CRT to demonstrate how this framework can address and challenge the impacts of race, class, gender, language, immigrant status, accent, and sexual orientation on Chicana/o educational attainment and achievement. Educational statistics demonstrate that nationally, only 45% of Chicanas/os have attended four-years of high school or more, in contrast to 83% of non-Latina/o Whites. Similarly, just 6% of

Chicanas/os have acquired at least a baccalaureate degree, in comparison to 23% of Whites. These two pieces of information suggest a need to examine Chicanas and Chicanos in all social areas, but especially in education. Our work in CRT attempts to address this need. Specifically, the goals of our work are:

1. To provide an analysis of Chicana and Chicano K-through-college education in the U.S. from critical race theoretical perspectives.
2. To explore some of the innovative critical race epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical approaches that can help us understand the educational experiences of Chicanas and Chicanos.
3. To address the strategies Chicanas and Chicanos use to resist educational structures, processes, and discourses that help maintain their subordination.
4. To examine and analyze the educational curriculum and pedagogy for their treatment of gender, race/ethnicity, class, culture, language, and immigration status.
5. To offer concrete examples of how critical race theory is being applied through quantitative and qualitative studies in education.

#### CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN EDUCATION

Our working definition of critical race theory in education<sup>1</sup> is to develop a theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical strategy that accounts for the role of race and racism in U.S. education and works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw, 1993). At least five themes form the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of CRT in education.

**1. The Intercentricity of Race and Racism:** Critical race theory starts from the premise that race and racism are pervasive and permanent (Bell, 1987). CRT in education centralizes race and racism, while focusing on the intersections of racism with other forms of subordination.

**2. The Challenge to Dominant Ideology:** A critical race theory in education challenges the traditional claims of the educational system such as objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity. Critical race theorists argue that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in U.S. society (Calmore, 1992; Solórzano, 1997).

**3. The Commitment to Social Justice:** A critical race theory in education challenges us to envision social justice as the struggle to eliminate racism and other forms of subordination while empowering groups that have been subordinated (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). CRT seeks to advance such a social justice agenda.

**4. The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge:** Critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of People of Color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education. CRT in education views this knowledge as a strength and draws explicitly on the lived experiences of Students of Color by including such methods as storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Carrasco, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995a&b, 1996; Olivas, 1990).

**5. The Interdisciplinary Perspective:** Critical race theory draws from the strengths of multiple disciplines, epistemologies, and research approaches (Scheurich & Young, 1997). A critical race theory in education challenges traditional, mainstream analyses by analyzing racism and other forms of subordination in education in historical and interdisciplinary terms (Delgado, 1984, 1992; Garcia, 1995; Olivas, 1990).

Critical race theory frames what we do, why we do it, and how we do it.

- What do we do? We focus our work on addressing the many forms of racism and their intersections with other forms of subordination.
- Why do we do it? The purpose of our work is to challenge the status quo and push toward the goal of social justice.
- How do we do it? We work by listening to, reading about, and centering the experiences of People of Color.

#### CRT'S INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

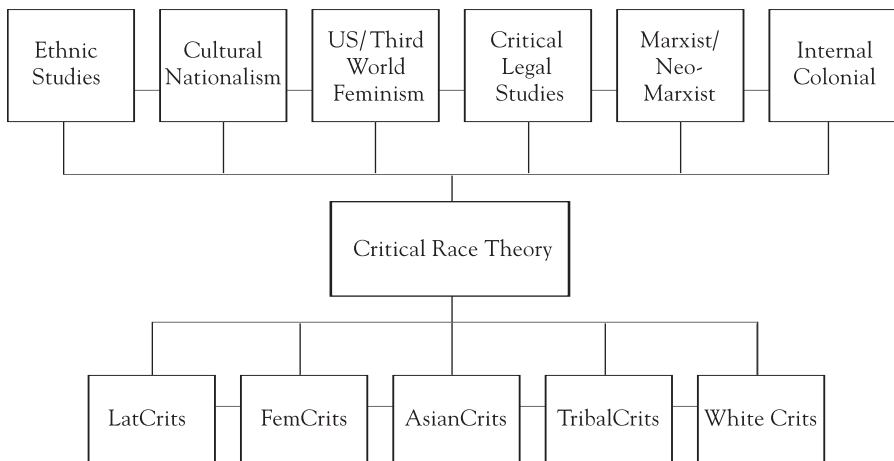
If senior anthropologists feel that the discipline's crown jewel [culture] has been ripped off by cultural studies, faculty and students in ethnic studies programs often feel that cultural studies is an only slightly disguised effort to restore white male authority in areas where ethnic studies programs have a chance of speaking with some authority. If certain majority scholars distance themselves from cultural studies by saying it is nothing more than ethnic studies writ large, certain minority scholars counter that the covert agenda of cultural studies is to allow white authority to co-opt ethnic studies programs (Rosaldo, p. 527, 1994).

Renato Rosaldo's (1994) quote above raises an important question of genealogy: Who has been doing work addressing the intersections of racism and are we going to acknowledge this work? Questions and theories about culture and identity, about race and racism, and gender and sexism have been a part of the work and discourse of Ethnic and Woman Studies disciplines for decades. Rosaldo's insight indicates that at best, work in Ethnic and Women Studies has not been adequately acknowledged, and at worst, has been appropriated by scholars in Cultural Studies. Rosaldo wonders if this lack of recognition is an

attempt to “restore white male authority in areas where ethnic studies programs have a chance of speaking with some authority” (p. 527). Rosaldo’s concerns resonate with the many Educators of Color who rarely see their work cited as part of the literature known as ‘critical pedagogy,’ which is ironically the supposed to be an empowering pedagogy for oppressed peoples. We attempt to outline critical race theory’s family tree for two reasons: (1) We feel it is important to recognize the work of those who have come before us; and (2) We can learn from previous bodies of literature to strengthen our arguments and thoroughly address critiques.

As we began to read the literature in law, we noticed that we had seen many aspects of CRT before. In fact, W.E.B. DuBois’ (1903, 1989) often quoted line from *The Souls of Black Folk*, “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (p. 29) takes the discussion of race and racism back to at least turn of the last century. However, the way the legal scholars articulated CRT was an innovative way to theorize about race and racism in U.S. society. Figure 1 attempts to examine CRT’s family tree. It is important to note that branches of this tree are both acknowledged and unacknowledged in the CRT literature <sup>2</sup>.

FIGURE 1. A GENEALOGY OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY



In its post-1987 form, CRT emerged from criticisms of the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement. One of the criticisms was the inability of CLS scholars to incorporate race and racism into their analysis. Indeed, these same criticisms had been taking place in Ethnic Studies and Women Studies Departments throughout the United States. These departments were struggling to define and incorporate cultural nationalist paradigms, internal colonial models, Marxist, neo-Marxist, and feminist frameworks into their intellectual and community work. Similarly, CRT is expanding to include branches in LatCrit, FemCrit, AsianCrit, WhiteCrit, and TribalCrit scholarship<sup>3</sup>.

Although initiated in the law, these branches are moving into fields outside the law. Much of this work is taking place in the field of education. For instance, William Tate's 1994 autobiographical article in the journal *Urban Education* titled, "From Inner City to Ivory Tower: Does My Voice Matter in the Academy" represents the first use of CRT principles in education. A year later, in 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate wrote a paper titled, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education" in the *Teachers College Record*. Two years later, Daniel Solórzano's 1997 essay on "Images and Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Racial Stereotyping, and Teacher Education" in *Teacher Education Quarterly* applied CRT to a specific subfield of teacher education. Also in 1997, William Tate's "Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications" in the *Review of Research in Education* furthered our understanding of the history of CRT in education. The field was expanded significantly with the 1998 "Special Issue on Critical Race Theory in Education" in the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Critical race scholars continue to help us better understand the racialized, gendered, and classed structures, processes, and discourses in the field of education.

#### CRT AND COUNTERSTORYTELLING <sup>4</sup>

Counterstorytelling is also an important aspect of critical race theory. Counterstorytelling as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences that are not often told (i.e. those on the margins of

society). The counterstory is also a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counterstories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform. Yet counterstories need not be created only as a direct response to majoritarian stories. As Lisa Ikemoto (1997) reminds us: “By responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse” (p. 136). Indeed, within the histories and lives of People of Color, there are numerous unheard counterstories. Counterstorytelling these experiences can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance.

Storytelling has a rich and continuing tradition in African American (see Bell, 1987, 1992, 1996; Berkeley Art Center, 1982; Lawrence, 1992), Chicana/o (see Delgado, 1989, 1995a, 1996; Olivas, 1990; Paredes, 1977), and Native American (see Deloria, 1969; R. Williams, 1997) communities. Richard Delgado (1989) reminds us that, “oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation” (p. 2436). Critical race scholars continue in this tradition and have practiced counterstorytelling in at least three general forms: (1) autobiographical stories/narratives (Espinoza, 1990; Montoya, 1994; Williams, 1992), (2) biographical stories/narratives (Lawrence and Matsuda, 1998), and (3) multiple-method stories/narratives, which offer both biographical and autobiographical analyses and utilize composite characters (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1996; Delgado, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, in press; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano and Yosso, 2000, 2001; Villalpando, in press). Each of these counterstorytelling methods draws on research data, existing writings in areas such as the law, social science, history, and literature, and professional/personal experiences in order to discuss racism and other forms of subordination.

#### TOWARD A CRITICAL RACE FRAMEWORK IN CHICANA AND CHICANO EDUCATION

Critical race theory furthers our understanding of epistemology, methodology, pedagogy, curriculum, and policy in Chicana/o education and how each of these areas intersects with the other (Figure 2).

**1. Critical Race Epistemology:** Epistemology can be defined as the study of knowledge. Critical education scholars have asked questions such as: what is knowledge and whose ways of knowing are more privileged in schools? A critical race epistemology recognizes Students and Faculty of Color as holders of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Critical race epistemologies reflect a raced history and focus on the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination in recognizing the multiple knowledges of People of Color. These epistemologies also include a rich historical legacy of resistance and survival and translate into a pursuit of social justice in both educational research and practice (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). Critical race epistemologies directly challenge the broad range of currently popular research paradigms (i.e., positivism to constructivisms and the critical tradition to postmodernisms) that draw from a narrow foundation based on the social, historical and cultural experiences of Whites.

**2. Critical Race Methodology:** Methodology can be defined as the place where theory and method meet. Critical race theory challenges traditional methodologies, because it requires us to develop “theories of transformation, wherein knowledge is generated specifically for the purpose of addressing and ameliorating conditions of oppression, poverty, or deprivation” (Lincoln, 1993, p. 33). Critical race methodology pushes us to humanize quantitative data and to recognize silenced voices in qualitative data. (Solórzano and Yosso, in press).

**3. Critical Race Pedagogy:** Pedagogy can be defined as an approach to teaching. Traditional pedagogies often marginalize students based on race, class, gender, language, accent, phenotype, or immigrant status. A critical race pedagogy challenges White, middle-class, and male privilege in traditional pedagogical practices and creates spaces to learn from pedagogies of the home. Because power and politics are at the center of all teaching and learning, the application of household knowledge to situations outside of the home becomes a creative process that interrupts the transmission of “official knowledge” and dominant ideologies.



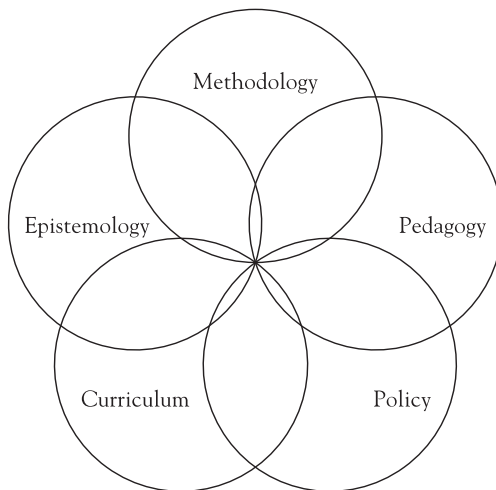
**4. Critical Race Curriculum:** Curriculum can be defined as formal or informal methods of presenting knowledge. In schools, curriculum is presented through textbooks, courses, and programs of study. Outside school, curriculum is presented through media, church, and community venues (Yosso, 2000; in press-a). Traditional curriculum distorts, omits, and stereotypes Chicana/o, African American, Asian American/ Asian Pacific Islander, and Native American knowledges and experiences. This curriculum rationalizes racial, gender, and class inequality in schools. A critical race curriculum analyzes and challenges racism and other forms of subordination that pervade formal and informal curriculum. (Yosso, in press-b).

**5. Critical Race Policy:** Policy can be defined as a rule or guideline that is used to organize and regulate the function of social institution. A critical race policy challenges traditional policies and legislation effecting education from a perspective that humanizes People of Color and draws on their experiences as strengths to learn from, not deficits to correct.

#### CRT NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

Critical race theory has begun to be deployed in educational research. Collectively, we have conducted research at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels of education. Specifically, we have completed at least three CRT empirical studies dealing with issues in K-12 education. For example, we utilize quantitative methods to analyze advanced placement enrollment patterns in an urban high school (Solórzano and Ornelas, in press). We also analyze the Chicana/o educational pipeline from elementary school through higher education through a counterstory (Solórzano and Yosso, 2000). Furthermore, we document Chicana/o high school and undergraduate students' historical and contemporary strategies of resistance against educational inequality, through oral history and counterstorytelling (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001).

FIGURE 2. THE INTERSECTIONS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN EDUCATION



In addition, we have conducted at least six CRT empirical studies focused on Chicanas/os in higher education. Many of these studies use qualitative methods, such as in-depth and focus group interviews, to address the undergraduate experiences of Chicanas/os and the barriers and successes of Chicana/o scholars (Delgado Bernal, in press; Solórzano, 1998, in press; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, 2000). We also draw on quantitative data to tell a counterstory about undergraduate Chicana/o experiences (Villalpando, in press) and to address the experiences of Scholars of Color nationally (Villalpando and Delgado Bernal, in press).

We are excited to see that our collective projects are moving the discourse in CRT forward. We believe that our research demonstrates the contributions CRT offers to educational research in the field of education. Scholars in fields outside of the law and education are also taking note of the power of CRT to propel discussions of racism forward (Aguirre, 2000). The National Association for Chicana and Chicano studies has been an important forum for us to share our work in CRT

and receive feedback. In addition, we have begun teaching courses in CRT at our individual campuses, where we are learning alongside our students how a CRT in education can help us better challenge racialized inequality inside and outside the classroom.



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Our definition of CRT in education draws on the growing body of Latino Critical Race (LatCrit) Theory scholarship. LatCrit theory extends critical race discussions to Chicanas/os and Latinas/os in education. Our working definition of LatCrit Theory informs our definition of critical race theory and visa versa. As such, we feel it is important to state this working definition, which is adapted from the LatCrit Primer (2000):

A LatCrit theory in education is a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes, and discourses that effect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically. Important to this critical framework is a challenge to the dominant ideology, which supports deficit notions about Students of Color while assuming ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity.’ Utilizing the experiences of Latinas/os, a LatCrit theory in education also theorizes and examines that place where racism intersects with other forms of subordination such as sexism, classism, nativism, monolingualism, and heterosexism. LatCrit theory in education is conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community. LatCrit acknowledges that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize co-existing with their potential to emancipate and empower. LatCrit theory in education is transdisciplinary and draws on many other schools of progressive scholarship.

We see LatCrit theory as a natural outgrowth of critical race theory, but we do not see them as mutually exclusive. For us, LatCrit scholarship is evidence of an ongoing process of finding a framework that addresses racism and its accompanying oppressions. LatCrit draws on the strengths outlined in critical race theory, while at the same time, it emphasizes the intersectionality of experience with oppression and resistance and the need to extend conversations about race and racism beyond the Black/White binary.

<sup>2</sup> The following resources are some examples of the different frameworks cited: Ethnic studies (see *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*); women’s studies (see *Frontiers: A Journal of Womens Studies*); cultural nationalist paradigms (see Mofi Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987); critical legal studies (see Mark Kelman, *Guide to Critical Legal Studies*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Marxist and neo-Marxist frameworks (see Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, and Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979; internal colonial models (see Frank

Bonilla and Robert Girling, Eds. *Structures of Dependency*, Stanford, CA: Stanford Institute of Politics, 1973); LatCrit (see Arriola, Elvia. 1998. Difference, Solidarity and Law: Building Latina/o Communities Through LatCrit Theory. *Chicano-Latino Law Review*, 19, 1-612; Valdes, Francisco. 1997. LatCrit Theory: Naming and Launching a New Direction of Critical Legal Scholarship. *Harvard Latino Law Review*, 2, 1-501; Valdes, Francisco. 1998. LatCrit: Latinas/os and the Law. *La Raza Law Journal*, 10, 1-600); WhiteCrit (see Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic (Eds.). 1997. *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press); FemCrit (see Adrienne Wing (Ed.), 1997. *Critical Race Feminism: A Reader*. New York: New York University Press.); AsianCrit (see Chang, Robert. 1993. Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post-structuralism, and Narrative Space. *California Law Review*, 81, 1241-1323).

<sup>3</sup> Each of these branches of CRT focuses on specific populations similar to approaches taken by specific Ethnic Studies Departments (Asian American, African American, Native American, and Chicana/o). Because each branch centralizes its analysis from the experiences of a particular racialized population, it expands CRT's discussion of how race and racism intersects with other forms of subordination.

<sup>4</sup> A story becomes a counterstory when it begins to incorporate the five elements of critical race theory (CRT). A majoritarian story is told from the perspective of racial privilege. Disguised as the norm, the standard, or a "natural" part of everyday life, majoritarian storytelling maintains racial subordination. A counterstory challenges racial subordination through the experiences of People of Color. Counterstorytelling exposes the deficit discourse and racial privilege embedded in majoritarian stories.



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CHAPTER  
EIGHT



*Linda Heidenreich*

*'En Las Escuelas de San Francisco  
Se Enseñan el Frances y el Aleman...':  
Nineteenth-Century Eclectic Readers,  
Common Schools and the Construction  
of Second-Class Citizenship in  
Nineteenth-Century California*

My title is taken, in part, from the testimonio of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, who when reflecting on the many changes that had transpired in California following the U.S. Invasion, raised the issue of education. He was concerned that Spanish was no longer taught in the schools, not even in San Francisco, the largest city in the north. As part of their regular education, school children were able to study French and German, but did not have the opportunity to study Spanish. The retired general's concern was tied to larger issues of political power, education, and the status of ethnic Mexicans in the U.S. —and with good cause.<sup>1</sup> Removing Spanish from the public school curriculum in some places, while failing to include it at all in others, was part of a

larger trend that created a definition of American citizen that necessarily excluded ethnic Mexicans from the curriculum and the republic. The decedents of Californianas/os were welcomed as school children, if, and only if, they would—and could, assimilate.

Many of the issues with which California residents and people in the greater U.S. West struggle today find their roots in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Following the U.S. Invasion of 1846-48, throughout the conquered territories, Euro-Americans replaced a Mexicano ranch economy with an industrial-capitalist one, displaced Mexicanos as the dominant land holding group, and achieved political dominance in local and state politics<sup>2</sup> As part of this process, public education for the next generation of “American citizens” played a significant role in establishing and maintaining Euro-American dominance.

In this paper I will focus on issues of citizenship and “American” identity as represented in California’s public schools during the late nineteenth century. I will do this by analyzing discourses of citizenship in the specific town of Napa, the focus of my larger study. Using common school textbooks and locally produced newspapers, I will argue that together these texts normalized an understanding of Euro-American as American. This narrow definition of citizen and “American” created a legacy of rigidity and exclusiveness with which educators and disfranchised people within the United States continue to struggle today.

*McGuffey’s Reader’s* were used throughout the greater American West, including not only what is now called the Southwest, but as far east as Ohio and Kentucky from the early nineteenth century through the early twentieth century, they continue to be used by fundamentalist Christian schools and advocates of home schooling today.<sup>3</sup> First published in 1836, they sold 7,000,000 copies between 1836 and 1850. Between 1850 and 1870 following the U.S. – Mexico War and then the U.S. Civil War they sold 40,000,000 copies, making McGuffey the dominant eclectic reader in the U.S. West.<sup>4</sup> The popularity of the

eclectic readers was not coincidental. Instead, their success was owed in part, to the fact that the readers were first published at a time when the public school movement was spreading throughout the U.S. and when the common schools, or public schools, of the West were becoming differentiated by graded classrooms.<sup>5</sup>

The time frame in which the readers rose to dominance is also important because during the late nineteenth century the very understanding of what it means to be an “American” was disrupted and redefined. Following the U.S. war against Mexico, Euro-American immigrants to what was formerly Mexico strove to redefine the territories as legitimately “American.” Just two decades later, while that very definition remained contested, the attempted extension of basic citizenship rights to freedmen caused yet another crisis among Euro-Americans in the U.S. East and West.

According to Richard Mosier, the late nineteenth century was also a time when Jacksonian democracy was contained. If all white male citizens were to participate in the republic, then citizen needed to be defined narrowly and all citizens need to share a reverence for property. The *McGuffey Readers*, according to Mosier, were part of a larger Republican counter-reformation that wedded property, religion and the judicial system, in part by rationalizing the poverty of the disfranchised<sup>6</sup>. In the *McGuffey Readers*, I argue, these two constructions, of Euro-Americans as peculiarly American, and of a reverence for property ownership together justified the socio-economic inequalities of the nineteenth century for young Euro-American school children.

This central role of eclectic readers is best understood in the context of discourses of nation – specifically in the context of the work of Benedict Anderson, where, in *Imagined Communities*, he made the now classic argument that what constitutes modern nation-states is not common race, religion, or language, but instead their status as a specific kind of “imagined community.” “The people” conceive of themselves as a fraternity and imagine themselves to be part of the community.

This imagined community is made possible not only by governmental mechanisms, but by mechanisms of culture and education—particularly newspapers.<sup>7</sup> Here I would add that the role of the popular press extends to the texts used in the public schools. And for the nineteenth century, what young people were taught in the public schools dovetailed with what was printed in the popular press to create an understanding of “American” that placed young white protestant Americans in opposition to other citizens and residents of the West.<sup>8</sup>

In the local press of Napa Euro-American claims of supremacy were normalized through various means. One of these was the valorization of the U.S. War against Mexico. Within two decades of the U.S.-Mexico War, events surrounding the War began to be memorialized in the local paper. Euro-American participants in the war began to post notices of commemorative events in the local papers and papers adopted a language that clearly labeled Euro-American men and women as “Americans.”<sup>9</sup> All other residents of the town were Othered – and labeled either by broad ethnic categories or by overtly racist labels. In Napa, as in other areas of the U.S. West, these others included Californianas/os, Mexican immigrants, African Americans, Chinese immigrants, and American Indians.<sup>10</sup>

A second means by which an ideology of white supremacy made its appearance in the local press was in the form of science articles by and about Louis Agassiz, the Swiss émigré to the United States who argued that one of the primary responsibilities of scientists was to “to settle the relative rank” among the races. Not surprisingly for this time period, Agassiz argued that Northern Europeans and their descendents were at the top of the racial scale. Agassiz went so far as to embrace the theory of polygenesis, which held that “in the beginning” God created two unequal species of man, one white, the other black.<sup>11</sup> In Napa, the local press ran numerous articles of and by Agassiz – at times using reprints of the articles for filler. In addition the white townspeople of Napa named one of their stream ships after him.

Finally, during this same time a mythology of American Citizens as the descendants of a peculiarly white race made its appearance in Napa's press and the newspapers adopted an unabashed racist approach to defining American citizenship. In 1869, for example, amid the strife surrounding the reconstruction of the American South, a poem entitled "To the White Men of America" appeared in the *Napa County Reporter*. It read:

Americans! Who proudly trace  
Lineage from a noble race;  
Who fill a high and honored place  
'mong the nations of the earth:  
Where is all your freedom grand?  
See! A wretched Negro band  
Ruling o'er your southern land,  
Where white men now are slaves...

Is our CHARTER now repealed,  
Which our father's blood has sealed?—  
Shall we, Freeman, basely yield  
The birthright of our race?  
Shall we stand where Judas stood –  
Break the bond of brotherhood –  
Force the men of our own blood  
To bow to Negro rule?...<sup>12</sup>

These are three of the strategies that I have found whereby Napa's nineteenth-century press naturalized Euro-American dominance and white supremacy. What is interesting and troubling about these strategies in relation to the history of education in the United States and to the status of Chicana/o education today, is the manner in which this rhetoric of white supremacy dovetailed with public school textbooks' reification of Euro-Americans as true Americans and

inheritors of English traditions. At the same time that readers of the English –language press sat and read overtly racist diatribes in Napa’s papers, the young boys and girls of the area sat and read in their Eclectic Readers of how-

...the people of the United States, descendants of the English stock, grateful for the treasures of knowledge derived from their English ancestors, acknowledge, also, with thanks and filial regard, that, among those ancestors, under the culture of Hampden and Sidney, and other assiduous friends, that seed of popular liberty first germinated, which on our soil, has shot up to its full height, until its branches overshadow the land. <sup>13</sup>

In the fifth readers, which, ironically were not written by William McGuffey, but by his brother Hamilton McGuffey, students read not only of their “English ancestors,” but also of virtues of their Puritan “forefathers.”<sup>14</sup> This construction of Englishmen and Puritans as the mythic forefathers of the schoolchildren of the U.S. West existed side by side with an overtly anti-Semitic rhetoric which blamed Jews for the death of Christ and claimed that they were strangers to “the morality found in the gospel,” as well as language that referred to American Indians as “savages” even when discussing their virtues.<sup>15</sup> What we have in the readers, then is a normalizing of Euro-Americans as true Americans. In conjunction with the overtly racist language of the local press, such texts normalized the disfranchisement of the “others” with whom Napa’s white school children shared resources in their far western town.

Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, Napa’s schools and schools throughout the U.S. West continued to use McGuffey as their central, at times their only text. In retrospect, scholars criticize these texts for the ways in which they inculcated doctrines of manifest destiny into a generation of young white Californians by praising American’s mission to spread liberty “among other nations and backward peoples.”<sup>16</sup>

At the time, however, the press criticized them only for their price tag – and so the rhetoric of White Supremacy of which Reginald Horsman, Ronald Takaki, Tomás Almaguer and others have written of at the state and national levels, was reproduced at the local level in the press and public schools of Napa.<sup>17</sup>

For displaced Californios, African Americans and Chinese immigrants these ideologies and mythologies did not represent empty fiction, but instead was reflective and constitutive of the racist society within which they lived. By 1860, the majority of people of Mexican decent in Napa were lived in a barrio called Spanish-town. Over 90% of Mexicano and Californio men living in this barrio appeared as laborers in the census. Women living in the barrios, both married and single were often listed as “keeping borders.”<sup>18</sup> In 1861, an ethnic Mexican man by the name of Manuel Vera was lynched for shooting a Euro-American man. Earlier in the month, the Euro-American had shot and wounded him <sup>19</sup>

Chinese Immigrants were similarly segregated into work camps and Chinatown throughout the Napa Valley.<sup>20</sup> The local press often reported “school boys” performing what they called “pranks” on the residents of these areas, cutting off men’s queues and knocking laundry out of their hands when they walked down the streets.<sup>21</sup> In the 1890s, at the height of the anti-Chinese movement in California, Napa’s Euro-Americans formed a White Labor Union and drove the Chinese immigrant population from the area.<sup>22</sup>

The role of the *McGuffey Readers* in creating an intolerant society is important to us as educators and activists today, I believe, for several reasons. First, it is important to acknowledge the very critical role that public education plays in the formation of national identity in this country. The lessons that students learn in the classroom are not learned in vacuum, but in the context of what is written and produced in the popular media whether that be the press, the radio, or television. In addition, the specific interpretation of American identity that school

texts produced in the nineteenth century created a legacy of intolerance that continues to influence our social climate today. For example, between 1982 and 1993, Mott Media, which supplies textbooks to home schools, sold 100,000 sets of *McGuffey's Readers*.<sup>23</sup> While some educators now acknowledge that the McGuffey readers represented “a map for building a national culture, drawn by one group of people who expected the entire country to be like themselves,” others, clearly, still ascribe to this map.<sup>24</sup>

If Homi K. Bhabah is correct in his argument that the nation-state itself is never in a state of equilibrium, but that instability and changing historical circumstances dictate continual rearticulations of the nation, then it remains critical they we, as educators and activists, remain engaged with the politics of what goes on in our public schools.<sup>25</sup> The popular media in conjunction with public schools played a critical role in establishing white supremacy in the country of Napa and the greater U.S. West throughout the late nineteenth century. What becomes of public education in the 21st century will be determined by all of us.



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, “Recuerdos Históricos y Personales Tocante al la Alta California,” in *CRÍTICA*, 142.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Camarillo, *Chicanos in a Changing Society: From Mexican Pueblos to American Barrios in Santa Barbara and Southern California, 1848-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Lisbeth Haas, *Conquests and Historical Identities in California, 1769-1936* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Skipp Porteous, “Anti-Semitism: Its Prevalence within the Christian Right,” *Freedom Writer May 1994*. This is also apparent by surveying Christian Right and Home schooling websites such as “Book, Line, and Thinker.”

<sup>4</sup> Stanley W. Lindberg, *The Annotated McGuffey: Selections from the McGuffey Eclectic Readers* (San Francisco: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1976), xv; Richard, Mosier, *Making the American Mind: Social and Moral Ideas in the McGuffey Readers* (New York: Russel and Russel, 1965), 168.

<sup>5</sup> Gerry Bohning, “The McGuffey Eclectic Readers: 1836-1986,” *The Reading Teacher* 40, no. 3 (December 1986): 266.



<sup>6</sup> Mosier, 98-105.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Today, analysts of McGuffey's readers often note their protestant tone in relation to industry and morality. See Franklin Parker and Betty J. Parker, "A Historical Perspective on School Reform," *The Educational Forum* 59 (Spring, 1995): 279; James W. Fraser, *Between Church and State: Religion and Public Education in a Multicultural America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 32-45; Stanley W. Lindberg, *The Annotated McGuffey: Selections from the McGuffey Eclectic Readers* (San Francisco: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1979), xvi; Mosier, 84.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, "The Death of Captain Grenville P. Swift," *Napa Reporter*, May 1, 1875, p. 3; "Another Pioneer Gone," *Napa Reporter*, March 18, 1876, p. 3; "Meeting of Pioneers," *Napa Reporter*, March 14, 1874.

<sup>10</sup> When writers and editors for the *Napa County Reporter* wrote favorably of working class Mexicanas/os in the 1860s and 1870s, they often referred to them as "our Mexican population" (see May 11, 1872, p. 3; May 6, 1871, p. 2). When denouncing crime and /or the people living in that same barrio, they wrote of "the degraded men and women who live in that portion of the city," (see, for example August 22, 1874, p. 2). When worried about the young Euro-American men being corrupted by visiting Spanish-town, they wrote of working class ethnic Mexican men and women as "lousy, diseased Greasers" (February 9, 1867, p. 3). See also the *Napa County Reporter*, August 15, 1868 "The residents of the savory suburb known as Spanishtown, are emulating in their way the famous strife of the Kill Kenny cats. One day this week, one of the dusky females was looking anxiously for an officer to arrest someone who had slashed a vicious cut in her head with a knife..."

<sup>11</sup> Reginald Horsman, 132-135.

<sup>12</sup> "To the White Men of American," *Napa County Reporter*, July 18, 1868. Italics in the original.

<sup>13</sup> "Europe and America" in McGuffey's *New Fifth Eclectic Reader: Selected and Original Exercises for Schools* (New York: Cincinnati, Winthrop B. Smith and Co., 1857), 271.

<sup>14</sup> "Character of the Puritan Fathers of New England" in McGuffey's *New Fifth Eclectic Reader: Selected and Original Exercises for Schools* (New York: Cincinnati, Winthrop B. Smith and Co., 1857), 249.

<sup>15</sup> Porteous, 6. Porteous was referring to passages in the Fourth Reader. See Bohning for a discussion of the authorship of the readers.

<sup>16</sup> Richard, Mosier, *Making the American Mind: Social and Moral Ideas in the McGuffey Readers* (New York: Russel and Russel, 1965), 40.

<sup>17</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 32-33; Reginald Horseman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 208-248; Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 160-163.

<sup>18</sup> U. S. Census, Napa County, 1860 (based on a formula for those pages that would have been located in east Napa for those men whose occupation status was listed).

<sup>19</sup> *Napa County Reporter*, 9 May 1863, p. 2. Here note that Manuel Vera, the man the Euro-Americans lynched was under custody for the shooting at the time they killed him. Note also that the Euro-Americans who took him from the Sheriff had blackened their faces as part of their ritual.

<sup>20</sup> Charlotte T. Miller, "Grapes, Queues and Quicksilver," 1966, mimeographed, Napa County Public Library, Napa, California, 56-63.

<sup>21</sup> Miller, 88-97.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, 146-148.

<sup>23</sup> Porteous, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Barbara Ruth Peltzman, "The McGuffey Readers," *History of Education Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 498.

<sup>25</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation." In *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 310-312.

SECTION  
FOUR



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*Literature*





CHAPTER  
NINE



*Robert K. Anderson*  
*The New World Gospel as Proselyted*  
*in Rudolfo Anaya's Jalamanta*

In Rudolfo Anaya's novels, the reader typically meets the author in the latter's role as a shaman, or community healer. Within them, this renown author conveys his diagnosis that our "modern" materialistic and power-hungry societies "[have] made us not as unified, not as harmonious as archaic man" (Anaya, "Mesa" 446). He also reveals a cure that provides hope for a peaceful transition into the new millennium. The aim of this study is to analyze the maladies of our era as depicted by Anaya and to identify his shamanic recipe for ushering in a new era of peace and brotherhood as it is revealed in his novel *Jalamanta* (1996).

In this novel, Anaya endeavors to provide a characterization of "original man," who, according to him, enjoys "a certain peace of mind, a certain harmonious relationship to [his] fellow human beings and to the universe" (Anaya, "Interview" 22-23). His perspective has its roots in the American Southwest, the author's land origin: "As I review my writings, I understand that it is the indigenous American perspective, or

New World view, which is at the core of my values" (Anaya, "New World Man" 4). In substance, within *Jalamanta* the author glorifies the "ways of the old tradition"<sup>1</sup> that fostered communal rather than antagonistic relationships. Upon teaching the contents of "the old books of the prophets of the desert [which] contained the knowledge needed to understand mankind's relationship to the Universal Spirit" (2), Jalamanta, the author's "persona," as it were, extols their values and communal bonds. He describes his ancestors as people who cared for the soul and sought "that clarity of consciousness that unites [the individual] with the cosmos" (18) and the "Universal Spirit" (2). To cite this protagonist: "...In all their stories they told of their close tie to nature, and for them nature was the entire realm of the Earth and sky." (162).

Counter to this positive depiction of original man, Anaya portrays an inferior "modern man." This, as explained by Anaya himself, is a person who finds himself cut off from "original unity and harmony" ("Mesa" 456) and who has grown so perverse that he finds himself in peril of destroying the earth itself, a gift of the gods" (Anaya, "Mesa" 456).

This negative lifestyle has spread throughout the fabled Seventh City of the Fifth Sun to which Jalamanta returns after serving an exile of thirty years. Through the protagonist's portrayal of the city's "authorities" and their subjects, we perceive that they have allowed themselves to be severed from the cultural roots of their ancestors, embracing an existential posture grounded in material acquisition. Two prime illustrations of this phenomenon are manifest via two members of the governing establishment, Iago and Benago. The former, the primary opponent of Jalamanta's spiritual teachings, prospers in his material endeavors as a wine merchant (10). He has grown fat and "[complains] of the gout that makes it difficult for him to walk" (57). Moreover, he is cynical (57) and wracked by the veil of jealousy (189). The latter "has grown old in his quest for power" (107). He preaches hate, thereby rising in power (107). Furthermore, he has grown corpulent, with sagging jowls and a thick chest (108). Concerned solely for the physical, for "[eating] at a trough of material goods" (39), these

"authorities" and a vast majority of their subjects have allowed themselves to become tied like slaves to the needs of their egos (176). Ignoring, even renouncing the spiritual (162), they promote the destruction of the old tribal relationships.

The above-mentioned "manipulators of power" (9) and "military dogma" (24) perceive of their subjects as "objects and forget they possess a soul" (58). Their supreme imperatives—power and possession—turn "brother against brother" (20). Consequently, the veils of distrust (26), lust (23), "anger, hate, bigotry, greed, excessive pleasure and gratification, and many other selfish desires take possession of the mind and body" (26). To quote a young woman in the novel: "Everyone grabs what he can, and it serves only to increase the violence and mistrust" (30). The ultimate results are the "fragmentation of the soul" (168), as well as alienation from everything that surrounds the individual.

Jalamanta, too, has experienced the "injuries" that this era causes the individual (168). Before his voyage to the underworld in search of his own lost soul (169), he, too, had suffered separation, or loss of "the strength of center" (167) caused by the previously identified "demons of [his] own creation" (169). Upon reading the novel, the reader witnesses how all of these negative attributes "take possession of the mind and body" (26) and become veils that "block the nourishment of the soul" (26). To cite Jalamanta: ". . . We create egos and create a distance between each other and the soul. The mind created its aloneness" (82). "Then," according to the former, "it's every man for himself, grabbing what he can" (30). Thus, veils cloud the soul (101), creating an "age of shadows" (91). It is appropriate, therefore, that Jalamanta depicts the city as a "place so shrouded in darkness" (118) and the world as a place "without light" (42). To quote one of Jalamanta's disciples: "Matter suffocates the soul, drags it into darkness" (178).

As previously asserted, Rudolfo Anaya has conveyed in *Jalamanta* his fundamental diagnosis that the "civilizing and socializing influence [of our times] has made us not as unified, not as harmonious, as archaic

man" (Anaya, "Mesa" 446). He also provides "prescriptions" for his characters, as well as his readers, to achieve "a certain harmonious relationship to our fellow human beings and to the universe" (Anaya, "Interview" 22). To this end, in the novel he casts a magical healer, or shaman, a figure deeply rooted in the indigenous traditions of Anaya's southwest. First, however, this individual, Jalamanta, must undergo a period of instruction and metamorphosis, a rite of passage.

By way of explanation, in communal societies throughout the world, prospective shamans must abandon the body and, aided by a tutelary personage (Eliade, *Myths* 61), traverse the door to the cosmic center, and travel through flight "to the depths of the Underworld...and back again" (Halifax, *Shaman* 24). They must participate in a series of developmental ordeals based upon a tripartite framework: suffering, death, and resurrection (Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* 33). In this context, death signifies personality transformation. Having ascended the *Axis Mundi*, the shaman "has come to know... the still point between the pairs of opposites, and has experienced the dissolution of separateness and the attainment of balance in the field of the infinite" (Halifax, *Shamanic Voices* 20). The "resurrected" being must return to the "clan" with this new vision and bestow it upon his fellow man (Campbell 30).

In *Jalamanta*, the reader becomes aware that the protagonist has experienced trials that constituted his rite of passage toward shamanhood. Prior to the beginning of the novel's temporal setting, this experienced shaman has entered and exited "a place of suffering, death, and forgetfulness" (3). Originally assisted by a female tutelary figure who pointed "the way to the door of light," he had learned how to journey through "the world of the dark labyrinth" (65) and found the "center" of his soul (63). In the shamanic mold, he has likely undergone on numerous occasions a figurative death, observing his bones broken and "tossed on the desert sand" (65). Many years before his return to the Seventh City, the afore-mentioned guide had brought him back to life by helping him gather his dismembered or "fragmented soul" (66).



Anaya conveys this newfound harmony through the image of twisting or merging serpents. Jalamanta's accomplishment is ciphered in his walking stick, a "withered staff made from the twisted roots of a desert tree, crowned by the carved head of two entwined snakes" (6-7). In support of this assertion, I defer to Juan-Eduardo Cirlot: "Two entwined serpents...signify two forces...in balance" (Cirlot, 91).<sup>2</sup> Thus, upon his arrival at the Seventh City, he is known "Jalamanta," the "puller or "remover" (*jala*) of the "manta" (*blanket or veil*) (26): "I am Jalamanta, he who pulls away the veils that blind the soul" (26). It is within his power to help his community to overcome its fragmentation and disharmony:

When Jalamanta returns to the City and to Fatimah, the love of his life, he exhibits the proverbial symptoms that follow such a transformative experience. He sparkles with inner light yet is burning with fever (6). He must be cared for in order to overcome the illness resulting from his traumatic voyage to the underworld.

In the process of becoming shamans or of maintaining such a status, therefore, "modern voyagers," like their ancestral counterparts throughout the world, must die to one mode of existence and be reborn to another. Having connected with the sacred, it is incumbent upon these figures to to put to use the knowledge gained (Noll 53). They must return to the "clan" with their new vision and share it in order to fulfill their sacred calling: "to restore the lost harmony" (Halifax, *Shaman* 21). Having learned how to reconcile the sacred values of their forefathers with the demands of modern urban society, they are prepared to share this boon with his community. Jalamanta is such a figure.

From all appearances, in *Jalamanta* Anaya portrays an ideology, or "gospel," similar to what Kenneth Meadows has described as "shamanist" in nature. By way of explanation, as postulated by this author of *Shamanic Experience*, "a shamanist is a person who, by applying the spiritual principles of the shaman, is enabled to experience the extra-ordinary whilst living an ordinary life in a modern society" (Meadows 1). In essence, a shamanist operates in accordance with a

different perspective from that of Western Culture, which finds itself mired in a materialistic orientation (Meadows 8).

First, shamanists, according to Meadows, hold the view that nothing exists in isolation, that all life forms, including human beings, are interconnected. As illustrated earlier, this belief, embraced by the ancients of Jalamanta's "pueblo" and inherited by Jalamanta himself, weaves itself throughout the novel. As Jalamanta and Fatimah participate in the Sun's epiphany in a "modern" space and time, "the mystery of the universe and its unity [move] through them..." (152). Fatimah feels "connected to the soul of the mountain, the desert, the river valley" (153). Both feel that they "[commingle] with everything around them" (16).

Second, shamanists believe that the reason for this connection, as it were, is that there is a Supreme Intelligence behind all things in existence. Meadows has explained that "shamanists live in an intricate and infinite Web in which everything is connected by strands of energy, like the arteries and capillaries that carry the life blood to every cell of the body" (Meadows 41). In *Jalamanta* we find numerous allusions to such a belief. Jalamanta himself alludes to the "Universal Spirit" (42) and describes how its "divine and vital energy" (110), manifest through light, is capable of unifying mankind. As Jalamanta declares: "When I am filled with light, I feel connected to all of life" (78).

Third, shamanists recognize "that the whole of Creation is thus a giving of itself, and a receiving back into itself through what has been freely given" (Meadows 173). In essence, the afore-mentioned spiritual entity is a "Love-energy" (Meadows 37), or "power that brought everything into existence, and from which everything is derived" (Meadows 37). It is not surprising, therefore, that in *Jalamanta* the protagonist, also known as "Amado" (2), or "beloved," affirms the following: "Our love of one another is a reflection of the Universal Spirit, the spark of love that animates. We are the receptacles for that light, we are that very same star dust of the First Creation" (148). As Fatimah explains, however, this love-energy must be shared, or re-woven into the love-

web of the cosmos: "We are like plants, using the energy and passing it on, binding together the poles of matter and spirit. We integrate and thus enhance our consciousness" (156). Jalamanta echoes this concept:

I say, love this desert teeming with life, this river that waters your crops and animals, these trees that provide fruit, and woods of mountain that provide fuel for your homes and fireplaces. Love the animals of the Earth, bird and beast, fish and fowl. This Earth so filled with the light of the Sun reflects the expanding Cosmos. Its beauty is a dream of splendor. The gift of light flows through everything both the living and the not-living. The energy of the Sun permeates the Earth, and the Earth lives. Yes, you should love this Earth. (32-33)

Thus, Jalamanta encourages his charges to trod "the Path of the Sun" (176), fill the soul with light, and reach out for union. "That reaching out is an expression of the will to be,...the will to join with humanity" (180), of the desire to "[arrive] at unity with the Universal Spirit" (110).

Fourth, a shamanist preaches that the power to choose one's path, to shape one's reality, can only come from within. As Fatimah explains: "People bring their cure with them" (19). To quote Jalamanta: "The Path of the Sun begins with the first step...You must decide" (37-38). Through this protagonist, Anaya continually alludes to this path toward harmony and unity. Jalamanta begins the novel by encouraging his "pueblo" to recover their original unity and harmony by plugging into the infinite web of the Universe in which everything is connected by strands of love-energy. He admonishes them to follow the Path of the Sun. From his own journeys into the underworld, he has learned that individuals can cultivate their own souls (49) by opening themselves to clarity (42): "Your real power comes from within, not from the gold you possess" (32). "Find your strength within" (170). Through Jalamanta, Anaya impresses upon the reader the need to teach the body, mind and soul to act as one (133). To quote Anaya himself: "The meaning...in life is not to acquire position or wealth, it is to achieve harmony

within [oneself]" (Anaya, "Interview" 22-23). Interestingly, each day Jalamanta re-enacts a cosmic gesture that both brings him clarity and symbolizes his single-minded aspiration to merge the polarities: "I turn to the four directions and offer the sunlight I hold in my hand to the sacred Earth. ...Through mind and flesh I feel the sunlight penetrating me, renewing me, passing through me to enter the Earth" (42). In his description of coronations within archaic societies, Eliade reveals the significance of this sign: "When [the king] is anointed he stands on the throne, arms lifted; he is incarnating the cosmic axis fixed in the navel of the Earth (that is, the throne, the Center of the World) and touching the Heavens" (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 39-40).

Thus, from this novel, we learn that in order to achieve this balance or equilibrium, the individual must embark upon his/her own quest, as it were, "to go in search of the lost soul" (163). It is the shaman's duty to orient and guide the voyager toward clarity, toward the center. To quote Jalamanta: "Our path is to converge on the center, to feel the creative passion of unity" (149). Phenomena such as memories, dreams, contemplation and meditation help free the soul from its veils and from its weightiness (27, 31 and 90), as it were. In metaphorical terms, they trigger the soul's descent to the underworld and/or flight (174) to the heavens (174) where it can fill itself with light: "The soul in its journey is filled with the Universal Spirit, and to be filled with that clarity is to achieve true enlightenment" (111). The Universal Light, or the vital energy of love, then, becomes the unifier of those things that are fragmented and separated from one another, such as body, mind and spirit (148).

In similitude of shamanists worldwide, Anaya has manifest a genuine concern about historical transitions, in the natural evolution from chaos to peace and harmony: "The battle is of epic proportions, we are in the midst of one of those times of history which will create a new consciousness" (Anaya, "The Myth" 200).

The author, who has acknowledged that all of his work "is infused with the mythic" (Anaya, "An Interview" 19), depicts this epic battle by means of archetypal symbols that connect him with his ancestors and

with the cosmos. In Jalamanta, he focuses repeatedly upon the point of transition between alienation and unity, fragmentation and reintegration, darkness and light. Embracing a primitive world view, he communicates the message that instead of constituting polarities, these elements have mutually sustaining relationships. They work in harmony, "like the yin and the yang" (Anaya, "Myth and the Writer" 418). To cite Mircea Eliade: A "dominant idea is one of rhythm carried out by a succession of contraries, of 'becoming' through the succession of opposing modalities" (Eliade *Patterns* 183). In other words, darkness follows light; light gives birth to darkness.

The novel, for instance, repeatedly alludes to the Fifth Age, evoking the Aztec belief that the universe has undergone four previous periods of chaos and re-creation, of darkness and luminescence. It demonstrates the role of the shaman in causing light to brighten darkness. Jalamanta, for example, believes that "the era of the Fifth Sun was ending in fear and ignorance" (40) and that "the end of the millennium was near" (5). He understands that "out of chaos peace may be born" (21). The following two affirmations by this prophet emphasize and clarify this point: "Pain and suffering are part of our growth into a new humanity" (59); and: "This community of souls will create the power of love you need to usher in the era of the Sixth Sun. Yes, there is hope, for as one era of time dies, a new dawn is on the horizon" (139).

In sum, Rudolfo Anaya incessantly communicates to his reader his conviction that the excessive materialistic desires of modern men have caused veils to descend and trap them "in a dark labyrinth" (33). In history's natural cycle, however, a new light, a new consciousness must emerge from an age of darkness. Shamans such as Jalamanta and Anaya—admittedly a writer-shaman himself (Anaya, "Rudolfo Anaya: An Interview" 78)—all teach the "pueblo" of the New World how to combat chaos and darkness and restore the harmony of the ancients. In Jalamanta's words: "It is up to us to light the way, to imagine the new era. We must be creative, for the forces of violence and chaos are inherent in the universe" (22).



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rudolfo Anaya, *Jalamanta: A Message from the Desert*. New York: Warner Books, 1996. 164. Subsequent references to this text will appear in parenthesis.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from Spanish to English by the author of this article.



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CHAPTER  
TEN



## *Norma Elia Cantú*

### *Whose Story Is It Anyway?: Autobiography on the Border*

When Genaro Padilla chooses as a title for his work on Chicano autobiography, *My History not Yours*, underscoring the issue of ownership, he is addressing not just the polemic surrounding the historical appropriation of texts and of Chicano history but the very nature of authorial voice and of whose (his)story is recorded in autobiography. Writers of personal narratives in the last part of the 20th century in South Texas, often self-published by small presses in Mexico or in the U.S., focus on a life lived under conditions of colonization. Here I explore how four texts—*La Casa de Miel*, *My Spanish-Speaking Left Foot*, *Mis Memorias*, and *Infancia peregrina*—present a transnationalist perspective that living on the border affords the writers. None of the writers are too concerned with questions of belonging to a nation state, yet in telling their individual stories, all four relate anecdotes and personal memories of life along the border of two nation states. We might ask: Where do the writers who cross geopolitical borders to publish their work belong? Are they U.S.



writers? Are they Mexican writers? If the narratives' settings cross between Mexico and the U.S., if the narrators identify with both the U.S. and Mexico, if the themes span issues of politics, education and cultural development along the border, can anyone claim that they belong to either nation? Should they?

I believe as Gramsci so aptly put it that “every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields” (5). For this very brief presentation I have chosen to examine four texts written in the late 20th century by denizens of a border town, Laredo, Texas, three of whom were actually born there, to highlight the way that they, although coming from varied “functions in the world of economic production,” felt the impulse to *write* and thus assume one of the most visible markers of the “intellectual.” I have also chosen to focus not so much on the economic or political, although there is evidence in all four texts of strong associations to these, but on the social field that Gramsci refers to.

For a long time, I have been intrigued by the term “intellectual” and the reticence of many Chicano/a scholars to refer to themselves as such. I suspect that they eschew the term because of its elitist associative semantic weight. I do not recall ever knowing any “intellectuals” growing up. My high school English teacher, Elizabeth Sorrell often spoke of the one person whom she believed was a true *intellectual*—the head of the local antimony smelter where my father worked as a laborer. No, we didn't come in contact with intellectuals in the barrio. I admit that for me, the term connotes class as well. I have also been intrigued by autobiography, writings that tell one's own story. As a child I read the *Diary of Anne Frank*, and as a teenager I read biographies and autobiographies seeking to learn about life and perhaps as a form of escapism. I read Mary Rinehart Roberts' *My Story* because I liked her mysteries; I read Bertrand Russell's autobiography because I

wanted to know who he really was, where he got his ideas; I read Regis Debray's biography of Che Guevara, about the same time that I read Nabokov's *Speak Memory*. Of course, I read Simone De Bouvier. And I read diaries: Virginia Woolf's *A Writer's Diary*, and in the early 70s Anais Nin's diaries, seeking a Latina voice I didn't know I hungered for. I also read literary biographies and, good Catholic girl that I am, the lives of the saints. But, what most intrigued me were those books written by the authors themselves where they disclosed who they were, what they thought. I still read these books about real people's lives: most recently the biography of Colette, Katherine Graham's autobiography and Dorris Lessing's memoirs.

Since the mid 70s, I have also been fascinated with folks who have written their autobiography or who want to do so. While in graduate school in Nebraska, I met Beatriz González George who was writing her autobiography of growing up Chicana in the state. Alberto Salazar, a Tejano whom I met in Nebraska also gave me a copy of his autobiography laboriously written on a manual typewriter. My fascination with the form has led me to read a number of such works. Some of the women of color autobiographies that have continued to inspire me over the last 20 years include those by Anzaldúa, Santiago, Lucas, Ponce, Moraga, and Lorde. It is this interest that has inspired my exploration of four writers from Laredo as organic intellectuals whose work functions in very clear ways in the way that Gramsci claims intellectuals work in society.

#### PURPOSE

My purpose here is twofold: to bring to light the writings of four writers from Laredo, Texas whose autobiographical writings (mostly self-published) create a view of growing up along the U.S./Mexico borderlands during the early twentieth century. Secondly, I analyze the content of these four texts to support my theses that these writers, first, unlike the nineteenth century Chicano/a writers of autobiographies are not so much concerned with land and the permanence of their location

as with the deterritorializing of culture that has occurred during their lifetimes, and second, that in writing about their lives they are revealing how they have survived life on the colonized border. A content-based analysis on the various topics the writers choose to document, however, yields but a very superficial view of the complex reasons for writing and fails to explore how and why the writers choose to write about their own lives and the very complex cultural shifts that they are chronicling. Like previous writers of autobiography, they respond to a need to document for posterity. But in late twentieth century it is no longer the nostalgia for land, but for language and culture that preoccupies the writers. If as Barbara Renaud contends, “Language is the last land we have left” (personal communication), the language used by the writers also signals the project of autobiography as a genre of the nonacademic—the nonprofessional writer. As I read these narratives, all first-person, all seeking to tell a personal story, I find similarities as well, of course, as tremendous and significant differences. Beatriz George and Albert’s Salazar’s working class background and Norma Benavides and José Sanchez’ upper middle class if not outright upper class, brings to the forefront different issues. In these books, the writers’ intent or motivation for writing is not so much to “rectify history” as Padilla asserts but to bring to the forefront the erasure of culture that is occurring. Additionally, the writers expect to limit their audience to their immediate family and friends, although there are references to the reader and in several occasions it is clear that there is a wider audience intended. The writers of these texts are not notorious figures in history as would be someone like Leonor Villegas de Magnon who penned her autobiography right after her personal involvement in the Mexican Revolution (1995). These writers are not writing to highlight their exploits or for self-aggrandizement. Nor are they seeking to glorify their own lives. But, there is a sense of self that emerges that reveals that they are celebrating their lives and their part in their own personal triumphs.

The four texts, perhaps exemplary of other such works, reveal the writers’ preoccupations, their concerns with culture and desire to “pass

it on” to their family. The family history they tell is interwoven with the community (his)story. Belia Treviño, Norma Benavides, Hilario Coronado and Jose Cárdenas, have chosen to tell their life story what Gloria Anzaldúa calls autohistoria ( ). I have chosen these writers from among others because they illustrate different kinds of publication and content and most clearly illustrate Gramsci’s claim of the work of the organic intellectual. Treviño’s book, *Infancia peregrina* (nd), tells her story as a motherless child who spends time in Laredo with her widowed father and her stepmother and sisters and with her maternal grandparents and aunt and uncle in General Treviño, a Mexican community formerly known as El Pontiagudo. Her story begins with her birth in Laredo, and ends with her father’s death. She writes in Spanish. Norma Benavides’ *Holidays and Heartstrings: Recuerdos de la Casa De Miel* (1995) written bilingually—but mostly in English—in collaboration with her sister Blanca Zuñiga Azíos narrates her family’s story in Laredo, Texas. Jose Cárdenas’ 1997 *My Spanish-Speaking Left Foot* also set mostly in Laredo, and mostly in English, revolves around his coming of age and becoming a successful educator and nationally recognized bilingual education proponent. Finally, Hilario Coronado, a retired railroad worker, published a book of poetry and prose, *Mis memorias* (1985), which he republishes in 1988 with the title *Memorias*. Coronado, the only one of these writers not to be born in Laredo (he was born in Matehuala, San Luis Potosi) writes in Spanish and almost exclusively in poetic form.

If the “organic intellectual” is to fulfill his or her function in society, he or she must cognizant of class position, and exercise certain actions. Because I only address issues of class differences superficially, the class privilege, real or perceived, that allows these writers to both write their books and also to have them published remains an area to be explored more carefully. The class and gender markers in the text abound with expected stereotypes of the time when they are written. But, we find spaces where there is defiance and self-assertion against the onslaught of perceived or felt and experienced pressures of the mainstream U.S. cultural hegemonic forces; the writers function much like Gramsci

described of the intellectuals as both arbiters of the outside or larger force and the masses. Unlike the autobiographies of “famous” people such as writers, politicians, heroes, or even of those who have endured incredible hardship or achieved incredible feats, these “homemade autobiographies” do not necessarily document the exploits of one person, and often include a much wider protagonist, the community.

These writers seek to document the quotidian, the day to day life of people as seen through the lens of a “non-writer” or as Benavides’s disclaimer says: “I apologize for any lack of literary quality, for I have taken many, many liberties.” She continues,

Aside from liberties of content, there are those of form and style, mood, language, and punctuation. The text fluctuates from one style to another, never adhering to any definite pattern or fixed set of rules. Also, it drifts from formal to informal, from carefree to soulful, dramatic, or even philosophical at times, or from comical to tragic. After all, isn’t life itself this way?” (1-2)

In like manner, Treviño and Cárdenas offer their own apology: Treviño begs of the reader “tu comprensión ya que al atreverme a contar un pedacito de mi vida, lo hice consciente de la sencillez y limitación de mi prosa” (3). In fact, all of them do not see themselves as writers but also express their belief in the enterprise before them.

In *Speak Memory*, Vladimir Nabokov writes of his exile and his search for a home; Pat Mora in *House of Houses* brings together all of her antepasados who tell stories and nudge the writer to remember. These four writers also write of home and with outright yearning; the nostalgia for times past seeps through in the tone in their words. Tey Diana Rebolledo notes of the writings of Jaramillo, Cabeza de Baca Gilbert, and Otero-Warren, that they use “narrative strategies of resistance that show the writers’ discontent” (). I found that these writers employ strategies similar to the ones Rebolledo outlines.

Because they are contemporary, however, they highlight different issues. A difference born of a different time: Rebolledo notes, “landscape is one symbolic icon for describing the loss of land” (17). (See pp 17-19). Yet, these texts speak not about land, for they are not necessarily a landed class, but of the cultural terrain that is at stake here, it is a way of life that is slipping away and that the writers want to document for posterity, to show what we were like. Rebolledo also notes that the early writers including Tejana Jovita Gonzalez “felt the need to document what they saw as a vanishing cultural heritage: their sense that their identity was being assimilated through history and cultural domination” (17). This same sense of impending loss permeates some of the contemporary texts, but not surprisingly since this is a late twentieth century borderland, the focus shifts to culture and tradition and leaves the despair over land loss behind.

#### THE TEXTS

I will take each book at a time, describe its contents and take a perfunctory look at the issues I have identified in it that marks how the writer seeks to preserve the past and to celebrate the cultural expressions of Laredo and the border. In all, the location of the writer and the setting of the historia is the border, but it is a border that is both Texan and Mexican.

#### *HOLIDAYS AND HEARTSTRINGS: RECUERDOS DE LA CASA DE MIEL*

Norma Zuñiga Benavides, the seventh of thirteen children takes on the task of documenting her family’s story. She claims to have the better vantage point because of her position in the birth order. Structuring her narrative following a calendar year beginning with holidays in December and ending the following November, she begins with the Christmas celebrations because she claims “it was Christmas, when we were most often all together, that held us closest to each other” (1). She invites her readers to enjoy her book with a culinary metaphor,

“to savor it and allow it to act as leaven that will bring much more to mind.” (1). The “diverse entries... historical data, photographs, poems, *antojitos*, prayers and other bits of family lore, including such rituals as *Las Posadas*” are woven into the text as they fit into the yearlong frame.

Norma Zuñiga Benavides, the first woman to be elected to a political position in Laredo, does not mention her political life and only alludes to her own participation in events. It is the family that emerges as the protagonist of her narrative, the family home serving an emblematic function, representing the hive where all the bees work and live. Her father had come from the northern Mexican metropolis of Monterrey to become “a partner in his brother Robert’s fledgling freight forwarding business.” Her mother also came from Monterrey. In the long section devoted to her parents’ courtship and eventual nuptials in 1915, she stresses the cultural constraints on women. My *tocaya* married into the prominent Benavides family whose dubious claim to history is Santos Benavides, one of the officers in the Confederate Army (Jerry Thompson)<sup>1</sup>. She is college educated and taught high school science at Ursuline Academy for many years. But, her family was not necessarily “in” and she belonged to what survived for a while in opposition to the ruling party, *el partido viejo*, for she belonged to the Reform Party. I remember as a child learning of her election to the school board and rejoicing for I felt a kinship because we were *tocayas*. Today she is still active and involved. My last communications with her have revolved around the board of the Friends of the Laredo Public Library where we both served until I left Laredo in the summer of 2000. She is definitely the kind of person that Gramsci would classify as an organic intellectual, for she emerged as a leader in the community’s social, political and economic fields, serving the needs of her class—the petite bourgeoisie—and of the masses who enthusiastically endorsed her politically. She still maintains a reputation among the working class as a champion of their cause in spite of having aligned herself with the Republican Party in recent years. Her book gathers her memories of growing up and just like the texts written in the early half of the century, she notes traditions and customs especially those concentrated

on religious feast days. She inserts a letter her father wrote one of her sisters on the occasion of her quinceañera. There is a photo of another of her sisters at her quinceañera mass. She writes eloquently of her own participation in the George Washington's Birthday Parade as Pocahontas. Complex and revealing, *Heartstrings* also documents a very female world-view and often addresses the readers, whom she very clearly marks as members of her extended family, nephews, nieces, cousins and their children. The book is a collection of mementoes including poetry and letters and a *memoria* penned by her mother that recalls the couple's 25th wedding anniversary and subsequent second honeymoon to Tasco Guerrero. The poems are written by various family friends and by her father, A.J. himself. These "literary gems" are collected in *El Alhajero*, and include poetry by A.J. the narrative by Concepción, and the poetry by the Monterrey poet Alfonso Junco and his father Don Celedonio Junco de la Vega.

Benavides, firmly rooted in Texas, writes of her parents' families in Monterrey and clearly documents an upper-middle class coming of age. She and her sister write of their life in Laredo and only hints at any of the usual vagaries of life on the border or at her own very political life.

#### MI INFANCIA PEREGRINA

In contrast to Benavides' narrative describing an extended family-life free of problems, Belia Treviño's short narrative documents a very personal and sad story, of what she calls her *infancia peregrina* when she had no solid foothold, or home. She chronicles a common story of many families whose reality took them back and forth across the border then as well as now. She divides her book into sections, each focusing on a particular cultural aspect, but she also throughout the narrative places herself in a victim position as an orphan. A mere 44 pages long, Treviño's book, written entirely in Spanish, is the shortest of the four under consideration. In her prologue she claims that reading Pablo Neruda's memoirs on January 1, 1993 she was moved to fulfill a long-held desire to "escribir mis vivencias" (3). She writes: "*inspirada por*



*él (Neruda) decidí tomar la pluma y plasmar en el papel los viejos recuerdos que por fortuna se remontan a mi tierna infancia”* (3).

As the fifth child, she enjoys certain privileges, but her life takes a dramatic turn in 1919 when her mother dies of tuberculosis. As a three year old, with her older siblings interned at Holding Institute, she goes to live in a village in Mexico, el Puntiaquedo, with her paternal grandparents. A great part of the book documents her suffering at the hands of a cruel aunt who wanted to adopt her and yet would punish the child for seemingly minor transgressions. “*Me castigaba por faltas insignificantes que cometía, como tardar mucho en moler el nixtamal o derramar la leche de la vasija*” (9). It was a rural life where the child went to school but was responsible for many household chores associated with rural life. It is in this section of the narrative she describes the process involved in the slaughter of pigs for chorizo and tamales. Carrying water from the acequia, preparing the dough for wheat flour, which she calls *harina de flor*, tortillas and making the tortillas before going off to school (10). She describes life before refrigeration or gas stoves, electricity, or running water. She goes into a detailed description of the preparation of the corn for tortillas. Most poignant is her obvious resentment of the cruel aunt who would not even allow the orphan child to share with her grandmother the pain she feels on Mother’s Day as the other children memorize poems and prepare gifts for the occasion. She returns to Laredo at age 8 when her father remarries and attempts to bring the family together. Upon her return to Laredo, she learns of the death of her sister Ethelina Rosa who died of intestinal fever at 16. To protect her from further pain, the family had kept Ethelina Rosa’s death from Belia. Once in Laredo she is enrolled in school and placed in the third grade with the caveat that she learn English. All seems to be going well. She offers a detailed description of a dress that she has made patterned on a dress one of her cousins wears. She talks of Sunday rides to Ft. McIntosh with her father and with her mother’s brother. But in spite of becoming “*la niña bilingüe más pequeña del mundo*” and her willingness to help her stepmother, it is a short-lived stay as the stepmother angered over the purchase of a pair of shoes forces the father to send Belia back to

Mexico. As she says, "*La realidad fue que mi madrastra no me aceptó*" and tearfully she is taken to Nuevo Laredo just as she is about to get her wish of a piano as her mother had wanted her to learn to play. She stays with her father's cousin and is soon sent back to the hamlet that soon is renamed General Treviño. She taught her classmates the little English she had learned, she learned to paint and for the ceremony renaming the community she was chosen to dance El Jarabe Tapatío dressed as a charro, perhaps due to the fact that it was not considered manly behavior for little boys to dance as Cárdenas points out in his text (14). But the cruel aunt tried to prevent the performance because one of her grandmother's brothers in law had died a few weeks before. From her aunt she learns to cook traditional dishes, and describes the preparation of machito and cabecita, both delicacies prepared from the kid goat or cabirto (26-27). Just like Benavides, Treviño talks of traditional meals for lent and of the practice of taking food to the relatives of the deceased for three days following the wake. She ends her narrative with her return to her father's side. He has fallen ill and asks for her. At fourteen she returns to Laredo. "*Por primera vez en mi corta vida tenía conmigo a Papá que me consentía, ... que me hacía sentir social y económicamente respctada y segura*" (44). Her father urges her not to return to General Treviño. "*Quedese aquí hasta que Dios la ampare*" (43), and encourages her friendship with the young man that would become her husband.

This brief summary reveals many of the concerns found in Benavides book as well, but the personal nature of the narrative and the focus on the coming of age of the narrator as an orphan deviates from the other books. Of the four, perhaps Treviño's is the least communal and thereby she is the one that easily fits into the schema of the "organic intellectual." However, she does represent her class well and interjects at critical junctures commentary on the way that her family had *servidumbre*, or servants, to help with the children. The book also lacks good copy editing, although it is in impeccable Spanish. For example on page 5 we read that her sister Ethelina died at age 15, but on page 17 her age at time of death is 16. All in all, we can look to

Treviño's short narrative to get a sense of what life was like along the border for a young orphan girl. Unfortunately, the narrative as do all of these, seems to be restrained and the tone is one of cautious expression. Although rich in specific dates and names of teachers and neighbors, there is no connection with the outside political situation of the area, aside from the comments about the naming of the small village.

MY SPANISH-SPEAKING LEFT FOOT

In contrast to Treviño's lack of involvement with the world, José Angel Cárdenas imbues his narrative with a socio-political context that explains, for example, how the border denizens are not immigrants. He cites the example of his wife's family whose ancestry is Irish and Spanish going back to the 17th century Canales family. Born in Laredo, Texas, in 1930, Cardenas exemplifies a kind of organic intellectual for he devoted most of his professional life to working in the development of multicultural and bilingual programs, seeking to help the children of the border and beyond whose Spanish proficiency schools deemed a disadvantage instead of the asset that it is. For over forty-seven years Dr. Cárdenas worked as a professional educator; he founded the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA) in San Antonio and currently holds the office of director emeritus of the organization. Just like the other authors, Cardenas sets forth the purposes for his book, but he is more proficient and specific outlining four major purposes. He says:

In this, my fourth book, I intend to depict the cultural influence of Mexico and the Spanish - speaking world for a Mexican American living in the Untied States.

Second, I intend to show the ease of adjustment to a multicultural existence without ambivalence or incapacitation...

A third purpose of this publication is to allay the fears of the extensive number of xenophobes in this country who are concerned with the impact of foreign cultures and languages. I wish to show that multiculturalism is, like love, infinite. (viii)

Just like the other autobiographies, his narrative stresses the fact that his extended family resides along **both** sides of the U.S./Mexico border. In his book, as the IDRA web site states, “He depicts the cultural influence of Mexico and the Spanish speaking world on a Mexican American living in the United States.”

I remember sometimes saying that I was born with my right foot in the United States and my left foot in Mexico. I specifically designate my left foot as the Spanish speaking one because I was taught in the U.S. Army that the left foot always comes first, and Spanish was my first language. (vii)

But the narrative is not just Cárdenas’s quaint reminisces of growing up along the border with two cultures, it “provides compelling reflections of multicultural topics such as wealth, class, language, religion, education and family.” For example, he clearly situates himself and his family as belonging to one of the buenas familias, but, he claims, “almost all Mexican Americans in Laredo, regardless of economic or social status, considered themselves to be from good families” (18) Cardenas’s narrative also self-consciously provides clues to the construction of masculinity in the border community. At one point he writes: “even at this early age, I had acquired from the Mexican culture strong concepts of what was considered manly behavior and what was not. Dancing the Jarabe Tapatío at my mother’s insistence was not considered macho, and it caused me no small amount of problems in my peer relationships (14). The book is comprised of seven chapters. The first five are reflections on his youth sprinkled with memories like Treviño and Benavides’ of preparing specific foods, like tamales (66) and of traditional cultural expressions, like the *mal de ojo* or the prevalence of *dichos* in everyday life (67). The last two chapters

merely recount the various places Cardenas has visited and offers his perceptions of these. Of all the authors, Cardenas is the most “educated” with a Ph.D. and the most widely traveled, and though it may seem that he seeks perhaps higher purposes, it too is a document of life along the border during the mid twentieth century.

#### MEMORIAS

Hilario Coronado’s *Memorias* also seeks to document and to render a view of life in Laredo via a collection of personal writings. Hilario Coronado’s unusual collection of poetry and prose, gathers his creative work that covers a span of over 40 years. Impelled by the autobiographical nature of the poetry and the prose pieces I include Coronado’s work, first published in 1982 as *Mis Memorias*, and reissued in 1988 with the letters of response from various writers in Northern Mexico and south Texas. Like Benavides’ father, Coronado marks the quinceañera of his niece with a 16 line poem in traditional rhyme scheme (abab) and with common constructions, almost cliché, for example, he refers the honoree as: “Bella princesita, tan hermosa cual una rosa” and uses word play as he ends:

Van hacia tí mis votos más fervientes  
porque sean siempre tus sueños realizados  
y porque tus deseos más vehementes  
si son nobles, veas siempre coronados. (65)

But, his poetry also celebrates the quotidian, weddings, birthdays, pets, and special events: his dogs, Teddy and Rags. On August 3, 1962 he writes Marcia Sybert his granddaughter a birthday poem full of portent and best wishes (70). He divides the text into sections and then arranges the poems thematically. His love poems to his wife Paquita span over 50 years of marriage. The poems to his family are first, then come the reflections on life and death and on nature: la lluvia, la urraca. One he titles: “Rewritten on this the 17th day of November 1977 on which I am celebrating my 79th birthday, Remembering the

Old Iron Horse,” (110) tells of his work for the railroad and his retirement. Originally written in April of 1965, it is one of the few written in English.

Cornado’s life and work in Laredo can be gleaned from his poetry and prose. But, unlike a true autobiography the text doesn’t have the “self consciousness” that the others have. Ye, Coronado’s work does reflect his concern with who he is; his reflections on life and the advice he gives his grandchildren, nephews, and nieces all express a concern with culture and identity. Although mostly poetry, his *Memorias* constitute a memorial and function as a testament to his life well lived.

Here I’d like to venture into a reading beyond Gramsci’s organic intellectual. Edward Said reminds us of the importance of “the role of geographic knowledge in keeping one grounded [...] in the often tragic social, historical, and epistemological contests over territory—this includes nationalism, identity, narrative, and ethnicity” (68). Indeed, the autobiography is by definition in geography, and the border area remains a contested territory. The Treaty of 1848 may have ended the war but the cultural conflict continues.

These four writers inhabiting what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “nepantla,” the in-between state, grounded in that border region between the U.S. and Mexico, keep the “geographic knowledge” at the forefront. I propose that the writers, through their autobiographical work, become the chroniclers of what of their lived experience under colonization. They as colonized subjects, in spite of having the desire to tell, choose not to “tell it all.” Save a few instances where the veil so carefully upheld slips a bit, we know nothing of the racism, or of the subaltern status that they are relegated to for being of Mexican descent in the U.S.

When José Cardenas expresses a subdued rage against the xenophobes, when Benevides explains off handedly a business loss, when Coronado and Treviño chooses to write in Spanish—the writers make a political statement that definitely signals that they are writing in the U.S. about their lives in the U.S./Mexico border region and that their narratives are not telling the whole story.

As critic, as scholar, indeed as intellectual, I read these works and celebrate that they are written and published at all. But I cannot stop there. I seek to problematize the ways that readers, historians, and critics understand the role of the writer in a community, a writer who may not seek an audience beyond her or his immediate circle but whose work reflects a truth and questions through its very existence what writing is, why autobiographies exist and finally what social, political, or life-affirming change such writing effects for the community, the reader, and, specifically, for the writer. The answer to the question: whose story is it? is a simple one: it is a story/*historia* of any autobiography/*cuento* that belongs to all of us, as it tells our collective story.

Why would these four individuals write their memoirs? What impels someone to write? And, more specifically, to write an autobiography? Scholars of the genre hold that the exercise of writing one's autobiography fulfills a desire of "coming to knowledge of the self" (Benstock 1139). We can ascertain that the desire, the impulse was so great that these four not only wrote, but saw to it that their work was published. A discussion of their various strategies to get the work published and the cost involved is outside the purview of this paper. Suffice it to say that in the very act of writing (and publishing) these authors have established themselves as agents in a social drama that continues to develop as life on the border shifts and changes with the hegemonic forces of two nation states that constantly clash and meet.



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CHAPTER  
ELEVEN



*Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez*  
*Maya Themes in U.S.*  
*Latino/Chicano Literature*

U.S. Latino literature, or literature composed in English by people of Latin American ethnic heritage who were born in the U.S., attempts in part to identify cultural traits specific to that ethnicity. In U.S. Chicano (or Mexican-American heritage) literature, indigenous “voice” reveals a native-to-this-continent identity. The Chicano identifies more with his or her Native-American heritage than Spain or Europe, and also identifies closely with the U.S. This indigenous representation in early Chicano literature (the 1960s and early 70s) was mostly Aztec, connecting to the fabled origin of Aztlán—a lost paradise thought to have been in what is now the U.S., and the former homeland of tribes who wandered south and founded Tenochtitlán, now present-day Mexico City.

In the past two decades, however, other indigenous heritage has been identified in Chicano literature published in English—most notably the *Tarahumara* in Estela Portillo-Trambley’s novel *Trini* and in novels by Graciela Limón, or the *Yaqui* in Lucha Corpi and other authors’ works. These are indigenous cultures of northern Mexico.

Now recent Chicano as well as other U.S. Latino literature <sup>1</sup> is beginning to include what is understood to be “Maya” culture, originating from southern Mexico or Central America. In fact, literature produced in English in the U.S. with a Latina or Latino “voice” now frequently includes Maya themes.

This can be helpful in teaching college students, at a time when travel agencies advertise excursions to the Mayan Riviera, or tours of the Mayan World, and the nightly news reveals the struggles of the Zapatistas in Chiapas or the efforts toward a peace process in Guatemala, where thousands of people of mostly Maya heritage were killed by the military in recent years.

Principally, it is several Latinas—women authors—who are bringing this new awareness to late twentieth century U.S. literature, but there is also the example of Chicano poet and novelist, Juan Felipe Herrera. Their publications demonstrate a broader consciousness of indigenous heritage among English-language Latino/Chicano writers.

In the Spanish-language world, the Maya people and culture were brought to life in early and mid-twentieth century novels, especially by two prominent novelists: Mexican Rosario Castellanos and Guatemalan Miguel Angel Asturias. While Castellanos and Asturias are not of Maya ethnic heritage, their legacy is of excellent writing (Asturias won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1967) with strong Maya themes. Although most of their novels have been translated to English<sup>2</sup>, their work is little known by contemporary English-language readers. It is the U.S. Latino authors who have published in recent years, and Latin American authors recently translated to English, who are introducing (or re-introducing) Maya themes to the English-reading public.

“Maya” is not a self-specific term, but instead, a broad category encompassing various indigenous people and dialects, all loosely associated linguistically and by legend and traditions. Today, some six million Maya reside in Southeastern Mexico including the Yucatán peninsula, in Guatemala, Belize, western Honduras and El Salvador. There are also some 100,000 living in the U.S. and Canada. Those

grouped under the term “Maya” share commonalities of religion, science and astronomy, and stories of origin. For some, their language is interrelated—the Yucatec Maya language is very similar to the Quiché Maya language spoken in Guatemala—but others have very different language structures. For example, Rigoberta Menchú is of the Maya-Quiché, or Quiché people, and the young brother and sister depicted in the film *El Norte* are of the Kanjobal, who speak a somewhat different language. There are also indigenous people in the Maya region who are not called “Maya,” such as the Pipil of El Salvador.

Maya ethnic awareness first crept into late twentieth century U.S. Latino literature based on a desire in the U.S. to understand the rampant mass killings by Central American governments of peasants—principally *indios* or Maya—to rid their countries of possible guerrillas. While Guatemala also suffered extensive genocide against its indigenous people, El Salvador received more attention and activism in the U.S. during the 1980s, and is focused in some of the following U.S. novels.

Two prominent Chicana authors represented El Salvador and its culture early on: In Graciela Limón’s 1990 novel, *In Search of Bernabé*, a young Salvadoran man planning to become a priest instead joins the revolutionaries after a brutal rampage by the military in his village. Here, descriptions of indigenous culture are limited to homemade *pupusas* (a flat, filled bread made from corn dough) stacked near the fire at mealtime, or the significance of a corn or maize-based diet, as well as the indigenous lifestyle—or reliance on the land—which is often in conflict with a government that does not trust self-reliance. In Ana Castillo’s *Sapogonia*, also of 1990, the main character feels closer to his Mayan grandmother than to his stern, patriarchal grandfather (of Spanish descent). “Sapogonia” seems to be a fictional name for El Salvador. Sapogonia is the principal character, Máximo’s, country, but he prefers living in Spain and the U.S., and when he returns, finds his country devastated by civil war. The character notes specific aspects of Mayan culture—his grandmother’s native dress, her long braids, and a philosophy that is markedly different from Western.

The novel suggests Máximo's need to reach or connect spiritually with his grandmother—or the Maya world—which is only vaguely attained by him near the end of the novel. A true understanding is left unanswered. And the novel confuses the reader by citing the grandmother's language as *Quechua* when *Quiché* was probably intended, since the novel states that she is Maya. Still, Limón and Castillo's novels *presence*<sup>3</sup> early on, a Central American people who struggle daily to survive and to preserve their indigenous culture.

The metaphor of corn or maize as the basis of human life and sustenance (prevalent in Mexican and Central American novels) is becoming more apparent in some recent U.S. novels, and defining the basis of indigenous and especially Mayan image and philosophy. This metaphor was first portrayed in Asturias' and Castellanos' novels, and is evident in some contemporary Central American novels, but also courses through Chicano poet Juan Felipe Herrera's book released in 1997, *Mayan Drifter: Chicano Poet in the Lowlands of America*. Although the latter text is written in English, Herrera uses several words in Spanish and Maya, and includes a glossary of definitions. Herrera's book is based in the Maya area of Chiapas in southern Mexico, and is a collage of travel diary, memoir, poetry and a play. His focus is on the Lacandón Maya, as visitor to their area as well as (he states) partial inheritor of their bloodline. His assessments are both reportorial travelogue and spiritual quest. In the remote Chiapas jungle, Herrera makes note of the "No trespassing" sign with the colors of the Mexican flag, and an eagle superimposed over a pyramid—Aztec symbology or an iconography that has nothing to do with the Maya, and the Lacandón of this jungle. He is visiting the "people of Nahá, whose lives and dream worlds were cast in the shape of the caoba forests and the earth that sustained them" (151).

Earlier, in the city of San Cristóbal, Herrera purchases some thick, Mayan-style tortillas (not thin enough to make *tacos* like those in central Mexico) from a "small Indian woman" in the *zócalo*. After giving her three instead of the required two pesos, he:

walked and chewed the tortillas, tried to push the food down my throat. Even though I was ravenous, even though I chewed hard, I wrestled with the corn paste in my mouth. It went down in clumps. Some of it stuck to the inside of my cheeks, some of it dissolved on my tongue and stayed there; the rest knotted itself in the middle of my throat. Even though I had not eaten since leaving Tuxtla, something was bruising me and did not allow me to chew and swallow. It was forcing me, against my will, to spit everything out. Most of all it wanted me to spit myself out. The tortillas wanted to turn me over, upside down, with the guts out (39).

Here maize serves to begin a soul-searching connection to Herrera's Mayan roots. At the end of his book, he calls Chicano "a half-step between Ladino and Indian, a jump start from apathy into commitment on the edge of a contemplation between Mexican, American [of this continent], campesino, and Maya" (258).

Herrera examines how we translate culture, how it is preserved, especially when its basic philosophy is disregarded. The various migrations and invasions that the Maya have endured have not obliterated their traditions, but change and re-adaptation differs from region to region. John Christie, writing on the modern imagination in Latino fiction, states the following:

What they gather in their travels, their shuttling between cultures, encourages them to balance logical reality with the unexplainable. Treating folk beliefs and faith with reverence and understanding, Latino writers return to their cultural beginnings (literally or imaginatively), and bring back with them to life in the U.S. the foods and sounds of post-colonial or indigenous worlds, and along with [these] come the ideas, customs and values of their grand-parents to be either discarded as antiquated superstitions or more often molded into some aspect of life in the U.S. (164).

It is the “shuttling between cultures” that the following two authors seek to identify. In 1994, Demetria Martínez published *Mother Tongue*, which deftly contrasts the lower socio-economic status and plight of a young Chicana woman with a Salvadoran refugee’s experience as he tries to adapt to the U.S. A Chicana poet and newspaper writer, Martínez wanted to make readers aware of the late twentieth century genocide against people in El Salvador in her first and only novel. In the foreword, she notes that more than 75,000 people died or disappeared during the twelve-year struggle principally of the 1980s. In this short novel, a refugee—José Luis—arrives in Albuquerque where he works as a dishwasher and is considered Mexican. He gives talks about his experience in community and church meetings, and lives in the basement of a home the other main character—Mary—is housesitting. He assumes it is safer in the Chicana character’s world, but does not realize, as she points out, that brown people are ignored by the mainstream population. It is another form of disappearing people, she tells him. Martínez’s short novel compares what is done by those-in-power in both countries.

The ethnographic details in *Mother Tongue* include references to *pupusas* as well as Mexican *posole*—both corn-based foods native to the Americas. Indigenous beliefs are noted—those of the Pipil and Náhuats of El Salvador as well as of *curanderas* (healers) in the Southwest—and reference is made to the great *ceiba* trees of Maya land, as well as to the indigenous cultural symbols of New Mexico.

Martínez’s goal in the novel seems to be to bring societies to a deeper understanding of each other. As the novel’s absent homeowner, Soledad, demonstrates in her many letters to Mary and by the articles around her house, U.S. mainstream society has no idea of the reality of life for the Salvadoran people. José Luis, on the other hand, has no idea what life has been like for the young Chicana. He assumes it was or is much better than his own experience. Martínez uses the José Luis character to demonstrate that U.S. society also needs to pay better attention to its own common people.

Martínez' first purpose in her succinct novel is to note that the U.S. populace is uninformed about those tortured and killed during El Salvador's civil war, and the reason for the presence of refugees in the U.S. and Canada, who are often assumed to be Mexican or "Hispanic." The second half of Martínez's story enlightens the U.S. Latina socio-economic experience. Mary is the child of a working single mother who occasionally leaves her with a neighbor who sexually abuses the child unbeknown to Mary's mother. Later, when Mary is barely an adult, her mother dies of cancer, and she has no other family. Mary's and José Luis' submerged memories seem to explode in revelation late in the novel.

The novel's physical construction enhances the intention of greater understanding and serves to contrast and compare life in the U.S. and in El Salvador. Martínez uses letters from Soledad, newspaper articles, and quotes from great Salvadoran poets Roque Dalton and Claribel Alegría, to provide background and history. There is day-to-day narrative of the characters' actions and dialogue, as well as changes to first-person introspection by Mary and José Luis. Finally, there are also poems and letters from José Luis to Mary, and a poem written by his murdered Salvadoran fiancé. The story weaves from present to past and back to present, and then thrusts several years into the future. The early information gives basis to José Luis' and Mary's present shattered lives; now they must find their place in society and go on living. The Central American voice—that of the Salvadoran refugee and *indio* fleeing certain death—is strong in this novel. The Salvadoran existence is projected into our day-to-day lives, and then contrasted with the experience of underclass U.S. existence. Martínez's novel does a much better job than that attempted in Ana Castillo's early novel *Sapogonia*, of depicting and contrasting the Salvadoran and U.S. Latino experience.

Sandra Benítez, a Minnesota writer of Puerto Rican descent, published a novel in 1997, *Bitter Grounds*, that spans three generations of women's lives in El Salvador, beginning with the infamous massacre of

hundreds of mostly indigenous peasants in the early twentieth century. Benítez's novel may have been inspired by Salvadoran Manlio Argueta's lyrical novels of the 1980s which focus the indigenous or peasant consciousness in El Salvador. Benítez (who grew up in Mexico and El Salvador) attempts to document the stamping out of indigenous way of life in the twentieth century. Her novel opens with the 1932 massacre called *La Matanza*, which started as a revolt against harsh working conditions in the coffee plantations, but resulted in the authorities singling out indigenous-looking people and killing some 30,000.

The novel follows three generations of women—both the privileged women of families who own everything in El Salvador, and their indigenous domestic servants. As in Martínez's novel, Benítez shows that darker skin color makes you suspect. The servants' family name is *Prieto*, meaning "dark." At the beginning of the novel, Ignacio *Prieto* is killed and his wife and daughter flee, leave their life in the country, and eventually go to work for an elite family in the city. There they prepare Western food for their *patrones*, and watch a soap opera in the kitchen. Their cultural values and way of life seem lost forever. Earlier, Mercedes *Prieto* had looked to her dreams for guidance and burned *ocote* (torch pine burnt by the Maya in Central America for safeguarding a household or before any ceremony). "Pipil ways have to be preserved" (5), she says to her family only days before the massacre. Her family speaks Náhuatl, the language of the Pipil, and follows traditional customs. Their philosophy is referenced in terms of their gods and the ordering of nature. Their forced departure from their land to the city removes these beliefs. Though they may still eat beans and tortillas in the kitchen, their indigenous customs are lost. Mercedes' daughter, Jacinta, goes to work for a newly married daughter of her mother's mistress who grows to depend upon her entirely—both to help with her children and to run the household. Jacinta's own daughter studies, travels to the countryside to work and to educate the poor indigenous people on health care, and then returns to the city and becomes a revolutionary. These are the roles of the darker-skinned indigenous people of El Salvador.



We understand from these novels that native or indigenous ways need “to be preserved,” for reasons of dignity and a sense of life. Their traditional philosophy is evoked in the voices of these novels. It survives even when their language, their gods, and their customs are taken from them.

The basis of Mayan philosophy is preserved in the *Popol Vuh*, at times called the Book of Wisdom, or the Mayan Bible. It describes the creation of the earth, man’s origin from corn, the journeys, and the knowledge of ancient peoples, and most Maya groups have an oral version of the narratives contained in this text. The epigraph of Martínez’s novel includes a quote from the *Popol Vuh*:

Remember us after we are gone. Don’t forget us.  
Conjure up our faces and our words. Our image will  
be as a tear in the hearts of those who want to  
remember us (iii).

Martínez opens the door to “remember” the indigenous civilization, lest it be forgotten forever. These Latina writers (like Latin American writers before them) heed the call to portray ancient indigenous heritage, seeking to substantiate its contemporary voice. The *Popol Vuh* is also remembered and rewritten in a recent play by Cherríe Moraga, titled *Heart of the Earth: A Popol Vuh Story*. It is an allegory for the contemporary Chicano or native to this continent, in which the enemy is white, patriarchal, and greedy for hearts—here, of the female. Moraga uses humor and creative story-telling to bring the hero twins home from the deadly underworld and reveal that the real power of creation is found in corn being ground on a *metate* by their Grandmother, and which is then converted to *masa*—the essence of life. Again, corn as metaphor for the regeneration of life is a central philosophy of the native peoples of this continent. Moraga’s feminist revisioning of the *Popol Vuh* story, and Martínez’ prominent epigraph from the *Popol Vuh*, exalt the Maya indigenous voice in the contemporary era. These are not an extinct people, they are still here, and are still guided by the legends and stories from their ancient book of wisdom.

As U.S. Latina/o and Chicana/o writing incorporates the cultural traits, philosophy and traditions of specific indigenous groups, the Latino canon is being expanded. It is no longer enough to know that the U.S. Latino's origins include Spanish language, but also that it encompasses a vast and different culture and philosophy, and often a language other than Spanish. America is a continent of many people, whose histories are older than the name of this continent. As U.S. literature opens our understanding of forgotten traditions and indigenous voice, we can begin to better understand Maya and other indigenous philosophy, and value the same in this hemisphere.



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Latino literature is that published by writers living in the U.S., who principally write in English and who are of diverse Latin American origin—such as Dominican-American, Puerto Rican-American, Cuban-American, and Mexican-American. “Chicano” is another term for Mexican-American ethnicity, therefore Chicano writers are a part of the U.S. Latino grouping.

<sup>2</sup> Rosario Castellanos has two principal books based in the Chiapas region: a novel, *Balún Canán* (in English translation, *The Nine Guardians*), and a book of stories, *Ciudad Real* (in English translation *City of Kings*). Miguel Angel Asturias' books that recreate Maya legends are *El espejo de lida sal* (in English *The Mirror of Lida Sal: Tales based on Mayan Myths and Guatemalan Legends*), and a novel, *Hombres de maíz* (in English *Men of Maize*).

<sup>3</sup> I am using the critical term created by Amy Kaminsky in her book *Reading the Body Politic* (1993) to indicate that subjectivity is achieved by an author for a character or personage given only objectivity in western or hegemonic literature. Thus, *the other* (in western gaze) is redeemed from isolation and lack of representation by the notion of *presence*.

<sup>4</sup> The Pipil are often confused or merged with Maya because, in fact, they are a part of the Maya region of Central America. They are descendants of Náhuatl speakers from Central Mexico who immigrated to what is now western El Salvador as early as 500 A.D., although greater movement occurred between 900 and 1300, after the downfall of the great Maya city states in southern Mexico and Guatemala. These indigenous people mixed with the Maya (the Maya had lived in this area for more than one thousand years), but continued speaking a variant of Náhuatl—the language of the Aztecs and their predecessors which was once spoken in much of Central America, from Guatemala to Panamá. They settled in Honduras and along the Pacific coast in what is now El Salvador and Guatemala, but lost territory

during wars with the Quiché and Kakchikel Mayas prior to the Spanish arrival (see Fowler). While there are presently about 200,000 ethnic Pipils, their language (at times called Pipil and at times Náhuat) is now nearly extinct. Although they are called *Pipil*, the Salvadoran indigenous have always had more in common with the other indigenous Maya of their region than with the Aztec. They share the same legends and stories of origin.

<sup>5</sup> Argueta is an excellent writer. He lives in El Salvador but travels frequently to the U.S. His novels in English translation are *One Day in the Life*; *Magic Dogs of the Volcanoes* (children's book) *Cuzcatlán*, *Where the Southern Sea Beats*; *Little Red Riding Hood in the Red Light District*; and *A Place Called Milagro de la Paz*.

#### U.S. LATINO TEXTS with MAYA THEMES

Benítez, Sandra. *Bitter Grounds*. New York: Hyperion, 1997.

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Portillo-Trambley, Estela. *Trini*. Binghamton, NY: Bilingual Press, 1986

#### NOVELS WITH MAYA THEMES BY LATIN AMERICAN AUTHORS TRANSLATED TO ENGLISH

Argueta, Manlio. *The Magic Dogs of the Volcanoes* (children's book); *One Day in the Life*; *Cuzcatlán*, *Where the Southern Sea Beats* (Salvadoran, contemporary)

Arias, Arturo. *After the Bombs* (Guatemalan, contemporary)

Asturias, Miguel Angel. *The Mirror of Lida Sal: Tales Based on Mayan Myths and Guatemalan Legends* and *Men of Maize* (Guatemalan)

Castellanos, Rosario. *The Nine Guardians and City of Kings* (Mexican)

#### FILMS WITH MAYA THEMES:

*Men with Guns*. Videocassette. Dir. John Sayles. Sony Pictures Video, 1998. 123 min.

*El Norte*. Videocassette. Dir. Gregory Nava. CBS/Fox Video, 1984. 141 min.

SECTION  
FIVE



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*Performing  
Arts*



CHAPTER  
TWELVE



*Louis M. Holscher*  
*Celestino Fernández*  
*Contrabando Y Corrupcion:*  
*The Rise in Popularity of*  
*Narcocorridos*

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses and analyzes a category of recent popular songs (performed in Spanish) that are regularly heard throughout Mexico and in much of the United States, particularly the Southwest. These songs, known as *corridos* (ballads), are factually based and deal with a variety of cultural themes important to Mexicans and Chicanos. Those *corridos* that deal with themes and issues involving drugs, particularly trafficking, have come to be commonly known as *narcocorridos* (narcotics ballads). These story-telling songs portray, and some critics argue glorify, the culture of drug smuggling and the exploits of drug traffickers and related criminals.

Included in this article is a brief historical overview of *corridos*, Mexican and Chicano popular songs that describe and comment on current political and social events, and depict the exploits of both famous and infamous individuals. A number of *narcocorridos* are presented and discussed as examples of currently (or recently) popular songs that deal with drugs and related topics such as drug lords and smuggling. The paper concludes with a discussion of the societal response (both favorable and unfavorable) to *narcocorridos*, and the songs' potential impact on young people and society in general.

#### THE CORRIDO TRADITION

Critics and the media have labeled recent Mexican and Chicano (Mexican American) songs dealing with drugs "narcocorridos" (narcotics-ballads). This type of music, both in terms of lyrical content and music, comes out of the *corrido* (ballad) tradition, which has been popular in Mexico and the Southwestern United States since the early to mid-19th century (Roberts, 1999; Simmons, 1951). The Mexican civil war (1846-48), for example, is well preserved in *corrido* texts (Roberts, 1999). Although they originated in central Mexico and have long been popular throughout all of Mexico and the American Southwest, *corridos* are a principal variant of norteña music and one of the main musical fares in northern Mexico. The *corrido* genre is generally based on a rather declamatory melody and the last line of each verse is stretched distinctively by their singers. *Corridos* can be in polka, waltz, or march time; conventionally, a 2/4 time is used for upbeat topics and waltz time for all others (Roberts, 1999). They are often sung in duet with one voice slightly dominating, often in parallel thirds and sixths - the most basic Spanish-derived harmonic approach. In terms of music, *corridos* are usually "sing-songy" and repetitive, with a relatively simple up-and-down cadence, with an accordion, guitar, and other instruments accompanying a vocalist. This paper broadly defines the term "*corrido*," and examines recent compositions in this genre that express views or comment upon matters related to drugs and crime.

During the past 20 years, *corridos* greatly gained in popularity throughout Mexico and the U.S., selling particularly well in markets throughout the Southwest and northern Mexico. *Corridos*, however, have a long history. In the 1500s their likely ancestors were the Andalusian romantic verses (known as *romances*) brought to Mexico by Spanish conquerors (Herrera-Sobek, 1998). In the late 1800s and early 1900s, they served as a popular form of news bulletin by traveling musicians (*trovadores*). Assassinations, revolutions, natural disasters, accidents, elections, immigration, strikes, family feuds, folk heroes and shoot-outs between bandits and the police were all popular themes for *corridos*. In fact, almost any event that touches the public sentiment can serve as inspiration for a *corrido* (Griffith and Fernández, 1988). *Corridos* are deeply ingrained in Mexican and Chicano culture, and are a standard form of marking major events in both public and daily life. They have covered events ranging from the coming of the railroads to Sputnik, from romantic entanglements to bank robberies. The facets of Mexican life that can be studied through the *corrido* are practically unlimited, and these ballads can be used as historical documents of important aspects of modern Mexican and Chicano life, as well as of the daily trials and tribulations of the *pueblo* (the popular or common classes). There are *corridos* about natural disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes, flood, etc.), traffic accidents, wars (e.g., the U.S.-Mexico War, WW II, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War) and joyous events like weddings and winning the lottery (Fernández and Officer, 1989). President John F. Kennedy's assassination is documented in over fifteen *corridos* (Dickey, 1978), for example, and the athletic achievements of Fernando Valenzuela, the ace pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers of the 1980s, can also be found in several ballads, e.g., Lalo Guerrero's "Olé Fernando" and "Fernando, El Toro" (Fernando, The Bull). Although *corridos* are essentially ballads that tell a story, they often contain beliefs, values, attitudes and commentary on many topics, much like the editorial page of the modern newspaper (Griffith and Fernández, 1988). Simmons (1951), for example, uses *corridos* to trace agrarian, political, and religious reform, as well as relations with foreigners and foreign nations in 20th century Mexico. He also discusses the treatment of Mexican leaders, and the Mexican national personality through this genre.

*Corridos* on specifically Chicano themes – often on political and cultural clashes – have been sung since the 19th century, and still continue to be composed. The earliest known complete U.S. *corrido*, "El *Corrido* de Kiansas" (Kansas), describes the cattle drives from Texas to Kansas in the late 1860s and early 1870s, and was sung in Brownsville by 1870 (Roberts, 1999). "El *Condenado a Muerte*" (The One Condemned to Death) was discovered in New Mexico and laments the author's coming execution for an unnamed crime, and actually gives an exact date, Wednesday, July 20, 1832 (Roberts, 1999). Possibly the earliest Texas *corrido* is "*Corrido* de Leandro Rivera," which dates from 1841. Paredes (1958) labeled the period from 1836 to the late 1930s the "*corrido* century" on the U.S.-Mexico border (although given the popularity of *corridos* in this region during the past 20 years, a rival "*corrido* century" may be in the making). An early Texas *corrido* hero was Juan Nepomuceno Cortina, who in 1859 shot a Brownsville, Texas, city marshal who had been mistreating his mother's servant, and with his followers briefly occupied the town before fleeing across the border. The most famous *corrido* from that period was about Gregorio Cortéz, whose exploits and problems resulting from the shooting of a Texas Ranger have also been documented in a recent popular film, "The Ballad of Gregorio Cortéz," starring James Edward Olmos. Numerous *corridos* are available about the late César Chávez, the founder and long-time leader of the farm workers' movement. One of the first ballads on César Chávez was by Felipe Cantú (Burciaga, 1991), one of the original actors in El Teatro Campesino (The Campestral Theatre), a highly popular theatre that performed plays with social and political themes of interest to farm workers and other laborers. There is even a 1995 *corrido* mourning the death of Selena, the popular Tejana star who had recently been murdered by the president of her fan club.

*Corridos* are often intensely serious, and they have always mirrored social and political concerns. They are repositories of both myth and history for a people not often served by mainstream newspapers and other media. A few such examples are: "*Los Rinches de Texas*" (The Texas Rangers) which tells the story of how Texas Rangers brutally beat poor farm workers. This song is featured in the film "Chulas Fronteras"



(Beautiful Borders) and describes an incident during a strike of melon-pickers in Star County, Texas, in June 1967; the "*Corrido de Juan Reyna*" (The Ballad of Juan Reyna) recounts his conviction for manslaughter (for killing a police officer while allegedly being beaten up in a squad car) and sentence to prison; a sequel tells of Reyna's apparent suicide in jail five months before his release; and "*La Tragedia de Oklahoma*" (The Tragedy in Oklahoma) deals with a famous case in which two students from Mexico, one of whom was related to the president, were shot by deputies near Ardmore, Oklahoma. One overt protest song is "*El Deportado*" (The Deportee) which bluntly describes Anglos as very evil, and who treat Mexicans without pity.

A relatively recent song, "*El Corrido de César Chávez*" (The Ballad of César Chávez) by *Los Pingüinos del Norte* (The Penguins of the North), reflects the rise of Chicano political and ethnic consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s. The death of eighteen undocumented workers who died of heat asphyxiation while locked in a boxcar was widely reported in the mainstream press, but was also recorded in a corrido, "*El Vagon de la Muerte*" (The Boxcar of Death). Hence, *corridos* have acted as not only a reflection of political and social consciousness but also as a stimulus to it.

Simmons (1951) is careful to point out that the views and events described in *corridos* are not always entirely correct (but no means of popular expression is always fully accurate); however, *corridos* are generally quite accurate in documenting the names, dates and locations of specific events. They also provide an important point of view on events and people from the composer's perspective and others who may share his point of view. Much of *corrido* music is working class in origin, and provides an analysis of events and people from the perspective of "*el pueblo*" (the common folk); thus, although *corridos* may not always present a complete picture, they do present views that may not reflect elite or even middle-class interests. The values espoused are most often ones of bravery, loyalty to friends, machismo, independence, disrespect for the law (but respect for a Higher Law) and a love of justice for the common man. Women are either generally not

mentioned, or are the subject of strong emotions of love, anger, scorn, etc. There are a few notable *corridos*, however, that favorably refer to the love and good advice of mothers. There are literally thousands of *corridos*, and this article only touches on one small aspect of popular and representative tunes that deal with drugs. The article analyzes and comments on the extent to which these songs provide an expression of how a sizeable segment of the working class population has viewed drugs and drug smugglers during the past thirty or so years. In that respect, it may provide a view of public/popular opinion not otherwise found in the media or other sources – similar to the role of rap music in the U.S. The popularity of these *corridos* is one indication that many people, particularly young people, have not accepted the official anti-drug message of the Mexican and United States governments.

#### DRUG TRAFFICKING AND MEXICAN MUSIC

In 1972 Los Tigres del Norte (The Tigers of the North) released "*Contrabando y Traición*" (Contraband and Betrayal), at a time when drug use had increased dramatically in less than a decade, and Mexican immigrants were seeing drug trafficking daily as they crossed the border. The song, about drug runners, was a huge hit, and was a critical factor in Los Tigres becoming major stars in Spanish-language pop music. Their music continues to be very popular at Mexican and Chicano *fiestas* and dances. Since 1972, Los Tigres, whose members are originally from Mexico, but who have made the San José, California, area their home since the late 1960s, have made 30 records and 14 movies, won a Grammy, and have changed Mexican/Chicano pop music at least twice - first with songs about drug smuggling and more recently with immigration songs (Quinones, 1997). Still largely unknown outside the Chicano community, they are revered within the Mexican-immigrant and Chicano communities in the United States and among Mexicans throughout Mexico. Los Tigres has also modernized the *corrido*, infusing their music with cumbias, rock rhythms, and sound effects of machine guns and sirens. With their popularity they have

broadened the appeal of the accordion-based music of Northern Mexico (*música norteña*). Over time, they have added a full drum set and an electric bass, and thus modernized *norteño* music. Besides their "drug" songs, common themes in their music include machismo, desires and the values and beliefs that are the essence of the Mexican and Chicano working class such as dignity, respect, family, and Christianity.

"*Contrabando y Traición*" became a *norteño* classic and has been recorded by many other bands, plus it was the title of a popular commercial film. (In the U.S., popular books, both fiction and non-fiction, frequently serve to inspire feature films, *corridos* have often done the same in Mexico.) The two main characters of "*Contrabando y Tración*," Emilio Varela and Camelia, "La Tejana" (The Texan), are now part of Chicano folklore. This corrido was also the first hit song about drug smuggling, and thus the first *narcocorrido*. The song "*El Corrido de Camelia 'La Texana'*" (The Ballad of Camelia "The Texan") spawned a number of movies, including one titled *Mataron a Camelia La Texana* (They Killed Camelia, "The Texan," 1976) and *Ya Encontraron a Camelia* (They Found Camelia, 1979) (Herrera-Sobek, 1998). Los Tigres followed "*Contrabando y Traición*" with "*La Banda del Carro Rojo*" (The Red Car Gang) also a corrido about drug smuggling. These tunes essentially sparked a trend that is currently undergoing immense popularity in Mexican music. In a sense, the *narcocorrido* is an update, both in terms of music and theme of the traditional *corrido*, and emphasizes drug smugglers, shoot-outs between drug gangs and the police, corruption, and betrayal. Most *norteño* bands today play a selection of *narcocorridos*, and many bands play almost nothing else. Like gangster rap in the U.S., *corridos* recount violence and crime and have achieved immense popularity without the benefit of radio airplay in many areas. Even in areas where *narcocorridos* are played regularly, disc jockeys often will warn listeners about language and content when such corridos are particularly graphic.

Criticism of *narcocorridos* has come from leaders within the Catholic Church, business leaders, and from at least one political party, the

conservative National Action Party (PAN) in Mexico, the party of Mexico's current President. They have been labeled as part of a "culture of death" for emphasizing drugs and murder. Newsweek (April 23, 2001) notes that, "Critics on both sides of the border are attacking Mexican pop songs that glorify drugs. *Los Tucanes de Tijuana* and *Los Tigres del Norte*, in particular, are targets for their *narcocorridos*... Tijuana's city council and a national business coalition are urging stations to stop playing these songs." Jorge Hernández of Los Tigres, like many rap artists, responds that, "The only thing that we do is sing about what happens every day. We're interpreters, then the public decides what songs they like" (Quinones, 1997).

Since the early 1970s, the Chicano community and Mexican working class have decided they like *narcocorridos*. Los Tigres regularly includes two or three on each album. In 1989, they released "*Corridos Prohibidos*" (Prohibited or Banned Corridos), an entire album about drug smuggling. Numerous other less well known singers and bands have followed suit with their own *narcocorridos* CDs and cassettes which can be purchased in almost any store that sells music, from small specialized music shops that cater to Mexicans and Chicanos to large chain department stores such as Target and K-Mart. This album was very controversial in both the U.S. and Mexico, and was reported to be very popular among the drug smugglers themselves. Los Tigres, however, is not really a "narcoband;" it is a *norteño* band that plays all varieties of *norteño* music, including *corridos* dealing with various themes, one of these themes is drug trafficking. Los Tigres, for example, won a Grammy for "America," a rock tune that preaches the universal brotherhood of Latinos. Also, unlike younger bands today, Los Tigres rarely mention the names of real drug smugglers, are not photographed with handguns or assault rifles, and usually refer to marijuana and cocaine as *hierba mala* (bad weed) and *coca*. In addition, Los Tigres have achieved a more respectable cultural claim with their songs about the immigration experience; for example, "*Vivan Los Mojados*" (Long Live the Wetbacks) and "*El Otro Mexico*" (The Other Mexico) which deals with the undying desire of Mexican immigrants to return home.

The title song of *Jefe de Jefes* (Boss of Bosses or Chief of Chiefs), which has a number of pictures in the CD booklet of the members of Los Tigres at Alcatraz, was released in the summer of 1997 and is about a fictional drug kingpin. The album features several *narcocorridos*, including one about drug lord Hector "El Güero" Palma, who was arrested in 1996 after a plane crash. "El Prisionero" (The Prisoner) is about recent political assassinations in Mexico. One song on *Jefe de Jefes*, "Ni Aquí Ni Allá" (Neither Here nor There), captures the feelings of many Mexican immigrants today. It is a pessimistic tune that captures the anti-immigrant sentiments in the U.S. and the corruption, scandals, and economic crisis in Mexico. The song concludes that immigrants are unlikely to receive justice or be able to improve economically in either country. In a previous song, "La Jaula de Oro" (The Golden Cage), an immigrant who years earlier had outwitted *La Migra* (the Border Patrol) does not feel at home in the country he worked so hard to enter. Even worse, he notes, his children now speak English and reject his *Mexicanidad*, his "Mexicaness." And while the protagonist would love to return to Mexico, he cannot leave his house and job for fear of being apprehended and deported because he needs the job in the U.S. in order to provide for his family. Thus, Jorge Hernández, notes that the U.S. is like a "cage made of gold" – immigrants may live well and be able to afford some nice things, but it is not home, it is not as relaxing and peaceful as living in Mexico. Also, the family is no longer as important and one is certainly not free to move about, particularly if one is an undocumented immigrant; although the bird/immigrant lives in a "golden cage," it is a cage nonetheless (Quinones, 1997).

Perhaps one explanation for why *narco* and immigration *corridos* are so popular is because they capture the essential reasons as to why so many Mexican immigrants come to the U.S. Namely, the lack of employment and economic opportunity in Mexico and the availability of work in the U.S., as well as because these songs document and help people cope with the discrimination and lack of equality experienced in the U.S., for example, as expressed in "Ni Aquí Ni Allá." Undoubtedly, these are some

of the critical factors (employment and income) as well that make the drug trade lucrative for many young working class Mexican men. As Cortese notes, “The Mexican-U.S. border is the only place where one can leap from the First World to the Third World in five minutes” (Cortese, 1990).

The 1990s experienced a resurgence of the *corrido*'s popularity. At the request of listening audiences, Spanish-language radio stations throughout the Southwest and Mexico offered daily hour-long *corrido* programs (in some cases the “*corrido* hour” was offered twice daily, usually during early morning and late evening). Without a doubt, during the 1990s the single favorite theme of *corridos* became drug trafficking. When Mario Quintero, the lead singer of the popular group Los Tucanes de Tijuana, takes the stage he often sings about drug lords, cocaine shipments and shoot-outs. They have one of the hottest bands in Northern Mexico and are equally popular with Chicanos in the United States. One of their recent two-CD release, *Tucanes de Plata*, has sold a million copies in the U.S. and over 2 million copies worldwide. They have been criticized for glorifying the drug trade and drug lords, and the question has been raised whether the message of Los Tucanes and dozens of other bands and *corrido* singers may be changing the values of a generation of young Mexicanos and Chicanos (Collier, 1997). One of their popular new songs is called “*La Piñata*” (The Piñata) and tells of a drug lord's party that included a *piñata* full of bags of cocaine. Two other songs from their new CD are “El Primo” (The Cousin) which adopts the voice of a narcotics boss and “The Little Colombian Rock” which refers to cocaine. While it is an open question whether these tunes and others like them actually change beliefs and behavior, they regularly describe the potential riches and pitfalls of the drug trade. Often these *corridos* speak of betrayals, murders and assassinations among those involved in drug trafficking, and the listener could easily conclude that this is a highly dangerous enterprise, one not worth entering. Yet, this was not the common interpretation during the 1990s. Drug trafficking, while highly dangerous, is a most lucrative business. A report issued by the United Nations (1997) documents that “drug trafficking has grown to a \$400

billion-a-year enterprise.” The same report notes that worldwide, “illegal drugs are reported as a bigger business than all exports of automobiles and about equal to the international textile trade.” Drug traffickers “are successful 85-90% of the time” (Cortese, 1990).

Besides Los Tucanes and Los Tigres del Norte, other known (and many relatively obscure) groups like Los Huracanes and Los Dinamicos del Norte have also had success with *narcocorridos*. Popular titles include: "Contraband of Juárez," "Terrible AK-47," "Partners of the Mafia," "The Cellular Phone," and "Sacred Cargo." Like rap music in the U.S., *narcocorridos* have been widely criticized in Mexico as having a negative influence on young people and a negative impact on society in general. Rene Villanueva, a prominent music historian and a member of Los Folkloristas (a band that has played *corridos* and other traditional regional Mexican music since the 1960s) calls *narcocorridos* a "horrible perversion of Mexican culture", and "a sign of how the power of money amid poverty has diverted people's interest to the most vulgar aspects of our society" (Collier, 1997). In two northwest Mexican states, Chihuahua and Sinaloa, government officials have banned *narcocorridos* from the radio and television, and many other individual stations have done the same. (Of course, banning them has not made them disappear or any less popular.) A common complaint is that they glorify criminal behavior and should be banned everywhere. Interestingly, it is commonly believed/known that these two states are home to numerous individuals involved in the drug trade. There is a shrine in Culiacán, the capital of the state of Sinaloa, dedicated to a Jesús Malverde where traffickers go (literally at all hours of the day and night) to pray for protection during drug trips and to thank him when such trips have been successful. It is common knowledge that Malverde has come to be known as “the saint of the drug traffickers.” There are numerous *corridos*, incidentally, about Malverde and some of these very specifically refer to drug trafficking.

There have not been calls for similar actions in California, Arizona or Texas, for example, although *narcocorridos* remain very popular on

Spanish-language stations in these states. Vicente Romero, program director of KRAY-FM in Salinas plays *rancheras* and other popular forms of Mexican music, but he also plays *narcocorridos*, commenting that, "Maybe Los Tucanes and the other *narcocorridos* are a bad influence, but we have to play them because everybody asks for them, and no one complains" (Collier, 1997). It may be that they arouse less concern than rap music because they have a much softer touch musically, and lack the aggressiveness and harder edge of many rap tunes. Plus, *narcocorridos* are part of the long and extensive *corrido* musical and cultural tradition and are almost always sung in Spanish, and thus rarely heard outside the Chicano and Mexican immigrant communities. Additionally, *narcocorridos* are performed by individuals and groups who look "normal," that is, they dress in clothes normal to the *noteño* music tradition, unlike rappers who project a distinct "look" (e.g., tattoos, baggy clothes, and lots of large jewelry). *Narcocorridos*, at times, almost seem to make drugs and drug trafficking a positive, lucrative, and charming experience. While they share drug and crime themes with gangster rap, they are still very popular with a large segment of the Spanish-speaking population.

Quintero, the lead singer and guitarist from Los Tucanes, responds to critics in much the same way as many rap artists, that they are simply reporting on a popular aspect of contemporary life, and that by prohibiting drugs the government has actually contributed to their popularity and to the development of a multi-billion dollar underground business. One of the most controversial aspects of Los Tucanes' songs is that some of their lyrics read as if they might have been written for the drug lords and gangs themselves. For example, the group's song about "El Güero" (Whitey) Palma, a Sinaloa drug lord now serving time in Mexico's high-security Almoloya prison, calls him "a respectable gentlemen" and concludes in a warning to the police: "Don't go over the line, because the king isn't dead...Don't sleep soundly. The orders are the same, and will be carried out to the letter. Even your pillow could explode on you." Quintero argues that their songs are about what they have seen or what people tell us. "La



*Piñata*" is about a real, he claims, drug lord's cocaine party that someone told him about. Whether *corridos* are always completely accurate or not is somewhat irrelevant. What is accurate, however, is that illegal drugs have been part of American popular culture since the 1960s and drug smuggling, drug wars, and other activities endemic to the drug trade and drug use have touched the lives of most Americans, including Chicanos and *Mexicanos*. Given the role of the *corrido* in Chicano and Mexican cultures, its role in capturing and commenting on the daily experience, particularly that which shocks, it is no accident, nor should it be surprising, that we find so many *corridos* about drug trafficking and that these *corridos* have become so popular.

#### CONCLUSION

*Narcocorridos* seem to indicate a change in heroes or if you will anti-heroes to some extent. While drug smugglers and dealers do fight the government, they rarely do it to benefit the community or the oppressed. Their popularity with young working class *Mexicanos* and Chicanos should not be surprising, however, given the poverty and inequality that continues to be a common phenomenon in both countries. As Cortese (1990) notes, "Profit and poverty explain why Mexico has become the source of large quantities of illicit drugs... They [poor Mexicans] literally have nothing to lose and much to gain by cultivating or trafficking in illicit drugs."



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CHAPTER  
THIRTEEN



*Pancho McFarland*

*‘Here is Something You Can’t Understand...’  
Chicano Rap and the Critique of  
Globalization*

*“Truth sparks revolution and is therefore labeled violent”*

(PSYCHO REALM, “LOST CITIES,” 1997)

It seems to me that the single most important trend facing Chicanas and Chicanos today is globalization and, more specifically, economic restructuring in the United States that since the 1970s has caused job dislocation, deindustrialization, lowered wages, increased unemployment, increased poverty, etc. As a result Chicana and Chicano standards of living, like that of most groups, has declined. Moreover, government disinvestments in cities, preferring instead to finance suburban growth, has caused the social ills that we all associate with the inner city. Combine this with few prospects for jobs in the future and few educational opportunities and you have a volatile mix. To all of this we should add the militarization of the city, racist policing practices and “get-tough-on-crime” legislation.

In the midst of this globalized nightmare is our working-class inner-city Chicana/o youth. They have been some of the most acutely affected of all peoples. Now, of course, I am not the first to point this out. Many Chicana and Chicano and non-Chicano scholars and others have analyzed the affects of globalization on our communities. Most have relied on traditional socio-economic data. Few have investigated the analyses provided by young Chicanas/os themselves. In this essay I turn to the poetics of young Brown urban America for such an analysis. More specifically, I read the lyrics of some relatively well-known Chicano rappers.

CHICANA/O YOUTH NARRATIVES OF THE  
CONSEQUENCES OF GLOBALIZATION

Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Prakash (1998) in their pathbreaking work, *Grassroots Postmodernism*, focus our attention on the fact that while most people in the world toil under the yoke of globalization they have not given up hope and are resisting the dehumanizing affects of neoliberalism and struggling to advance alternatives to it. Stories from numerous places throughout the world suggest an emergent “grassroots postmodernism” through which the world’s marginalized resist the logic, structures and behaviors associated with globalization and the “new world order” and construct alternative institutions based on the cultural logic of their local traditions and customs. Esteva and Prakash contend that we must listen to these voices and engage in dialogue with them if we hope to stem the tidal wave of globalization and survive the coming globalization decades. In agreeing with them I assert that the voices of Chicana/o youth present a particular, localized critique of globalization through the narration of their experiences in urban “America.” Chicano rappers have taken the lead in presenting this critique to the rest of us through recorded stories (both “real” and “imagined”) of inner-city life that if read carefully can contribute to our understanding of the affects of globalization, especially as concerns questions of violence, xenophobia and economic powerlessness.

As a result of the rappers synthesis and representation of the primary concerns of many Chicana/o and Latina/o youth, I want to suggest that these young Chicanos serve as an organic intellectual class for the young, Brown, urban, disenfranchised.<sup>1</sup> Chicano rappers represent the cares, concerns, desires, hopes, dreams, and problems of young inner-city Chicanas/os through their poetics rapped over the aggressive, transgressive rhythms conceived in the smoke-filled rooms<sup>2</sup> of recording studios and private dwellings of the musicians. The following is a discussion of a sample of this Chicana/o poetics.

*'HERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND/  
HOW I COULD JUST KILL A MAN'<sup>3</sup> : URBAN VIOLENCE  
AS A CONSEQUENCE OF GLOBALIZATION*

Much of “America” consumes the world of gangbanging’ Brown youth through media images and the endless refrain of the criminal justice system’s discourse that we need more cops and prisons, more military technology and logic, to contain the threat posed by gangs. News stories, yellow television journalism and the gang genre in film render the horrors of inner-city living that has the propagandistic effect of creating an enemy, an Other, out of our youth of color. State and Federal legislative bodies increasingly pass draconian legislation which disregards the human and civil rights of urban youth with the approval of middle-class “America” who lock themselves behind walled communities with neighborhood patrols and purchase the latest surveillance and deterrence equipment to protect themselves from the new “Brown Scourge.”<sup>4</sup>

Of course, left out of this hyper-real depiction of the gang threat is the fact that most youth of color, including most inner-city Chicanas/os, are not members of gangs and do not partake in its violent sub-culture and an analysis of globalization, economic restructuring and increased violence directed at young people of color. But, propaganda is never intended to present the facts. The role of propaganda is to establish

the legitimacy of those in power and their acts of violence (physical, economic, symbolic or other); to illustrate the righteousness and benevolence of “our side” and the evil of the enemy<sup>5</sup>. So, it is left to the organic intellectuals, the urban poets, of the barrios to include an analysis of globalization and illegitimate violence on the part of the state in our imaginary of urban warfare.

They keep order by making street corners gang  
borders/Beating down King and setting the theme  
for riot starters/Cop quarters can't maintain the  
disorder/So they call the National Guard to come  
strike harder/Rolling deep headed for Florence and  
Normandy where all you see/Buildings on fire chaos  
on Roman streets/Hope is cheap sold by the local  
thief relief from the common grief/Served on a  
platter shatter your smallest dreams/ Pig chiefs are  
referees on gladiator fields/We're too busy dodging  
the sword truth stays unrevealed/Sealed all filled in  
the federal cabinets/ Classified order through chaos  
for world inhabitants/.../We go to the streets at  
night/And fight in the sick-ass side show of  
mine/We play the government role/And straight up  
fuckin' smoke the rival <sup>6</sup>

The three Chicano members of Psycho Realm (Jacken, Duke and B-Real) spit these words with vengeance on their second release, *A War Story* (2000). These Los Angeles youth who claim the barrios of Pico-Union and the Rampart District as their ‘hoods have since their arrival onto the hip-hop scene in 1997 with their self-titled debut, *The Psycho Realm*, focused their poetics on the violent environments found in the concrete jungles of Los Angeles. They pull no punches in making testaments to violence in the barrios and locating the cause of that violence in illegitimate state policies.

This song, “Order Through Chaos,” analyzes the multi-ethnic Los Angeles Rebellion that followed the 1991 verdict in the case of the police beating of Rodney King. The members of Psycho Realm locate

the violence associated with the uprising as well as that of everyday violence in many L.A. barrios in the state strategies of containment of poor people of color. In stating “they keep order by making street corners gang borders” the authors offer a first-hand critique of the police practice of exacerbating neighborhood tensions.<sup>7</sup> They go on to state “we play the government role and straight up fuckin’ smoke the rival.” Psycho Realm presents a vivid critique of how the powerful use the divide-and-conquer strategy to undermine potential revolt by focusing people’s angst on one another. The divide-and-conquer strategy has the added benefit of causing people to be “too busy dodging the sword” to see the “truth”, thus, maintaining elites claim to legitimate rule. Psycho Realm suggests that in busying themselves with fighting each other, many barrio residents remain uninformed of the true nature of their oppression at the hands of the state and the transnational bourgeoisie. In another song from the same album they rap even more strongly that

We’re killing family tragically/The enemy dividing  
those fighting against it/Weakening our infantry/We  
caught on to your big plan/Separate us into street  
gangs/Infiltrate the sets<sup>8</sup> put some battles in  
effect/To distract from your dirty outfit, yeah<sup>9</sup>

Finally, they assert that the propagandistic function of the media furthers intra-ethnic violence and masks damaging state policies. From “Order Through Chaos” they rap:

Chaos serves as smoke repeated hoax to screen/  
We lose control confused in the midst of staged  
scenes/Media invented unrelented reports  
presented/ Often enough to make us think our  
world’s tormented/ Sentenced by momentous news  
of feuds we side and choose/Use weapons and step  
in the trap we lose.../All because the broadcast  
flashed ghetto stars/How much television you watch  
you tube whores?.../Through TV set nonsense/We  
sit and fit as the face of violence<sup>10</sup>

In “Order Through Chaos” the Psycho Realm reveal another common theme in Chicano rappers’ analysis of urban violence; animosity toward and conflict with “the pig.” Many barrio residents have had negative interactions with law enforcement agents including unwarranted stops, searches and seizures, harassment, “planting” of evidence, physical abuse and, even, murder. Increasingly we hear reports of police officers stopping and harassing Latinas/os for infractions such as “driving while brown” and talking with friends. Repressive legislation and police policies have been used to deal with the young “Brown Scourge” including the proliferation of gang databases and a 1997 court order that placed a curfew on “members” of the 18th Street Gang in Los Angeles and made it illegal for more than two identified “gangmembers” to congregate together even though some of the supposed “gangmembers” were family members who lived in the same house. Such measures have promoted further animosity between Chicana/o youth and police officers. No one theme, save for perhaps songs dedicated to marijuana use, has been discussed in Chicano rap as much as young Chicanas/os animosity toward “the pig.”

This pig harassed the whole neighborhood/Well this  
pig worked at the station/This pig he killed my  
homeboy/So the fuckin’ pig went on vacation/  
This pig he is the chief/Got a brother pig, Captain  
O’Malley/He’s got a son that’s a pig too/He’s  
collectin’ pay-offs from a dark alley.../An’ it’s about  
breakin’ off sausage/Do ya feel sorry for the poor little  
swine?/ Niggas wanna do him in the ass/Just ta pay  
his ass back/So they’re standing in line/That fuckin’  
pig/Look what he got himself into/Now they’re gonna  
make some pigs feet outta the little punk/Anybody  
like pork chops?/How ‘bout a ham sandwich?

The song “Pigs” is off of the 1991 album, Cypress Hill, by pioneering multi-ethnic rap group, Cypress Hill. Cypress Hill’s members include a Cuban, Sen Dog, a Chicano-Afro-Cuban, B-Real, and an Italian, DJ Muggs. While some might argue that their multi-ethnic makeup would



disqualify them as Chicano rappers, I believe it appropriate to discuss Cypress Hill as organic intellectuals for the young, Brown urban class and their lyrical analysis as rooted in a young, Chicana/o urban reality. The lyrics are penned mostly by B-Real, a Chicano from Los Angeles, with Sen Dog, a Cuban raised in Chicana/o Los Angeles, providing additional writing. They have consciously decided to rap about what they see and experience on Cypress Avenue (the street where Sen Dog lived) located in a Chicana/o barrio in the town of Southgate.

“Pigs” reflects two common themes associated with young Chicana/o barrio dwellers’ understanding of the police: 1) police harassment of Chicana/o barrios and 2) police violence directed at Chicana/o youth. Further, this song plays out a violent fantasy of some Chicana/o youth who wish to retaliate against their oppressors. For many barrio youth their most immediate oppressor and symbol for all oppressors is the “pig.” In this song Cypress Hill tells of a police officer who gets convicted of drug trafficking (another common theme in lore about the role of police in barrios) and gets sent to prison where he will not have his “gang” (other police officers) to protect him nor will he have the protection of the state. Cypress Hill raps “‘Cos once he gets to the Pen/They won’t provide the little pig with a bullet-proof vest/To protect him from some mad nigga/Who he shot in the chest and placed under arrest.” The fantasy continues as they discuss paying the “pig” back for crimes he has committed against barrio and ghetto youth. They liken their revenge to the cutting up of a pig into pig’s feet, pork chops, sausage and ham. As well, they mention what is perceived in some violent subcultures to be the ultimate act of vengeance, rape, when they say “Niggas wanna do him in the ass.”<sup>11</sup>

This song introduces the next theme associated with the relationship between Chicana/o barrio youth and police officers: the criminality of cops. First, they suggest that cops are murderers and then go on to discuss their role as drug traffickers; “He’s collectin’ payoffs from a dark alley.../This pig works for the mafia/Makin’ some money off crack.” In another song from their album, “IV” (1998), they discuss the dark

world of the police officer. “Looking Through the Eye of a Pig” presents the ravings of a fictional cop who in his twenty years on the force has become “worse than some of these motherfuckers I put away.” Cypress Hill talk about what they believe is the tendency for many cops to use cocaine for the purposes of getting “wired” enough to meet barrio streets with a battle mentality: “Bad dreams all up in my head/No lie/Sometimes I got to take a sniff so I could get by.” They also accuse cops of alcohol, as well as drug, abuse rapping in this song from the point of view of their fictional cop: “Fuck I need a drink and I’m almost off/At the precinct it’s like an AA meeting all gone wrong.” Moreover, Cypress Hill understands the cops’ criminality and drug use/abuse to be sanctioned by the state and see cops as a tight-knit group, or “gang,” that protects one another either from external enemies such as “criminals” and “gang members” or from the law. Following barrio wisdom about the police, Cypress Hill raps in this song: “I’m in the biggest gang you ever saw/Above the law/Looking through the eyes of a pig/I see it all.../I.A. got an eye on my close friend, Guy/For takin’ supply from evidence/A bust on a buy/That doesn’t concern me/We never rat on each other/We went through the academy/Just like frat brothers.” “I.A.” refers to police Internal Affairs office whose mandate is to investigate the criminal activities of police officers and the “supply” they mention is drugs stolen from police evidence rooms.

The song ends with the police officer pulling over a truck because it has been modified, customized, in the lowrider style popular to Chicana/o youth. Again, this formerly illegal practice of “illegal searches and seizures” has become increasingly common in ghettos and barrios. As it turns out the victim of “driving while Brown” is Cypress Hill rapper, B-Real, who gets “framed” by the criminal cop. They end the song rapping:

What’s this a dark green truck/Tinted  
windows/Dually modified/Probably a drug dealer/  
“Pull over to the curb/Take your key out of the  
ignition/ Raise your hands out the windows/Get ‘em  
in a high position/Don’t move or I’ll blast your

fuckin' head off/Don't give me that bullshit/I've  
heard about your raps/All you're talkin' about is  
slangin' and shooting off your straps/Okay Mr. B-  
Real get the fuck out of the truck/I love it how all  
you fuckin' rappers think you're so tough/Get your  
ass out/I don't need no probable cause/You got a big  
sack of coke/So take a pause"

This ending illustrates a common problem for Chicana/o youth who participate in a subculture characterized by their style: baggy jeans, baseball hats, wearing hair short or shaved, lowrider cars and trucks, tattoos, and hip-hop music. The song suggests that the vehicle occupants are innocent and are pulled over and framed simply because they are barrio youth. Cypress Hill connects drug use by police officers with police brutality and harassment of Chicana/o youth. In the song, "Earthquake Weather" (2000), Psycho Realm takes a step further in their analysis of the connection between police cocaine abuse and their violence as they rap, "Split second in time life becomes short/Courtesy of LAPD psycho/Inhaling white coke straight snort."

'MOVING THE REVOLUTION THROUGH USING / ALL  
KINDS OF MUSICAL FORMS OF CONFUSION'<sup>12</sup>:  
UNIFYING THE SOCIAL MAJORITIES

Rap artists and enthusiasts have consciously banded together as a community with a unique culture and worldview. They call themselves members of the Hip-hop Nation. This nation is multi-ethnic and multi-racial as are the roots of hip-hop.<sup>13</sup> Chicano rappers have been concerned with making multi-racial and international connections with like-minded people resisting the same forces of globalization. Chicano rappers, Cypress Hill, Funky Aztecs and others, have operationalized Laura Pulido's notion of the "people of color" identity.<sup>14</sup> Pulido notes that within the environmental justice movement in the Southwest Chicanas/os, Blacks and American Indians are developing a movement based on a common identity as people of color. While many grassroots

movements that use identity as a catalyst for social change are exclusive and limit the possibilities for a broad-based multi-ethnic movement, the environmental justice movement has been successful in creating an inclusive identity, “people of color,” that has the power to unite people of various ethnic and/or racial groups for the purpose of challenging environmental racism at the regional or national level. However, Pulido points out, and Chicana/o rappers practice, that the “people of color” identity does not preclude the use of one’s own particular racial, ethnic or other identity; one need not lose oneself in order to become part of a multi-racial alliance. Further, we can extend the idea of a “people of color” identity to include all of the 2/3 majority and like-minded whites. Chicano rappers have enacted a broad-based multi-racial identity through expanding their audience beyond Chicanas/os and Blacks and, especially, by reaching out to Mexicans and Mexican immigrants in the United States.

Members of Cypress Hill exemplify the unifying project of hip-hop as they have reached out to all who might have a sense of carnalismo with them. Soon after Cypress Hill released their debut album in 1991 they joined the alternative rock tour, Lollapalooza, and began to reach “hippies, stoners and Gen X alternarockers”<sup>15</sup> with their discourse of marijuana smoking and critiques of gang and state-sponsored violence. Moreover, Cypress Hill has been active in critiquing Chicana/o nationalism that overemphasizes Chicana/o solidarity at the expense of a broader working-class and youth solidarity.<sup>16</sup> In a 1994 interview the members of Cypress Hill began a public debate with Chicano rapper (Kid) Frost over this issue. They claim that Frost errs when he focuses too much on “la raza” screaming “Brown Pride” while ignoring other youth who might benefit from hip-hop solidarity.<sup>17</sup>

On the flip side, others, including editors of the hip-hop magazine, *The Source*, accused Cypress Hill of “selling-out” as a result of their touring with alternative rock bands and marketing their music to white kids. B-Real responded to this critique stating

You can't stop people from buying your shit. If it's good and it's what you feel, that ain't sellin' out, man. You gotta figure that's introducing your shit to new people, it's making rap bigger. So what if white people like it or not, big fucking deal. If they can relate to it, it's a part of their lives. They always make this cop out that rap is for us, solely for us. Music is for everybody, no matter what color...It ain't about black or white, not for me.<sup>18</sup>

This does not mean that Cypress Hill does not emphasize their Latina/o roots in their music or that they ignore Latina/o youth. On the contrary, they celebrate their Latina/o culture and language (see the song, "Latin Lingo," from their Cypress Hill album) and address issues pertinent to urban Latinas/os. In 1999 they reached out further to the Latina/o audience, especially those "South of the Border", releasing an album of their most important and well-received songs totally in Spanish. The album titled, *Los Grandes Exitos en Español*, features the Mexican rap group, Control Machete, whose hardcore sound owes much to the trailblazing of Cypress Hill.

Other Chicano rappers who have focused their attention on Mexicans and Mexican immigrants in the United States include the Funky Aztecs. Their two albums, *Chicano Blues* and *Day of the Dead*, discuss the everyday violence in California barrios and pay homage to "partying" and marijuana use but also implore Mexicans (both U.S. citizens and non-citizens) to critique the United States government and white supremacy ("Amerikkkan" and "Prop 187") and to organize themselves to take action ("Organize" and "Nation of Funk").

A Message to the Coconut/No matter how much  
you switch/Here is what they think about  
you/Cactus frying, long distance running, soccer  
playing, shank having, tortilla flipping, refried bean  
eating, border crossing, fruit picking, piñata  
breaking, lowrider driving, dope dealing, Tres Flores

wearing, green card having, illiterate gangmember,  
go the fuck back to Mexico (Funky Aztecs, 1995,  
“Prop 187” from *Day of the Dead*. Raging Bull  
Records).

The narrator urges people of Mexican descent who try to “act white” and invest in the white, middle-class “American Dream” to recognize that “Amerika” and white “Amerikans” do not want them; that no matter how much you attempt to assimilate and become good, upstanding, middle-class Americans, if you are of Mexican descent, you are stigmatized and discriminated against.

Further, they link the narratives of Chicana/o experiences discussed throughout their album to the fate and experiences of Mexicans. The song continues with the menacing refrain, “Secure the Border,” repeated over news reports reproducing the new nativism that led to the passage of Proposition 187 in California. Proposition 187 passed in 1994, if upheld, would essentially undermine a fundamental aspect of the founding of the United States, birthright citizenship, by denying citizenship to U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants and denying undocumented immigrants and their children access to public services such as health clinics and public schools.<sup>19</sup> The authors in the excellent edited volume, *Immigrants Out!*, write that during hard economic times people search for a scapegoat. The initial years of globalization have created uncertain and difficult economic times for most U.S. citizens. Propaganda from think tanks, universities, public officials and the media has placed much of the blame on members of powerless groups such as undocumented immigrants, welfare mothers and gangbangers. This propaganda has led to the dismantling of public assistance programs, legislation increasing prison sentences, prison development, numbers of police officers, and use of military technology by inner-city police forces and the Border Patrol.<sup>20</sup> The Funky Aztecs, aware of the damage caused by the xenophobia and racism directed at people of Mexican descent, reproduce recordings of newscasters, white citizens and others claiming that immigrants are a drain on resources and that we tax paying citizens should not have “to pay to educate

those children and their healthcare.” The FA’s predict the outcome of Proposition 187 and increased racism by repeating “Proposition 187” followed by a gunshot. They end the song discussing news from Mexico including the two major political assassinations in 1994 and the uprising in Chiapas. We could read this ending any number of ways; as a critique of further propaganda aimed at Mexicans; recognition of the link between globalization, Mexican political instability and Mexican immigration to the United States; a call to arms for Mexican (American) peoples and a threat to U.S. elites. I believe that the Funky Aztecs probably intend to suggest all of these and more.

As discussed at the beginning of this section, the hip-hop community has always been multi-racial and continues to forge a multi-racial alliance in building their “Hip-Hop Nation.” This act of multi-racial community formation resists globalizing forces that undermine multi-racial solidarity through fostering xenophobia and racism. Increasingly, rappers are looking internationally for sources of *carnalismo* to increase the ranks of their cultural movement. Chicano rappers have naturally looked Southward to Mexico to create bridges over the Border in attempts to transnationalize the hip hop community. As William Robinson suggests countering transnational capitalism (globalization) requires building “a transnational class consciousness and a concomitant global political protagonism and strategies that link the local to the national and the national to the global.”<sup>21</sup> Chicana/o rappers have done this through linking globalization, political instability in the U.S. and Mexico, racial stereotypes, nativism, and violence and repressive legislation aimed at people of Mexican descent, and reaching out to broader Latina/o and non-Latina/o audiences.<sup>22</sup>

However, we should be aware that within the Hip-hop Nation women are marginalized and often represented in rap lyrics in extremely negative ways. First, female rappers have had a very difficult time breaking into the “game” and when they do get a record deal their lyrical content, image and success are heavily monitored, mediated and controlled by record executives. In a 1997 interview pioneering female rappers Salt-n-Pepa, MC Lyte, Mia X and others discussed the trials and

tribulations of women trying to break into the rap game.<sup>23</sup> Mia X commenting on how male rappers have made it difficult for females stated “I’ve never had a problem with a sister that I’ve met that’s rhyming, but I’ve had problems with men, always men, writing this and saying that about our lyrics.” Asked about having to compromise themselves “in entering the male-dominated hip-hop industry” the female MCs agreed that record labels try to control your image, appearance, lyrics and music.<sup>24</sup>

As well, images of women in rap lyrics and videos often present them as mere sex objects. For evidence of this problem in rap, one need only tune into Black Entertainment Television (BET) on any weekday afternoon to see images of scantily clad Black women dancing as “video `hos.” Rarely are women depicted as protagonists in rap videos. Rather, they exist in the videos as titillation and to further aggrandize the male rappers who demonstrate their prowess through their association with these unrealistically beautiful women. As rap has become more corporatized (that is, gone from ghetto streets to Wall Street) and an increasingly important part of the global entertainment industry, these images of women have become increasingly devoid of substance and unidimensional. Once again, globalization has taken deeply entrenched notions of race and sex and turned them into a profit. The music industry has taken the battle of the sexes within minority communities combined it with old Anglo-European notions of the “Jezebel” or “Latin spitfire”<sup>25</sup> updated it with a dance beat and packaged it for international consumption.<sup>26</sup>

This analysis of rap does not intend to let the young Black and Brown MCs off of the hook for presenting tales of conquering women and explicit discussions of women as mere whores. Certainly, the young men must analyze their own sexism if they are to be truly revolutionary in their rhetoric and behaviors. However, I believe that there are openings in rap for such self-reflection. Many young men have rethought their understanding of women and posed challenges to other male rappers in their lyrics.<sup>27</sup> Another important opening for challenging the phallogentrism of rap and the sexist images in its lyrics comes from a



new wave of female MCs who have projected positive, multifaceted images of women in their videos and songs. Female rappers have taken the discursive and everyday resistance of women of color to the patriarchy and critiqued their brothers in the Hip-hop Nation and the misogyny of Western society that they often emulate.<sup>28</sup>

As with many male-dominated liberation movements such as the Black Power Movement or the Chicana/o Movement,<sup>29</sup> men within the Hip-hop Nation have marginalized women. They exhibit in their lyrics and behaviors a use and abuse of the male privilege afforded them in a sexist society. Such a stance seems hardly revolutionary to women who lose privilege and are harmed as a result of Black and Brown men accepting from greater U.S. society an uncritical, sexist definition of masculinity. So, it is hoped that while the Hip-hop Nation continues to define itself in the face of globalization and the co-optation of its culture by corporate America, its ideology and gender analysis will evolve beyond its current “parroted” of the sexist norm in U.S. society.

LA ORDEN DEL NUEVO MUNDO, NO, NUNCA!<sup>30</sup>:  
CHICANO RAP'S 'GREAT REFUSAL'

Chicano rap narratives vividly illustrate the consequences of urban decay resulting from globalization. Their stories of violence, murder, drug use and trafficking, police repression and poverty contribute to a theorization of globalization from barrio streets. Their narration of urban dystopia puts brown faces on statistics concerning urban neglect, decreased job opportunities and hopelessness in Chicana/o U.S.A. Their “armed-with-words” response to the war waged by the transnational bourgeoisie and their conscious rejection of the middle-class lifestyle reflects a Great Refusal<sup>31</sup> shouted by many throughout the 2/3 world.<sup>32</sup>

In the place of globalization and the violence attending it Chicana/o rappers and other members of the Hip-hop Nation are building a multi-

racial community based on love for one another and free expression. This utopic model is, of course, not always followed by practitioners and enthusiasts of hip hop. Rappers have often illustrated racism and vehement hatred toward other members of the Hip-hop Nation resulting in a few isolated acts of violence. Further, the pervasive sexism and homophobia in rap turns the utopic Hip-hop Nation upside-down for women and gays and lesbians. Nevertheless, Chicano rappers<sup>33</sup> (who have mostly stayed away from sexist and homophobic images in their music) have begun to illustrate ways in which to unify “people of color” and other marginalized people through “love for the `hood.”<sup>34</sup>



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> In theorizing the concept of “organic intellectual” in contrast to the “traditional intellectual” Gramsci (1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York:International Publishers, p. 6) writes that “[e]very social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.” Excepting the vanguardist role that Gramsci reserves for the organic intellectual, this concept can be useful for understanding the role that rappers play in their community. That is, Chicano rappers serve the function of solidifying a self-understanding for Chicana/o youth in urban “America.” I use the term “solidifying self-understanding” as opposed to the Gramscian-like construction of “giving an awareness to” because I contend that the intellectual material from which rappers or any other organic intellectual develops her/his knowledge of the world results from an embeddedness in her/his community and interactions and an interdependency with her/his community’s customs and traditions (its epistemology, ontology and social structures). While rappers may present new understandings that serve a pedagogical function for their constituency, their cultural production owes a great deal to the community wisdom in which the rappers were socialized. Moreover, Gramsci’s concept is apt given that the aforementioned discussion of Chicana/o youth’s role in the international economy allows us to conceive of urban Chicana/o youth as a class with a specific, unique, and “essential function in the world of economic production.”

<sup>2</sup> The use of marijuana in rap and hip-hop culture is well-known and celebrated on songs too numerous to mention here. A cursory look at the lyrical content of the rappers discussed in this essay reveals several “cuts” devoted to the pleasures and politics of marijuana consumption. It is beyond the scope of this essay to detail the use of marijuana and the uses to which it is put in the hip-hop community. Suffice it to say that we can not underestimate the importance of marijuana to the evolution of this form of cultural production.

<sup>3</sup> These well-known lyrics come from the group Cypress Hill. The song title is “How I Could Just Kill a Man” from their debut album, *Cypress Hill* (1991).

<sup>4</sup> Davis, *op.cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Pease, S.E. 1992. *PSYWAR: Psychological Warfare in Korea, 1950-1953*. Harrisburg, PA:Stackpole Books.

<sup>6</sup> These lyrics were downloaded from the world wide web at the following address: <http://www.angelfire.com/mi2/cypress2/prii21.htm>. The web has been an important site for the development of hip-hop culture during the 1990s. Besides reprinting the lyrics for thousands of rap songs, rap enthusiasts can discuss issues around their favorite artists (including the politics of their lyrics), read or write biographies of artists, and read about contemporary issues pertinent to the existence and survival of hip-hop culture including legislation, recent public debate on music, and insights into the recording industry.

<sup>7</sup> The fine documentary, *The Fire This Time* (Holland, R., 1995. Rhino Home Video) offers a similar critique of state practices which contribute to inner-city fratricide through exacerbating gang difference, allowing for and encouraging weapons distribution, and the government’s role in the crack cocaine trade. See also Scott, P.D. and J. Marshall, 1998, *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies and the CIA in Central America*. Berkeley:University of California Press. Along the lines of *The Fire This Time*, *Cocaine Politics* and Mario Van Peebles’ critique of the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) abuses against the Black Panther Party (BPP) in the movie, *Panther* (1995; see also Churchill and Van der Wall, 1988. *Agents of Repression: The FBI’s Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement*. Boston:South End Press), Psycho Realm offers the following in “Conspiracy Theories”: “The masterplan don’t include us so they shoot us/Supply weapons, coke, crack and buddha/Keep track of who took the bait through computers/Enslave and regulate the ‘hoods through the *jurass*/We’re all victims as the plot thickens/Better recognize the big plan the clock’s ticking.” “Buddha” is hip-hop slang for marijuana. The reference to computer surveillance alludes to the practice of authoritarian states to continuously monitor its citizens, especially rebels and “criminals.” In the *barrios* of the United States this takes the form of gang databases and a sophisticated national FBI data center. “Jura” is Chicana/o slang for the police.

<sup>8</sup> “Sets” is another term for gang.

<sup>9</sup> These lyrics come from the song, “Enemy of the State” (2000).

<sup>10</sup> This analysis of the propagandistic function of the media which causes people to believe that “the face of violence” is a young and Brown one is illustrated in the following lines from the Chicano rappers, Funky Aztecs, on their song “Nation of Funk” (*Day of the Dead*, 1995): “Ever since you saw American Me/ You’re scared of me.”

<sup>11</sup> I must note here that this form of domination stems from a deep homophobia and sexism in Chicana/o and Black American culture. The reason that this is seen as the ultimate act of vengeance is because the person committing the rape turns the raped into either “his bitch” or a “fag.” In our sexist, homophobic society it becomes the ultimate expression of heterosexual male superiority through symbolically creating an inferior woman or homosexual out of the victim.

<sup>12</sup> These lyrics come from the Psycho Realm's song, "Moving through Streets" (2000).

<sup>13</sup> See Hebdige, D., 1987. *Cut 'n Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*. New York: Methuen.

<sup>14</sup> Pulido, L. 1996. "Development of the "People of Color" Identity in the Environmental Justice Movement of the Southwestern United States." *Socialist Review*. 26:3-4:145-180.

<sup>15</sup> Trakin, R. n.d. "In the Temple with Cypress Hill." Cover Story. Web magazine.

<sup>16</sup> Their practices and critiques echo an important discussion in Chicana/o studies about the continued reliance on outdated cultural nationalist models that cause researchers to study Chicana/o history and contemporary experiences in a vacuum as if Chicanas/os have not had contact with any other marginalized and/or working class peoples. This type of Chicanocentrism has distorted history and has been detrimental to the formation of interethnic alliances between Chicanas/os and other social groups that constitute the social majorities. Furthermore, Chicana/o parochialism limits even our ability to fully understand Chicana/o experiences because without an analysis of globalization and the location of Chicanas/os in the new world order vis a vis groups throughout the world we are unable to accurately assess the ideologies, structures, and policies that negatively impact Chicanas/os. See Darder, A. and R.D. Torres. 1998. "Latinos and Society: Culture, Politics, and Class." In Darder, A. and R.D. Torres (eds.). *The Latino Studies Reader: Culture, Economy and Society*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers., pp. 3-26.

<sup>17</sup> This interview appears in Cross, B. 1994. *It's Not About a Salary: Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Frost (formerly Kid Frost) has been described as the "Godfather of Latin Hip Hop" by Brown Pride Online ([www.brownpide.com](http://www.brownpide.com)). Frost had the first Chicano rap hit with "La Raza" (1989, Hispanic Causing Panic).

<sup>18</sup> Dumisani Ndlovu. N.d., "Back with a Boom: Cypress Hill." Cypress Hill homepage.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of Proposition 187 and the causes, affects and consequences of the "new nativism" see the various chapters in Perea, J.F. (ed.). 1997, op.cit.

<sup>20</sup> Dunn, op.cit., Davis, op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, 1996, op.cit., p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> An important critique of hip-hop as a revolutionary social movement argues that the methods and much of the ideology of these young people are steeped in patriarchy and patriarchal notions of masculinity and sexuality. Often the violence discussed in rap songs celebrates armed defense (and offense) as a solution to problems attending globalization. Many women and peace advocates would challenge this masculinist solution. It is important to note, however, that most of violence discussed in rap is a critique of intra-racial violence and state violence and that rappers are involved in a grassroots "stop the violence" campaign. Finally, the promotion of consumerism and the fact that rap music is part of global music industry are certainly not revolutionary and, in fact, maybe exactly what the fight against globalization is all about. Further, one must question the degree to which corporate control mediates the politics of rap music. Again, the hip hop community is challenging the global circuits of cultural diffusion and commodity exchange through grassroots entrepreneurship and "underground" promotion and organization of the hip hop nation.

<sup>23</sup> Few Latinas have been successful as rap artists. The current most notable Latina MC is Hurricane G., a *Puertorriqueña* from New York.

<sup>24</sup> McGregor, T. 1997. "Mothers of the Culture." *The Source*. 97 (Oct.): 115-122.

<sup>25</sup> Patricia Hill Collins in her excellent article, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images" (in *Black Feminist Thought*. Boston:Unwin Hyman, 1990, p. 67) theorizes that "portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas has been essential to the political economy of domination fostering Black women's oppression." For a discussion of Latina images in film see Fregoso, R.L. 1993. *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano Film Culture*. Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press; Noreiga, C. (ed.). 1992. *Chicanos and Film:Essays on Chicano Representation and Resistance*. New York:Garland; Wool, A.L. 1980. "Bandits and Lovers: Hispanic Images in American Film." In Miller, R.M. (ed.). *The Kaleidoscope Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups*. J.S. Ozer. Pp. 54-72.

<sup>26</sup> In December, 1999 as I watched BET's "100 Greatest Videos of the Millenium" I noticed that while women were marginalized and sometimes presented as sex objects in the rap videos and lyrics of my childhood they were not commodified in the same way as they are in today's corporate rap industry. The few women presented in early rap videos were women just like any other we might find in our neighborhoods. The central problem in early rap was the lack of female representation. Today, nearly ever rap video requires women with unrealistically large breasts strutting or, more often, dancing, seductively for the pleasure of the male rappers and the adolescents watching on the television screen. While I have found no direct causal evidence between the increasing corporatization of rap and the increasingly pornographic images found in rap videos, I suspect, at least, an indirect relationship between the two.

<sup>27</sup> For such an interesting transformation see the later recordings of Tupac Shakur (Makaveli, Killuminati:The Seven Day Theory and songs such as "Keep Your Head Up," "Dear Mama" and "Baby, Don't Cry") and Goodie Mob ("Beautiful Skin").

<sup>28</sup> An analysis of the themes of female rappers is beyond the scope of this essay. However, many of the female rappers mentioned earlier and new rappers such as Lauryn Hill, Solé, Rah Digga, and Eve have taken on themes of domestic violence, rape, and sexual and economic powerlessness. Others have, of course, capitulated to corporate greed and teenage desire for sexual images through presenting themselves and other women as sex objects.

<sup>29</sup> See works by Chicana feminists who discuss the battle of the sexes during the Chicana/o Movement. Anzaldúa, G. (ed.). 1990. *Making Face, Making Soul:Haciendo Caras*. San Francisco:Aunt Lute; Broyles-González, Y. 1994. *El Teatro Campesino:Theater in the Chicano Movement*. Austin:University of Texas Press; García, A.M. (ed.). 1997. *Chicana Feminist Thought:The Basic Historical Writings*. New York:Routledge.

<sup>30</sup> These lyrics come from the Psycho Realm song, "Premonitions" (1997, Ruffhouse Records).

<sup>31</sup> Marcuse, H. 1964. *One-Dimensional Man:Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston:Beacon Press. Marcuse suggests that an important aspect of a revolutionary social movement is the rejection of capitalist society and its logic. He notes that art (including rap?) in its most "advanced" and political form serves as an important catalyst for this form of social protest.

<sup>32</sup> Esteva, G. and M. Prakash, op.cit.; McFarland, L., op.cit.

<sup>33</sup> I have concentrated on a few relatively well-known Chicano rappers from California. For a list and discussion of dozens of Chicano rappers see the “Brown Pride Online” homepage at [www.brownpride.com](http://www.brownpride.com).

<sup>34</sup> This quote comes from Chicano rapper Frost’s song, “Nothing but Love for the Neighborhood,” on the compact disc, *Smile Now, Die Later* (1995, Ruthless Records).

CHAPTER  
FOURTEEN



*Irma Mayorga*  
*Re(a)d Roots: Grounding History,*  
*Identity, and Performance in the work*  
*of Celia Herrera Rodríguez*

1. ARTE

I have identified myself as being ‘indigenist’ in outlook. By this, I mean that I am one who not only takes the rights of indigenous peoples as the highest priority of my political life, but who draws upon the traditions—the bodies of knowledge and corresponding codes of values—evolved over many thousands of years by native peoples the world over. This is the basis upon which I not only advance critiques of, but conceptualize alternatives to the present social, political, economic and philosophical status quo...this gives shape...to the goals and objectives I pursue...

—WARD CHURCHILL, “I AM INDIGENIST:  
NOTES ON THE IDEOLOGY OF  
THE FOURTH WORLD”

The trauma of history dividing and uniting the wretched of the earth can only be undone in strategically adventurous, repeat performances.

— AMIT S. RAI, “THUS SPAKE THE SUBALTERN”<sup>2</sup>

If the intention of a ceremonial element in Chicana art “reveals the role of belief, healing and celebration in the ongoing lexicon of women’s work,” as Amalia Mesa-Bains describes, then Celia Herrera Rodríguez’s mixed-media altar installation, “Red Roots/Black Roots/Earth (Tree of Life),” stages an important reelaboration of this intent.<sup>1</sup> The desire of Rodríguez’s altar is to address and reformat the centrality of violence in the making of *mestizaje*, allowing this work not only to recover the past but also “to underscore the loss inscribed in the social body” of Chicana/os.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, Rodríguez’s woman’s work crafts a cultural narrative that does not immediately leap to conjoin resiliency and hope, but rather, looks back to mark and make perceptible deracination and devastation. Her praxis does not build from a subtle methodology of feminine subversion, satire, or innuendo, but rather, performs a forthright feminist critique of the intersectional loci of gender, history, land, memory, and culture made visible in the tautness of her work’s minimalist symbolic lexicon. In this, her strategy stages an important counterpoint to the dominant aesthetics of Chicana/o *rasquache*.

As Tomás Ybarra-Frausto offers in his well-rehearsed definition, *rasquache* in Chicana/o aesthetics is “a witty, irreverent, and impertinent posture that recodes and moves outside established boundaries,” and it is “rooted in Chicano structures of thinking, feeling, aesthetic choice. It is *one form of a Chicano vernacular*, the verbal-visual codes we use to speak to each other [emphasis added].”<sup>4</sup> Mesa-Bains marks the Chicana manifestation of *rasquache* as “domesticana.” In either instance, what is important to note here is that *rasquache* is but “*one vernacular*” of Chicana/o verbal-visual codes. Often, the aesthetics’ seductive dominance supercedes this overlooked delineation. I suggest here that Rodríguez’s work composes an important, inverted



differential vernacular of Chicana/o aesthetics, which has implicit affiliations to both *rasquache*'s and *domesticana*'s intent, yet molds a revised ethics of remembering for Chicana/o aesthetics. Rodríguez's work renders an efficacious poetics of loss enacted to search out redressive possibilities for the Chicana/o social body.

Resistance and affirmation have come to be hailed as the hallmark qualities of Chicana/o art's expression of the political.<sup>5</sup> Rodríguez reformats resistance's oppositional strategy, stressing the indigenous element of *mestizaje*'s components to invoke redress. The symbolic actions of redress are both powerful articulations of loss and longing and endless searches for remedy and reparation.<sup>6</sup> Affirmation relies upon a sense of the positive, validation, and confirmation to counter past wrongdoing. In contrast, redress revisits loss, demanding retribution, and a setting right of those wrongs. In these considerations, Rodríguez's work constitutes itself within a decidedly redressive performative. Here, I use redress in Saidiya Hartman's illuminating study of the term, which she applies to the examination of a damaged social body:

Redress. . . is an exercise of agency directed toward the release of the pained body, the reconstitution of violated natality, and the remembrance of breach. It is intended to minimize the violence of historical dislocation and dissolution—the history that hurts. Redressive action encompasses not only a heightened attention to the events that have culminated in the crisis but also the transfiguration of the broken and ravenous body. . .into a bridge between the living and the dead. The event of captivity and enslavement engenders the necessity of redress...<sup>7</sup>

Approaching memory with the impetus of redress steers the act of remembering away from nostalgia or ambivalent recollection into a more demanding and constitutive act. It punctures these static layers allowing for the discussion of issues such as dislocation, rupture, shock, and forgetting to emerge.<sup>8</sup> Breach in Rodríguez's Chicana/o vernacular

is her attempt to raise the effacement or obfuscation of Native origin, and Rodríguez's altar attends to articulating Native loss within mestizaje—positioned in her work as a “violated, captive body” of social memory. In her concept, Hartman revises Victor Turner's notion of redress for his schema of the phases of social drama.<sup>9</sup> Hartman recalibrates Turner's ideas to describe more succinctly the acts of abject peoples: the social drama of oppressed people's will repeatedly stall upon the redressive phase without fundamental changes in the external social forces which produce breach and crisis.<sup>10</sup> Hartman's reconceptualization of redress can be located throughout “Red Roots/Black Roots/Earth (Tree of Life)'s” signifying lexicon (figure 1).

“Red Roots/Black Roots/Earth (Tree of Life)” stages the social drama of Chicana/o history, symbolically and figuratively, to evince the tragic scope of mestizaje. The Tree of Life contained within Rodríguez's altar radically breaks from traditional lush and baroque Tree of Life representations. In the mexicana/o figuration of the craft, the Tree of Life signifies good luck, fortune, and prosperity<sup>11</sup> and builds on an iconography assembled from both Native cosmologies and the Christian biblical narrative of Adam and Eve in Paradise. In total, a Tree of Life represents a fecund state of being through its aesthetic.<sup>12</sup> Rodríguez's Tree of Life, her installation's centerpiece, repeats and cites, *with a difference*, the significations affixed to a Tree of Life's symbolic logic. Rodríguez's “Tree” tactically recodes this iconography and remetaphorizes its symbolic lexicon by physically transfiguring the Tree's structural features to emphasize loss and despair.<sup>13</sup> As Rodríguez's exhibition notes explain: “Originally, I thought this altarpiece would be a beautifully sculptured cabinet-like structure made of willow, painted silk and beadwork, where I would place the tree (of life) inside. But such beauty is irrelevant here. It is not where I have been standing, looking out at fragmented families, battered landscapes... So, this is not a beautiful tree...”<sup>14</sup> Thus, her altar bears a desolated tree indicative of this damaged condition.

Since pre-history, the sanctity of trees has been used to signify sacred dimensions.<sup>15</sup> In Native cosmologies, the sacred tree is the figurative

synonym used to connote the condition of human life. Or, as the holy man Black Elk eloquently eulogizes in his oral account,

...These things I shall remember by the way, and often they may seem to be the very tale itself...

But now that I can see it all as from a lonely hilltop, I know it was the story of a mighty vision...of a holy tree that should have flourished in a people's heart with flowers and singing birds, and now is withered...<sup>16</sup>

Black Elk ends his story by igniting the interanimations between the tree and atrocities against his people: "There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead."<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising that Rodríguez's viewpoint as a Chicana, "where I have been standing, looking out," strongly echoes Black Elk's position "as from a lonely hilltop" as when he gazes upon the history of his deracinated, now mutilated people upon a snowy battlefield. Indeed, Black Elk's oral strategy is the precise assessment Rodríguez desires to describe about the condition of her own Native "nation" through her tree's reformatted symbology.

Rodríguez's tree is neither robust nor ornate, but rather, a denuded tree; its evocations resonate with pain, deprivation, dispossession, and grief—structures of feeling and states of being that continue to describe the positionality of Chicana/os within the US nation-state and the indigenous within the terrain of Chicana/o remembrance and culture. Before inducting cultural affirmation, Rodríguez's work inverts the paradigm of *mestizaje* in Chicana/o cultural production, consciously canceling the celebratory spirit of accumulation and fragmentation associated with hybridity's invocation, and in the same vein, measuring the co-optation of these traits by the hegemony of postmodern aesthetics. Through a representational economy of lessness, Rodríguez's altar addresses the "history that hurts" from a consciousness of both feminine *and* feminist mourning to educe valuable indigenous components lost in the cultural *mêlée* of identic formation. This inverse aesthetic abandons *rasquache* in lieu of a modality that refuses to romanticize, flatten out, masculinize, or marginalize indigenous originary sources in Chicana/o cultural production—its aim is to figure a new aesthetic of resistance.

The most commanding visual element of “Red Roots” is a small, black, bulto (bundle) held in the Tree of Life’s center (figure 2). The bundle is roughly the size of an infant. Flowing from the bulto’s lower side are crimson strips of cloth, conjuring the image of blood streaming from the seemingly lifeless bundle. Lengths of red cord also emanate from the bulto’s center and tether the bundle to a wooden cross that lies below (figure 3). As Rodríguez explains: “The center of the tree holds a ‘bulto.’ It contains all that is remembered, and all that we have forgotten.” More specifically, the bundle’s leash to the cross serves as metonym for indigenous memory’s constraint in the wake of Christianity. The bundle’s lifeless form visually and strategically ironizes a Tree of Life’s cultural narrative; this tree is unable to produce life, and rather, offers up the fruit of death from its limbs.

Rodríguez’s installation enacts the concepts of redress through an ensemble of indigenous performative components creating what I suggest is a “theater of memory.” As performance theorist Peggy Phelan notes, an increasing variety of the arts have now engaged performative modes to create an “interactive exchange between the art object and the viewer.” In the case of “Red Roots” and the Chicana/o spectator, these interactive figurations form a powerful identificatory circuit as the revenants of *mestizaje*’s violence make petitions to our individually and collectively violated indigenous roots, calling us to redressive actions that can function transfiguratively in retrospective *and* prospective senses.

## 2. ARTE / PERFORMANCE

On this occasion I am, for I imagine that I am; and  
on this occasion you are, for I imagine that you are.  
And this imagining is the burden of the story, and  
indeed it is the story.

— N. SCOTT MOMADAY, “  
THE MAN MADE OF WORDS”

As Amalia Mesa-Bains suggests in her essay for the exhibition *Imágenes e Historias/Images and Histories: Chicana Altar-Inspired Art*, Chicana altar-art such as “Red Roots,” which utilizes differential spiritual traditions to address the socio-historical, begins the repair work necessary for cultural healing.<sup>21</sup> In this stead, the *performance* connected to “Red Roots” insists that to heal historical wounds we must make a more thorough assessment of the damages—a closer look at the *cositas quebradas*—which expands Rodríguez’s redressive performative. For this performance piece, Rodríguez again culls from indigenous nutrient sources to create what Western art tends to describe as performance art. However, I suggest here that the endeavor to engage an indigenous performative does not merely serve as a vehicle for aesthetic re-citation, rather it is a search for an alternative consciousness to destabilize the histories of hegemony and oppression. Moreover, this search for a differential consciousness deploys Chicana theorist Chéla Sandoval’s methodology of the oppressed, a theory and practice invoked to engender social change. Sandoval’s interest lies not in identifying how the state subjugates, but rather, how citizen-subjects repel and/or escape subjugation; her interest lies in excavating the technologies needed for resistant acts that lead to emancipation. Of primary concern is Sandoval’s quest to identify an oppositional theory and practice that oppressed peoples can craft and consciously apply in order to generate resistance and liberate themselves from the neocolonial constraints of the dominant social order.<sup>1</sup> Sandoval’s ideas stem from the extensive study of linkages between “the great oppositional social movement practices of the latter half of the twentieth century,” especially those undertaken by social movement groups within the US.<sup>22</sup> In the following analysis, I will read Sandoval’s groundbreaking method against Rodríguez’s performance *Cositas Quebradas (Broken Things)* to consider the political ramifications of Rodríguez’s performance work.<sup>23</sup>

Within the parameters of the overwhelmingly Anglo dominated genre of performance art, Rodríguez’s Chicana figurations attempt to recuperate a resistant art practice. Roselee Goldberg, the first art historian to

organize a genealogy of performance art, defines the genre as “live work by [live] artists....<sup>24</sup> For Goldberg, definitions of performance art must retain an open-ended fluidity: “Performance art actually defies precise or easy definition...<sup>25</sup>” Scholars from a theater or anthropological base have expanded Goldberg’s definition to move performance work out of an art world context, essentially revealing the racial and class-based boundaries Goldberg’s perspective constructs. As Goldberg describes:

It is only in what we call the art world that it is possible to invent a new genre from scratch... The reason is that the art world remains the most permissive of cultural and social sub-sets, whose core of followers are as eager as the artists themselves to be overwhelmed and provoked...<sup>26</sup>

Goldberg’s view of the art world does not mark the closed gates a minoritarian artist, performance or otherwise, encounters when their projects either indict this same “open-minded” spectatorship or scourge their participation altogether.

Cultural critic Coco Fusco’s recent work (re)considers performance in terms of Latin American and U.S. Latina/o contexts. Fusco identifies three overarching tenets that differentiate Latina/o performance.<sup>1</sup> First, Latin American popular culture creates differential foundations, visual languages, and gestural vocabularies for Latina/o performance. Second, whereas Euro/American artists expropriate and co-opt ritual and religious sources for their work, Latina/os delve into their own heterogenous and colonized pasts for performance vocabularies.<sup>27</sup> Finally, Fusco offers the “spatialization of power.”<sup>28</sup> The spatialization of power extends through regulatory systems such as racialized xenophobia, the militarization of national borders, and the relegation of neighborhoods, pushing power into the spaces of working, social, and domestic life. Due to the spatialization of power, Latina/o performance artists use signifying strategies with socio-political orientations therefore envisioning their art practice in public spaces as “symbolic confrontations with the state.”<sup>29</sup>

Rodríguez's performance engenders Fusco's delineations. In particular, Rodríguez draws from Native storytelling to shape the form, content, and effect of *Cositas Quebradas*, which I now position as storytelling. Here, I adopt Kiowa artist/scholar N. Scott Momaday's conceptions of storytelling to locate, in part, the political structure of Rodríguez's performance work. As Momaday instructs, stories are told to be believed; they are true "in that they are established squarely upon belief."<sup>30</sup> A story is a statement on the human condition and centers upon a certain event. As the human condition involves moral considerations, stories involve moral implications.<sup>31</sup> Telling story is "essentially creative, inasmuch as language is essentially creative."<sup>32</sup> Creative encompasses two different but connected senses. A story draws from the same well of thought and perception as do correlative activities such as painting, sculpture, or dance. The basic desire to express, to render to others and to oneself one's position in or of the world inhabits the cores of these activities. However, relating story is also creative in an existential and performative dimension: speaking aloud thought brings into existence, produces, creates, makes real the person telling the story, the audience listening, and the story itself. As Momaday explains: "[the storyteller] re-creates his vision in words, [thus] he re-creates himself. He affirms that he has existence in the element of language, and this affirmation is preeminently creative."<sup>33</sup> This act of creation extends to her listeners: "[The story teller] creates his listener in the sense that he determines the listener's existence within, and in relation to, the story..."<sup>34</sup> In storytelling, words contain power, magic, and endow a person with the means to effect change in the universe.<sup>35</sup>

The resonances between storytelling's ethos and the methodology of the oppressed's oppositional technologies to effect social change are manifold, and their conjoined use within Rodríguez's work enables her to decolonize performance art practice and with it the social sphere.<sup>36</sup>

Rodríguez's installation "Red Roots/Black Roots/Earth (Tree of Life)" stands in the rotunda of Santa Clara University's de Saisset Museum, the first artwork one encounters after proceeding through the museum's main entrance. Immediately next to Rodríguez's imprisoned Tree of Life sits a smaller altar: a chimney made from four tiers of stacked

firewood and positioned in the center of a serape laid on the ground beneath it. Directly in front of this “fire” altar is a vase of fresh cut flowers, more folded serapes, a full bottle of tequila with shot glass, and other personal items—all ofrendas for remembrance. Across the chimney’s top sit Talavera plates with small votive candles that glow quietly—a symbolic fire burns.

Rodríguez is nowhere to be seen as people mill about the reception, cautiously making sure not to carry their plastic wine glasses beyond the “refreshment” room and into the main exhibition of art “objects.” I learn of this mistake by carelessly attempting to cross from one space to the other with my own glass of wine. A museum docent curtly informs me of my infraction and escorts me back towards the “proper” space for refreshment consumption. Art and nourishment, in this arena, have distinct, impermeable boundaries. Elements attributable to class-based protocols of behavior linger in my mind after this altercation. Yet, the interception serves to remind me of the institutionality of the space that I have entered, which is a strange, ironic twist considering the domestic origins of the Chicana altars on exhibit.

Without refreshments, the crowd gathered drifts between and among the many Chicana altar inspired artworks. Latina/os are present, more so than would normally gather together at the same time in a decidedly Anglo museum space but, for the most part, the audience is comprised of an Anglo audience that looks well acquainted with an opening reception’s museum and gallery behavior. Because this particular museum is located on a college campus, the crowd has many Anglo, college-age students as well as academic-type older adults. And, I like to think, because it is a Latina/o occasion the young are also present—babies in strollers as well as older children swimming quickly among the mostly slow moving current of us adult folks. Rodríguez’s performance piece will take place amid the reception and drastically reorganize its convivial mood.

The central events of Rodríguez’s storytelling in *Cositas Quebradas* are the impact of colonialism, the ideologies of nationhood (U.S. and Chicana/o), and the absence of memory. In her story, she demonstrates



the intersectionality of land, history, language, class, and race for both Chicana/o peoples and, in particular ways, for a larger American populous. The performance this essay documents was specifically geared for a Californian audience.<sup>37</sup> The story in *Cositas Quebradas*'s performance evolves organically—one topic lays the ground for others to emerge, exposing the interrelated and imbricated nature of the events described. Yet, the ways in which Rodríguez weaves the topics together has a discernible trail of affinity and structure of feeling—one which I posit makes rhetorical sense to an audience of peoples of color and Chicana/os in particular. The piece is short, and as Rodríguez speaks, she performs rituals and gestures familiar with altar traditions such as offering food and drink to those present, asking the audience's involvement in strategic ways.

Semiology, reading the signs of power, comprises the methodology of the oppressed's first technology. Rodríguez's performance addresses the institutionality of museums and the systems of power they support in her opening thoughts:

Regreso. [I return.] Regreso aqui otra vez. [I return to another time here.] Regreso aqui otra vez. [I return to another time here.] Aunque, tambien es un dificil. [Although it is also a difficult thing.] Pasodad. [To create that passage.] Tambien dificil [It is also difficult.]...I will speak to you in this language and maybe I will speak to you with passion but if I speak to you that way, los watchos [the watch], los watchos [they watch]. Los que comen mucho. [They eat a lot.]...Los Americanos [The Anglo Americans.]...long journey...to stand here like this before you again. And say these words to you.<sup>38</sup>

Rodríguez is not innocent to the challenges her Chicana art places on the “signs of power” that museums feed the public imaginary. Her opening words mark the “journey” that artists not subscribing themselves to these subjugating standards must make to gain entry into these institutions. Elsewhere in the performance, Rodríguez reads and deconstructs, the

second technology of the methodology of the oppressed, how museums entrench systems of power through symbolic display: “The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and 50,000 Native people killed, 50,000 disappeared.”<sup>39</sup> She then takes a plate from the chimney’s surface and smashes it with an ax over the chimney. The plate falls through the chimney’s opening and crashes to the floor, shattered. Her story continues after this jarring act: “Gone, like that. Gone. But what do we have left of them? Everything they left behind in their homes. We wonder sometimes how those things got into museums. Don’t you? You think that they [Native peoples] walked up and said ‘Oh, here’s my sacred things please keep them for me so that in five thousand years you’ll understand me?’ Just like you understand the Greeks, right?”<sup>40</sup> The “you” in her question is wielded in both a rhetorical sense to museum institutions and explicitly directed towards the ideological sensibilities of Anglo members of the audience. The physical event of breaking down objects— an act which she repeats throughout *Cositas Quebradas*—semiotically and materially reads and deconstructs dominant cultural logics, powerfully enforcing and metaphorically enacting what Sandoval describes as an essentially internal cognition for the methodology.

Sandoval’s third technology, meta-ideologizing, is what she describes as an “outer” technology, a “political intervention”<sup>41</sup> or act by a subject who seeks to effect change in the social order, accomplished after the previous two inner cognitions have changed consciousness.<sup>42</sup> This third technology relies on tactics in “relation to power,” which yield “the creation of new, ‘higher’ levels of signification built onto the older, dominant forms of ideology.”<sup>43</sup> I argue here that Rodríguez’s work engages two distinct social orders, that of the art world and the other in relation to the larger U.S. nation-state. In terms of performance, Rodríguez’s piece moves in, through, then outside of performance art’s pre-conditioned genre script in important ways. For instance, she does not consider her work “performance art”:

I don’t consider myself a performance artist. I really haven’t sought out venues in that way...It’s about audience. I really feel that every time I do the

performance the people I care about are the few scatterings, you know, of Native people, peoples of color in the audience. I don't feel like I'm educating or [that] my task is to address the art world.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, her practice enfolds many of the same characteristics that define the genre. However, through Native storytelling practice and purpose she consciously refigures the genre's particulars to meet the needs of an audience often unacknowledged by the work of performance art. The political intervention in this instance is one with redirects the self-interest and essential whiteness that characterizes performance art in America. Moreover, Rodríguez's challenge to the genre is the very act of appropriating and then refashioning it with alternative histories, identities, and ideological objectives.

With these larger considerations in mind, Rodríguez's surreptitious ingression into the rotunda begins her meta-ideological tactics. For example, her presence is not formally announced; rather, she quietly seeps into the crowd, remaining undetected by almost all of the exhibit's visitors. Unlike the fanfare of formal stage presentation or the overtly portentous airs of much performance art, Rodríguez's entrance is a quiet ritualistic cleansing of her speaking space. Rodríguez circles her altar, stopping to honor each of the four directions and the Tree within. In this circumscription built of prayer and ritual, she endeavors to decolonize her space from that of the institution that contains it. Upon reaching the smaller wood altar, she shakes a gourd rattle to gain the audience's attention. The prayer, the claiming of space, the rattle all sew native orientations into performance, even as they reference and signify dominant performance art practice.

Rodríguez's Chicana storytelling, like Native storytelling, is driven by creation and this creation, at its core, centers on an ethical ideological code to mobilize a democratic that produces social justice. To achieve this fourth technology, as Sandoval denotes, power must be redistributed "across such differences coded as race, gender, sex, nation, culture, or class distinctions."<sup>45</sup>

Once the audience has focused on Rodríguez, the next segment of her performance changes the distribution of audience members to produce mestizo bodies. Rodríguez informs the audience that the ground she stands upon is “What’s left of my land,” indicating the blanket below her feet, “I welcome you to what’s left of my land.” The intention here is to read through the artificiality of geo-political constructions imposed on the earth, exposing California’s once Mexican and before that Indian origins, again deconstructing sign-systems. This reading leads to a line of interrogation into the false democratic that the U.S. nation-state cultivates in its historical imaginary. The mestizo body is a corporeal entity that counters this false democracy. Therefore, to puncture this imaginary and redistribute power is to call forth those who can materially counter this ideal. Rodríguez invites the audience to search their own ideological and identic formations: “If you would like to join me on my land, those of you who call yourselves indios, those of you who remember where you are from...I ask you to take a blanket and stand on it. Open it up. Those of you who remember how to open up that blanket...and join me in my nation.”<sup>46</sup> She waits for response after her call, which will break down the formal barriers between spectator and performer, aligning with storytelling’s practice: the storyteller creates his listener.<sup>47</sup> Slowly several women come forward, unfold blankets, and sit with Rodríguez in a Native reality. “Opening a blanket” is metaphoric language that interpellates the hail of dominant ideology and asks that Chicana/os recognize and recover their Nativeness. Physical bodies, bodies that respond, mark a differential consciousness in the perception of Self, disidentifying with U.S. nationalism, and in this instance, undermining museum authority, which promotes the false ideal of a bygone “Other” that needs protection, paternal watch. The women who come forward also expose the historical divide between the Anglo and Latina/o spectators present. This act both performs power’s distribution and engenders its redistribution; it *redresses* a damaged social body: “I welcome you home,” Rodríguez confirms.<sup>48</sup> A story is told to be believed and in their covenant those gathered on blankets subscribe that this can become their nation.

Rodríguez's ethical ideology then begins to connect the disproportion of contemporary U.S. democracy with past acts to create passages for differential consciousness and an ethical democratic. Rodríguez recounts that then President Clinton had expressed horror at how a foreign nation of people was "quickly disappearing because other people were taking their names away...and so we went to war."<sup>49</sup> She focuses on U.S. foreign policy and the ways in which social justice is exported, but has yet to reconcile or acknowledge its lack within US national borders:

[Pres. Clinton]...was so upset at the loss of names...He was so upset that he had to send bombers because there was a nation losing its identity, there were people who could no longer claim the land, there were names that could no longer be said. And so I'm standing here nameless. My name was taken away a long time ago...And words that I want to say, but everything's a little broken, a little fractured.<sup>50</sup>

Rodríguez's socio-political critique indexes the unapologetic irony between U.S. foreign and domestic policy, more importantly, it elaborates how peoples native to this continent have undergone the same travestied processes that now incite indignation and military action. Rodríguez fortifies this corollary once more as she yokes the processes of undemocratic action to the history of Catholicism's strictures: "Strangers came up [to indigenous populations] and they said . . .kneel down and open your mouth, and stick out your tongue."<sup>51</sup> She demonstrates this posture by closing her eyes and producing her tongue and then continues her narrative: "And they put that little piece of bread there on our tongue, and we had no tongue, and we had no names, and we had no land, and we had no rights."<sup>52</sup> The ability to connect differentiating sign-systems of power, break apart their structures, reassemble them through their own fortifications, in the stead of egalitarian democratic ends, requires the differential movement of one's consciousness, the last technology of Sandoval's rubric used to cast off oppression and move towards emancipation. Rodríguez's transcoding of signifying processes

in both dominant ideological constructions and in its attendant sub-systems, such as the exclusionary practices of art production or xenophobic nationalism, insists on a decolonization and positions her as a practitioner of the methodology of the oppressed.

As Rodríguez recedes from her altar at her story's end, she leaves the audience with a final, cautionary thought: "I just came here to break a few things today. Tenga cuidado [take care], 'cause there's a lot of broken things in your path."<sup>53</sup> Her performance practice has broken many things—the strictures of representational economies, the figuration of ritual traditions, the aesthetics of Chicana art practice, and the tenets of colonization. Here, in the work of the oppressed's methodology and a Chicana indigenous performative of memory, breaking things is not to render them inoperable, but rather, a transgressive act, a creative act, a redressive act, which push through and beyond an object's, an ideology's, and a colonial consciousness's delimitations. And, this breach is the burden of Rodríguez's story for Chicana/os.



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ward Churchill, "I am Indigenist: Notes on the Ideology of the Fourth World," in *Struggle for the Land* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1993): 403-451.

<sup>2</sup> Amit S. Rai, "'Thus Spake the Subaltern': Postcolonial Criticism and the Scene of Desire," in *The Psychoanalysis of Race*, ed. Christopher Lane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 91-119.

<sup>3</sup> Amalia Mesa-Bains, "The Language of the Feminine Gender and Representation Among Chicana and Latina Artists," *Contemporary Art by Women of Color*, Exhibition Catalogue (San Antonio: The Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center and the Instituto Cultural Mexicano, 1990): 11. The title of Rodríguez's installation, "Red Roots/Black Roots/Earth(Tree of Life)," is an important point of entry into her work. The title's first component, "Red Roots" symbolically identifies the pre-conquest identity of Chicana/os, namely the element of Indian origin in Chicana/os' cultural and corporeal make-up. Modulation from the vibrancy of "Red" to the withering of "Black" roots linguistically charts the historical and cultural loss of the Americas' indigenous peoples accomplished through invasion and European contact. In the phrase's final unit, "Earth (Tree of Life)," Native origin is intimately connected to loss of land or earth. The earth holds the memory of both indigenous origin and its death in the effacement of colonialism—which produces the title's final turn: a Tree of Life that grows from

this remembering earth's historical ground. In effect, the title creates a journey of historical remembrance and gestures towards recovery suggesting Chicana/os' Indian origin is regenerative but cannot be reinvented in any facile or affirmative sense without also taking into account the devastation which must accompany the act of remembering. Moreover, the tripartite title ties together life's continuance with land and the land's survival with human life.

<sup>4</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 75.

<sup>5</sup> Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, "Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility," in *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* (Los Angeles: UCLA Wright Art Gallery, 1991): 155.

<sup>6</sup> This is demonstrated in the two terms repeated use, most explicitly in the groundbreaking exhibition *CARA, Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* at UCLA.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 77.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that in her thesis Hartman is addressing black slavery in 19th century America. However, her concepts, I argue, readily describe the condition of a parallel history, that of Chicana/os and Mexican Indians. In this, I am suggesting that implicit and explicit resonances exist between these two "histories that hurt." Enslavement extended to Native peoples in the Americas and was wrought from racial hierarchy, as is the case of African slavery. While the extenuating circumstances that describe these two histories often diverge radically, the places where they cross-cut and intersect must be examined and discussed. In this, I am indebted to the fastidious theoretical labor on black slavery that richly informs my own thinking.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>12</sup> The town of Izúcar de Matamoros, Mexico is particularly renowned as an early center for crafting Trees of Life in Mexico. A web feature on Izúcar features this history: "Famous 'árboles de la vida' have been created for centuries in Izúcar [Mexico]. It is believed, according to artist craftsman Francisco Flores [a leading family of the craft in Izúcar], that they bring good fortune and prosperity to the family that possesses one of them. 'People pray to God for miracles, however the candlestick itself is a miracle. Many years ago, people (specially [sic] the godfather in a wedding) began to give a candlestick to the newly wed, if the couple did not have one of them in their home they had misfortune in everything they did; their land did not produce any crops, they could not have and raise any children, their cattle was not good enough and their marriage was a failure. However, if they had a candlestick or tree of life, their land produced enough crops to live in abundance, they had many children, and a very happy life together. So the candlestick became the synonym of life, and people began to call the candlestick 'árbol de la vida' tree of life, since it offers you the miracle to live healthy, rich and happy', says artist craftsman Francisco Flores." "Izúcar de Matamoros El Árbol de la Vida," Magic Mexico, online. [http://www.digiserve.com/magicmex/cand\\_history.html](http://www.digiserve.com/magicmex/cand_history.html) [Accessed 12 March 2001].

<sup>13</sup> The mexicana/o idiom of the Tree of Life usually features a highly stylized, leaved tree, with flora, sometimes birds, and prominent representations of the bodies of Adam and Eve with the Garden of Eden's serpent placed between them.

\* Links in resources page may no longer be active.

<sup>14</sup> The ideas I employ here owe their origin to the ideas contained in José Muñoz's theoretical work in "The Autoethnographic Performance: Reading Richard Fung's Queer Hybridity," *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 80.

<sup>15</sup> Celia Herrera Rodríguez, "Artists' Biographies and Statements," *Imágenes e Historias/Images and Histories: Chicana Altar-Inspired Art* (exhibition catalogue), ed. Constance Cortez (Medford: Tufts University Gallery, 1999): 65.

<sup>16</sup> Celia Herrera Rodríguez, "Artists' Biographies and Statements," 65. As Rodríguez observes: "In the Lakota tradition, the tree is life sacrificed so that we may offer ourselves, our prayers. . . .The Mexican stories that survive tell of life rising up from the underground river, flowing through the roots of the great Tree of Life and spilling out into the world. And in ancient Greece, tree next to stream meant 'sacred place.'"

<sup>17</sup> *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*, as qtd. in N. Scott Momaday's, "To Save a Great Vision," *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997): 21-27.

<sup>18</sup> Momaday, *Black Elk Speaks*, 21-27.

<sup>19</sup> Celia Rodríguez, "Artists' Biographies and Statements," 65.

<sup>20</sup> Peggy Phelan, "The ontology of performance," *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Amalia Mesa-Bains, "Spiritual Visions in Contemporary Art," in *Imágenes e Historias/Images and Histories: Chicana Altar-inspired Art* (exhibition catalogue), Constance Cortez, ed., (Medford: Tufts University Gallery, 1999, 1-10): 8.

<sup>23</sup> Chéla Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>25</sup> Rodríguez' s installation has stood alone for exhibition in various galleries and museums. However, upon occasion Rodríguez supplements the installation with the performance of *Cositas Quebradas*.

<sup>26</sup> Roselee Goldberg, *Performance; Live Art from 1909 to the Present* (London: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 1979): 9.

<sup>27</sup> Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art*, 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Coco Fusco, "Introduction: Latin American Performance and the Reconquista of Civil Space," in *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, Coco Fusco, ed. (London: Routledge, 2000). *Corpus Delecti* is a first time gathering of critical writings on the work of Latinos in the Americas performance work.

<sup>30</sup> Fusco, "Introduction," 7.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.



32 Ibid., 8.

33 Ibid., 9.

34 Ibid.

35 Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*, 3.

37 Ibid., 23.

38 Ibid., 25.

39 Ibid., 3.

40 Ibid., 15-16.

41 To see this process, we must unyoke our view of the performer. The use of the term “performance” engenders in a Western orientation to the world certain attitudes towards “liveness.” We have been encouraged to view communication between performer (actor) and spectator as essentially false. The spectator recognizes yet engages in the artifice that they witness, cognizant that they feed into a unique temporal-spatial world of fiction where suspense, reversals, and deferrals are intended to be decoded within the event. In Momaday’s indigenous epistemology, creating conventions to mediate between fact and fiction does not occur in storytelling because of fundamental differing conceptions of how truth and knowledge is dispersed and obtained in one’s experience of the living world.

42 Rodríguez, interview by author, tape recording, Oakland, CA, 23 November 2000. *Cositas Quebradas* was first performed at Tufts University Gallery and geared towards a Bostonian audience.

43 Celia Rodríguez, *Cositas Quebradas*, de Saisset Museum, Santa Clara University, April 2000.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 111.

47 Ibid., 114.

48 Ibid., 110.

49 Rodríguez, interview.

50 Ibid., 112.

46 Celia Rodríguez, *Cositas Quebradas*.

47 Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*, 3.

48 Celia Rodríguez, *Cositas Quebradas*.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

CHAPTER  
FIFTEEN



*Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr.*  
*Musica Tejana:*  
*More Than Conjuntos and Orquestas*

INTRODUCTION

Manuel Pena has argued that *musica tejana* is comprised of two major musical ensembles and their styles, the conjunto and the orquesta.<sup>1</sup> These are not the only ones in the community. Others have formed and become dominant at different historical periods in the 20th century. The only ensemble that has survived during this century, however, has been the conjunto.

CONJUNTO: TRADITIONAL AND PROGRESSIVE

The conjunto originated on both sides of the border and began as a two-person outfit in the 1920s, one played the accordion and the other played a string instrument. Its repertoire, initially, was quite broad and included a host of traditional dances and songs popular throughout

Mexico. The conjunto expanded to four persons and four instruments in the post-WWII period. Two distinct styles also emerged during the period after the 1940s- the norteño and the Tejano. By the late 1950s, the conjunto was comprised of the accordion, the bajo sexto, the bass guitar, and the drums.

From mid-century until 1973, there was no significant change in its instrumentation. This changed in the latter year when Roberto Pulido y Los Clasicos added two saxophones, i.e., los pitos (the horns), to the ensemble and created what later would be known as the progressive conjunto. This type of conjunto however was not very popular until 1990 when Emilio added a synthesizer. His addition of the synthesizer initiated a new phase of popularity with the “modernized” progressive conjunto ensemble.

The increased popularity of Emilio led to the resurgence of the traditional conjunto but with some minor changes in its instrumentation and repertoire. Both types of conjunto styles, the norteño and the Tejano, were revived. Three Tejano conjuntos- Los Palominos, Jaime y Los Chamacos, and the Hometown Boys- led the revival in the first part of the 1990s. Michael Salgado, Intocable, and Limite initiated the second and more popular wave of conjunto music during the latter part of the decade. These groups, unlike the first three played in the norteño style. Most of the new conjunto groups were different in two distinct ways from those of the past. First, they increased the number of instruments in the traditional conjunto ensemble. Tejano groups generally added the keyboards, whereas norteño conjuntos incorporated a percussive instrument such as a conga or timbales. These new instruments, in most cases, were only used for special types of songs, usually cumbias.<sup>2</sup> Second, Tejano and norteño conjuntos changed the traditional core of this music and increased the percentage of cumbias and baladas in their repertoire.

Although the conjunto’s popularity fluctuated during the decades—it was extremely high in the years from the 1920s to the 1960s, quite low in the 1970s and 1980s, and on the increase in the 1990s— the

ensemble has not faded from public view. Since its emergence in the Tejano community, the conjunto has been and, continues to be, an integral and dynamic aspect of the community's cultural life.

#### THE VOCAL TRADITION

In addition to the traditional and progressive conjunto, there have been at least four other ensembles with different degrees of popularity over the years—the vocal tradition of the solistas and the duets, the orquestas, the grupos, and the Chicano country bands. The vocal singing tradition, unlike the others, was sit-down music. Those who recorded in this tradition, for the most part, did not play dance music.

The vocal tradition was comprised of one, two, or on occasion, three singers who were backed up initially by a string instrument and then an accordion. The vast majority of vocal singers sang corridos, canciones mejicanas, and a host of other songs. During the 1920s and 1930s, all the vocalists, with one minor exception, were males. Lydia Mendoza was the exception. In the post-World War II era, females became an important force in this type of ensemble and set the template for the emergence and growth of the orquestas and conjuntos in the state. Other changes in addition to the increased role of women were made to the vocal singing tradition during the post-World War II era. Solistas and duets went beyond the traditional guitar accompaniment and were now accompanied in most cases by a conjunto or an orquesta. In a few cases, a mariachi ensemble was used as a backup. The vocal tradition was the most popular form of music in the Tejano community prior to World War II. During the 1950s, it declined in popularity because of its incorporation into instrumental dance music. Although a few individuals continued singing as solistas or in duets, vocal singing disappeared as a viable musical tradition after the 1950s. The repertoire of these vocalists continued to be varied but stayed within the realm of baladas and rancheras Tejanas.

The ensemble most in competition with conjuntos after the Second World War was the orquesta. In the early part of the 20th century, three types of orquestas existed—the orquestas típicas, the orquestas de cuerda, and the orquestas de pitos (bandas). The first two were extremely popular. Bandas, on the other hand, were tolerated but not embraced. Orquestas típicas were usually larger than orquestas de cuerda. The former used a large number of folk and/or classical string instruments such as mandolins, tololoches, harps, guitars, violins, cellos, and contrabass. Some of them also used flutes, oboes, and perhaps a cornet or two. They also performed a remarkable variety of dance music for all social classes and for all occasions. Paso dobles, danzas, one-steps, waltzes, mazurkas, huapangos, polkas, and schottishes were among the most popular dances that they performed.<sup>3</sup> The latter performed similar types of songs and dances but they usually although not always contained fewer instruments.

The orquestas típicas and de cuerda eventually declined in popularity and were replaced by la orquesta moderna. Unlike the pre-World War II orquestas, the modern ones had new instruments and a changed repertoire. Many of the string instruments such as violins, mandolins, and Hawaiian guitars were replaced by wind-based ones especially saxophones, trumpets, and trombones. Orquesta musicians also added new dance tunes such as cha-cha-chas, danzones, boleros, and fox trots. In the mid-1960s, the new generation of Tejano musicians modified the instrumentation and repertoire of what now was the older orquesta ensemble. They streamlined the brass section of these older orquestas and added the organ. They also eliminated most of the Latin American and Caribbean dance tunes but added cumbias as well as new American tunes to the musical mix. The result was the creation of a new sound that came to be known as la Onda Chicana. Despite its increased popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, the orquesta, as a viable musical tradition, disappeared by the early 1980s because of changing musical tastes and other factors. It was replaced by the grupo.

The grupo Tejano emerged in the early 1960s and increased in popularity during the following decade. This type of musical group emphasized the sounds of the keyboard. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the organ was the primary instrument used to make this music. By the latter part of the decade, the synthesizer assumed this central role. These groups also changed the musical repertoire. They played less rancheras and more cumbias, baladas, and country tunes. They also played the new American tunes popular at that time such as funk, soul, disco, rock, rap, and pop. The keyboard-driven grupos competed with the orquestas and other non-Tejano musical styles for dominance in the 1970s and won out during the 1980s. They became so popular that they effectively wiped out all the orquestas. In the early 1990s progressive conjuntos such as Emilio y Rio Band and La Tropa F increased in popularity and competed with grupos for fans. The primary response of grupos was to selectively add the accordion. Progressive conjuntos in turn also adjusted their music by using the synthesizer more extensively in their music. By the latter part of the 1990s, grupos and progressive conjuntos sounded very much alike. Few could distinguish between the grupo sounds of Mazz, La Mafia, or Jennifer y Los Jetz and the progressive conjunto music of Emilio, Elida y Avante, and Bobby Pulido. Whether grupos and progressive conjuntos survive as distinct ensembles into the next millennium depends on many factors including the emergence of new groups with a different instrumental mix and with fresh approaches to playing musica Tejana. By the end of 1999, no such groups were on the horizon.<sup>4</sup> In early 2000, however, a new group emerged on the Tejano music scene and won several major awards at the TMA, including Most Promising Band, Album of the Year (Group) ["Amor, Familia y Respeto"], Showband del Año (Showband of the year), and Tejano Crossover Song (Azucar).<sup>5</sup> This group, known as the Kumbia Kings, was the creation of A. B. Quintanilla, Selena's brother. Unlike other Tejano groups, it did not play rancheras. Its repertoire was comprised of cumbias, ballads, oldies (mostly rhythm and blues), and hip-hop style dance music. The Kumbia Kings was modeled after both

American hip-hop and "boy bands" and utilized three and four-part harmonies in their songs.<sup>6</sup> Only time will tell whether the Kumbia Kings is the wave of the future of *musica Tejana* or only a passing fad.<sup>7</sup>

#### CHICANO COUNTRY BANDS

The final ensemble was the Chicano country band, a development unique to *musica Tejana* in general and border music in particular. Chicano country bands had at least three general characteristics. First, they were small and depended on two important instruments for their sound— a violin and a steel guitar. Second, the vast majority of vocalists sang with a country twang. Third, these bands played traditional country music and traditional Mexican music but in their own style. For the most part, they “Mexicanized” traditional country music and “countrified” traditional Mexican songs such as “Los Laureles” or “Las Margaritas.” The former was done by singing the lyrics in Spanish or bilingually, the latter by playing Mexican tunes with these instruments and by singing them with a country twang.

Little is known about the Chicano country bands or where they originated. Although the earliest recording of country music by a Tejano artist<sup>8</sup> is in 1949, the country twang and the use of the violin and steel guitar in these songs probably originated sometime in the 1950s or 1960s along the lower Rio Grande Valley. These types of group probably became popular in the following two decades.<sup>9</sup> In the 1970s, Country Roland and several others had a significant impact on Tejano groups. Among those most impacted by Chicano country bands were Rudy Tee Gonzales y Sus Reno Bops, Snowball & Co., Roberto Pulido y Los Clasicos, and Mazz.<sup>10</sup>

#### TRADITIONAL YET MODERN

In addition to being comprised of several distinct musical aggregations or ensembles *musica Tejana* also had other essential elements. Of primary importance was that it was traditional yet “modern.” First, *musica Tejana* was and continues to be rooted in Mexican musical traditions. In the

early part of the 20th century, it was based on the diverse musical dance steps popular in Mexico- polkas, schotises, mazurkas, redovas, vales, one-steps, two-steps, huapangos and others. In the post-World War II period, the musical repertoire narrowed significantly so that it was limited mostly to the polka and the ranchera tejana, that is, the polka with lyrics. Although Tejano groups played additional tunes such as baladas, huapangos, and vales, the majority of them emphasized music with a polka beat. In the 1980s and 1990s, the repertoire again was modified to include more cumbias, baladas, and country tunes.<sup>11</sup> Despite its expansion, the musical repertoire of the 1990s was still less diverse than the one in the early decades of the 20th century.<sup>12</sup>

The songs played by Tejano groups likewise were rooted in Mexican musical traditions. The primary ones in the repertoire were canciones tipicas and canciones romanticas. On occasion, Tejano groups would record corridos. For the most part, however, Mexican groups appealing to a Mexican immigrant audience, not Tejano artists, recorded corridos.

Second, although rooted in Mexican tradition musica Tejana received constant influences from the United States. Throughout the decades, for instance, African American musical styles such as jazz, rhythm and blues, soul, funk, rap, and hip-hop provided some of the rhythms that Tejano musicians selectively incorporated into this music. Mainstream forms of American music including big band tunes, rock, country, dance, disco, and pop also influenced musica Tejana. In some cases, Tejano musicians incorporated the instrumentation used by American groups. This is true, for instance, of the wind-based and brass instruments used by the big bands in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s or of organs and rhythm guitars used by rock groups during the 1960s. In most cases, Tejano groups did not imitate the styles popular in the United States, as did Mexican origin musicians in other parts of the country.<sup>13</sup> Instead they recorded “jazz-influenced” rancheras, “rock-driven” baladas, “big band-style” polkas, or “pop” cumbias. In those specific cases where English musical forms were recorded, e.g., fox trots or rock ‘n’ roll, the lyrics usually were in Spanish. Musica Tejana thus remained rooted in tradition but consistently modernized over the years.



Musica Tejana also was influenced by other musical cultures from Latin America and the Caribbean. Tejano musicians selectively adopted some of the particular dance forms and song types popular in these Spanish-speaking countries. In the post-World War II era, for instance, Tejano musicians, especially those involved with the orquestas, added canciones románticas from Mexico and Caribbean tunes such as mambos, cha-cha-chas, danzones, and boleros to the musical repertoire. In the post-1960 period, many of them added cumbias. In the last decade, tejanos have begun to record the international sounds of mariachi music, musica romántica, and rock en español.

One final note pertaining to this music. It continued to be rooted in another Mexican tradition, the Spanish language. Some of the songs reflected the bilingual tradition of the Mexican origin population living in the United States but most of them were sung in Spanish.

#### MUSICA TEJANA AND TEJANO LIFE

Finally, musica Tejana was a particular form of border music developed by Tejanos for Tejanos. Because it was an indigenous creation, this music reflected the complexity of Tejano life. More specifically, it expressed and reflected the historical experiences, internal differences, and ethnic identity of the Mexican origin population residing in Texas. Through its forms and lyrics, it reflected the community's social subordination and its internal diversification. Musical ensembles, for instance, reflected the emerging social differentiation of the Tejano community. The orquestas and grupos reflected the rise of the Tejano middle class whereas the conjunto and the progressive conjunto reflected a working class aesthetic. Vocal music, on the other hand, expressed the social subordination of the Mexican origin population in Texas, the economic upheavals experienced by Mejicanos, the inter-ethnic conflict between Anglos and Mexicans, and the patriarchal foundation of Tejano culture.<sup>14</sup>

More importantly, this music affirmed and reinforced the distinct identity of the Mexican origin population born or raised in Texas and

compelled to live out the contradictions of being an ethnic American. *Musica Tejana*, in this case, was an act of cultural affirmation by the Tejano population. Through this music the community expressed its own aspirations, feelings and sentiments about being “mejicano” in a society that consistently denied them their language, culture, and dignity.<sup>15</sup> In other words, this music expressed the distinctive manner in which this particular ethnic group adjusted itself to living in a particular region of the United States and on the border of several different cultural fronts— the Tejano and the Anglo, the American and the Mexican, and, more recently, the national and the international. Although the geographical boundaries have changed in the last dozen years, *musica Tejana* continues to be border music for a border people.

#### CONCLUSION

*Musica Tejana* then was more than simply corridos and conjuntos. It was and continues to be comprised of several musical ensembles with distinct reportorial and stylistic features. *Musica Tejana* also is a diverse and complex set of musical forms and styles that has changed over time. For most of the 20th century it experienced significant changes and went from a regional music style to an international one. It also underwent several musical transformations as noted above. Despite these changes, *musica Tejana* remained rooted in Mexican culture and in the Spanish language. In other words, it remained culturally meaningful to Tejanos. The music, as Pena has noted elsewhere, retained “its capacity to communicate deeply felt aesthetic and other social meanings.”<sup>16</sup> Throughout the entire century Tejanos of all ages and from different parts of the state and country strongly identified with the various forms of *musica Tejana* because it reflected their ideals, sentiments, and desires. It was and continues to be, as Los Garcia Brothers, one of the rising conjuntos of the 21st century, put it recently, “*nuestra musica (our music)*.”<sup>17</sup>



## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Manuel Pena, *Musica Tejana* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 1999), p. XI.
- <sup>2</sup> Albert Zamora y Talento, a conjunto from Corpus Christi, for example, added a keyboard in the mid-1990s. This keyboard however is only used for a limited number of songs. For a brief history of this group see Guadalupe San Miguel, "Albert Zamora y Talento: Leading the Pack," *Tejano Times*, September 10-24, 1997, p. 4.
- <sup>3</sup> For a brief overview of these early orquestas see *Mexican American Border Music, Vol. 4: Orquestas Tipicas: The First Recordings, 1926-1938*, Arhoolie, CD7017, 1996, and *Mexican American Border Music, Volume 5: Orquestas de Cuerdas: The End of a Tradition, 1926-1938*, Arhoolie, CD4984, 1996.
- <sup>4</sup> One type of ensemble that has not been tried in the contemporary period is a guitar-driven group. These types of groups are becoming increasingly popular as indicated by the emergence of "rock en espanol." However, none of these recent groups, including Chris Perez, former guitar player from Selena y Los Dinos, are playing musica tejana. For an example of one group that occasionally used the guitar as a lead instrument in rancheras during the early 1980s see La Movida, *Es Amor*, Hacienda Classics, SC206-4, 1997. Ricky Smith was the lead guitarist for this group. La Movida disbanded sometime during the mid or late 1980s. In the late 1990s, it re-grouped but without Ricky Smith.
- <sup>5</sup> Vanessa A. Conner and J. Carlos Silva, "Tejano Music Awards Shines Over the Lone Star State," *!Que Onda! Houston*, Martes 14 de Marzo del 2000, 14.
- <sup>6</sup> "Boy bands" were generally comprised of four or five young males who sang various types of pop and rhythm and blues songs in three or four-part harmonies. One of the original "boy bands" was the Philadelphia-based quartet Boys II Men. For a brief history of this group and a review of their 2000 CD see Jake McKim, "Boys II Men's latest effort reaffirms group's talent," *The Daily Cougar* (University of Houston), October 23, 2000, 9.
- <sup>7</sup> "Kumbia Kings: New Dimensions with No Limits in the Latin Scene," *Tejano Times*, September 1998, 1; "Los Kumbia Kings, "Down with the Kings," *Tejano Times*, September 1998, 5.
- <sup>8</sup> In this year, Johnny Herrera, from Corpus Christi, recorded the country music standard "Jealous Heart" in English and in Spanish for the Melco label. Two years later, he recorded the same song as "Corazon Celoso" for Decca Records. Herrera's recording was done with saxophones, trumpets, and the accordion, not the traditional violin and steel guitar of the later Chicano country groups. Joe Nick Patoski, *Selena: Como La Flor* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 23.
- <sup>9</sup> For a sampling of this music see the following LPs: Country Roland, *Las Margaritas*, Falcon, ARVLP-1057, 1979; Country Roland Band, *Rancho Grande*, Falcon, ARVLP-1052, 1978; Country Mingo, *The Outlaw*, Falcon, FLP-5041, 1980; The Texas Country Band, *Valle de Palmas*, Falcon, ARVLP-1065, 1980; Country Roland, Jr. *Mucho Macho*, Falcon, ARVLP-1064, 1980; *Various Artists, The Best of Chicano Country, Vol. 2*, Falcon, ARVLP-1075, 1982.

<sup>10</sup> For a sampling of the country music recorded by these artists see Rudy Tee Gonzales y Sus Reno Bops, *Country*, Teardrop, TD-2030, (ca. 1972); Snowball & Co., *Snowball & Co.*, Fireball, FLP-1001, n.d. (see especially “Just Because,” a Chicano country ballad); Roberto Pulido, in Various Artists, *The Best of Chicano Country*, Vol. 2, Falcon, ARVLP-1075, 1982; and Mazz, *Perfect 10*, Cara, CA-10B, 1977. Mazz recorded three country songs in their first album in 1977, “Algo Bonito,” (Something Pretty) “El, (He)” and “Laura Ya No Vive Aqui” (Laura Doesn’t Live Here Anymore). Unlike other Tejano artists, Mazz abandoned the use of the steel guitar and violin and played these songs using the synthesizer and rhythm guitar as its primary instruments.

<sup>11</sup> Two-steps are usually associated with American country music but they have been an integral part of musica tejana since the early decades of the 20th century. For further elaboration see chapters two, four, and five of Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr.’s *Tejano Proud: Tex-Mex Music in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>12</sup> Although the repertoire expanded during the 1990s, the number of rancheras declined. In late 1999 and early 2000, at least two popular groups, Jennifer y Los Jetz and Los Kumbia Kings, recorded a CD without any rancheras in them. It is too early yet to see if this is a trend or only a coincidence. See Jennifer y Los Jetz, *Besame y Abrasame*, EMI Latin, 2000 and Los Kumbia Kings, *Amor, Familia, y Respeto*, EMI Latin, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> See David Reyes and Tom Waldman, *Land of a Thousand Dances: Chicano rock n Roll from Southern California* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1998) and Steven Loza, *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> For further elaboration of how musica tejana reflected the community’s social subordination and its social differentiation see Pena, 1999, especially chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>15</sup> Thaddeus Herrick, “Go Tejano,” *Houston Chronicle*, February 9, 1995, p. 1C.

<sup>16</sup> Pena, 1999, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Los Garcia Brothers, *Cuatro Paredes*, ZAZ Records, 1998 (liner notes).

SECTION  
SIX



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*Sexuality*



CHAPTER  
SIXTEEN



*Elizabeth Rodriguez Kessler*  
*Searching for Sexual Identity in*  
*a Homophobic Society:*  
*Hunger of Memory and Pocho*

To begin speaking of sexual identity, whether heterosexual or homosexual, assumes speaker and listener alike share the same definitions. This, however, is not always the case, and because of this, we must formulate a definition that differentiates the gay Latino from the gay in the dominant society, create a working literary framework that standardizes the reading of the gay characters in Chicano literature, and use Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* and Antonio Villarreal's *Pocho* to test the framework and show how each protagonist must fit into two homophobic cultures.

Because of the heterocentric nature of society, normative heterosexuality is the measure by which individuals determine gender. Thus, to assume one's gender as a woman or a man automatically "means to have entered already into a heterosexual relationship of subordination" (Butler, Preface 1999 xiii). Consequently, compulsory heterosexuality orders the genders and creates a homophobic attitude, "maintaining that men

who are men will be straight, [and] women who are women will be straight” (MacKinnon cited in Butler, Preface 1999 xiii). What continues to come into question is the definition of these terms. In the rhetoric of the heterosexist society, a male and female are those individuals who possess the biological apparatus to qualify as male or female. Further evidence of gender, however, comes from behavior, what Judith Butler refers to as both anticipatory and performative (Preface 1999 xiv, xv). If one anticipates an object to have a certain meaning, to have an “internal essence” (Preface 1999 xv), then that object becomes what the viewer expects. That object then maintains its essence or identity based on a “sustained set of acts”; for gender that means, the acts are “posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (Preface 1999 xv). Thus, for us to see an individual whose external characteristics signify masculinity, we, who are shaped by normative heterosexuality, expect the individual to act in certain masculine-associated ways. Hence heterosexual identity is established and maintained.

Confusion, however, arises when the behavior, appearance, or other “masculine” characteristics are subverted by non-masculine behavior, dress and so forth by one who is assumed to be male when gender does not validate and reflect sexuality. Does this individual now qualify as homosexual, considering that he has transgressed against the norm? To assume so leads to binary thinking and fosters the belief in a “fixed essence,” that sexual individuation cannot be constructed beyond the norm without moving to a totally antithetical polarity: homosexuality (Padgug qtd. in Halperin 420). To return to Butler, we discover that she adheres to Nietzsche’s assertion that “‘there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; the doer is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything’” (*Gender* 33), thus throwing us back to performativity for gender identity.

In considering the assumption that normative heterosexuality defines gender in the dominant society, we must look at the Mexican/Mexican-American community and discover that while the premise is accurate, gender is defined differently in the Mexican-American society. As she ends her Preface (1999), Butler asserts that “the sexualization of racial

gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once" (xvi), and I contend that definition provides a missing lens that clarifies Mexican-American gender construction for men. The Latino community's reliance on displays of machismo—whether negative or positive—serve to reinforce the special bonds men create with other men, bonds that serve to validate their hegemonic heterosexist views that value sexual prowess in men, and bonds that ironically display an emotional, homosocial attachment to one another. On the other hand, Stephen Murray found that closeted gay Mexicanos frequent the straight bars in the *barrios* to find other Spanish-speaking gay men as "sexual partners" (259). Joseph Carrier, however, identifies these men specifically as "straight Latino males" ("Miguel" 203). In a homosocial atmosphere found in the *cantinas*, there are no homoerotic suggestions or relationships, but the environment does display an important emotional kinship that is easily felt and experienced among the men. In fact, the display of affection is not uncommon as men embrace other men in *un abrazo* or a very manly hug devoid of all erotic overtones. The men in this scenario are neither homosexual nor gay; they are *macho*, and they are usually men from traditional Mexican or Mexican-American households.

Carrier's designation of "straight" is somewhat culturally problematic. In the Eurocentric dominant society, for an individual to choose as sexual object someone who is from his or her biologically marked sexual group is to subvert the heterosexual activity expected of males and females and not comply with being "straight." This, however, is not so in the Latino community. To determine sexual identity, two criteria must be met: appearance and performance. Similar to Butler's discussion of anticipatory behavior, the Latino community overlooks the biological construction of a male to determine his sexual identity but focuses on the physical signs of machismo. Unlike the Anglo homosexual/gay, the Mexicano/Mexican-American who experiences same-sex sexual desires and performs same-sex sexual activity is not automatically labeled as homosexual even if his activities are known. Thus, the definition of being a heterosexual must come from the



culture. In the more closely traditional Mexican-American community, if the male appears macho, that is, to exude virility and a sense of physical prowess, he is clearly heterosexual. If, however, the male is effeminate, he is automatically seen as a *maricon* even if his sexual performativity is heterosexual. If the macho, however, practices the assertive, dominant role, “*el activo*,” in a same-sex sexual encounter (excluding oral sex), he is still seen as *un macho*, *un hombre*, a male who is unmarked as homosexual. However, preference for the submissive position, “*el pasivo*,” in sexual activity identifies the partner as *joto/maricon*. The Latino sexual system “highlights sexual aim—the act one wants to perform with the person toward whom sexual activity is directed—and gives only secondary importance to the person’s gender or biological sex” (Almaguer 256). While a stigma falls on all homosexual males in the dominant culture, being stigmatized “does not equally adhere to both partners” (257) in the Latino culture. In the latter, *el pasivo* or the male assuming the feminine role is stigmatized while *el activo* “is not stigmatized at all, and, moreover, no clear category exists in the popular language to classify him” (Lancaster qtd. in Almaguer 257).

Because the Chicano/Mexican-American male is socialized within a Mexican/ Mexican-American culture that perpetuates the images of *machismo* and *maricon*, and because all Mexican/Mexican-American males are taught the importance of being “men”/macho, sexual identity that rejects normative heterosexuality is a threat to individual and community alike. Thus, in determining a young man’s sexual identity, he must weigh not only the consequences administered by his own culture, family, religion, and friends, but he must also recognize that he will also be doubly discriminated against in the dominant society: first for his race and second for his sexuality. To make the decision to admit even to himself that he is gay is to take a leap into feelings of conflict and guilt. Currently, there are three classic Mexican-American gay authors, Richard Rodriguez, John Rechy, and Arturo Islas, who have written about the problems inherent in the culture that gay men, and in some cases lesbians, must face when they choose to remain in their community. Accommodations for the behavior of these men must be made within a

framework for same-sex sexual activities based on cultural standards and values so as to clarify the motivation for role preference in sexual activity and even preference of sex act. It is within the Latino culture or in consideration of the Latino culture's impact on men who experience same-sex desires and attractions that a paradigm is needed. By creating this paradigm, queer will continue to resist normalization—as the terms indicate—but conditions and cultural constraints will prove to be fairly consistent. While theoretical models that conceptualize "identity formation and development" among members of ethnic minority groups have been constructed, they have been from psychological and sociological perspectives (Morales 228). I propose the following framework, composed of four major divisions that can be applied to homosexual behavior in Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicano males as described in Chicana and Chicano literature.

First, if the literature that includes references to homosexual Latinos is set in traditional communities that are predominantly inhabited by Mexicans/ Mexican-Americans who practice traditional values and standards, the reaction from those who are openly heterosexual and culturally loyal will be expressed in one or more of the following attitudes: overt or subtle denial of the existence of homosexuality; an ignoring of the presence of homosexuality/homosexuals; resentment, disgust, disdain, or ridicule, especially from family members of the individual and more so if the individual's behavior affects the family; and finally, ostracism of the individual from the family or circle of friends caused by fear, shame, or embarrassment on the part of the heterosexuals. Two excellent examples are *Migrant Souls* and *Pocho*.

Second, if the literature that includes reference to the homosexual Latino is set in traditional communities that are predominantly inhabited by Mexicans/Mexican-Americans, the reactions from those who are *less* traditionally Mexican/Mexican-American and more acculturated to the dominant society will be expressed in one or more of the following attitudes: open and honest acceptance of the individual; quiet acceptance of and empathy with the individual; or

defense of the individual's right to choose same-sex relationships. Again *Migrant Souls* is important here.

Third, if the literature that includes reference to homosexual Latinos is set in primarily American locales, the reaction from the heterosexual Latinos will be a tacit acceptance if it is in keeping with the attitude surrounding them, or it could be a conformity to the attitude displayed by others around them. Gay bashing in the form of brutality is not displayed by heterosexual Latinos in the literature. *City of Night* could be used here as reference.

Fourth, the Latino who experiences same-sex sexual desires and/or indulges in homosexual behavior appears in the literature in one or more of the following ways: questioning his heterosexual identity, experiencing guilt or fear of discovery; relocating; practicing—openly or covertly—same-sex sexual activities; experiencing nostalgia for a comforting setting; experiencing disillusionment with his culture and/or his family; selecting American object choices exclusively or Latino object-choices; frequenting bars that serve exclusively straight men or predominantly Anglo gays; abusing drugs and alcohol; experiencing child abuse; preferring the active or the passive role almost exclusively if he is a traditional Mexican or Mexican-American but finding freedom to experiment in roles and forms of sexual fulfillment other than sexual intercourse if he is more acculturated. *City of Night*, *Migrant Souls*, and *Hunger of Memory* can fit into this division.

To test these elements, I will use *Pocho* and *Hunger of Memory* primarily. Although Villarreal's young character, Richard Rubio, becomes intrigued by the gay community, and he, like Richard Rodriguez must confront his own same-sex sexual attractions and identify his sexual identity. *Pocho* is a novel, which emphatically reinforces not only Juan Rubio's cultural loyalty but also his role as *Macho*. Both of these qualities contribute to his homophobia, and he clearly conveys his attitude to Richard as he tells his son about an acquaintance who "was one of 'those others'" (Villarreal 168). That Richard understands that "'They have their place'" (168) not only surprises his father but reveals that Richard diverges from his father's

homophobic attitude and has a quiet acceptance of men with same-sex sexual behavior. Although Juan does not attempt to change his son's attitude, he forthrightly admits that he had been afraid that Richard had "become like that . . ." and if he had, "I thought I would strangle you with my own hands, and to do that would mean that I would destroy myself . . ." (168). This rejection of his son, including committing an act of violence if Richard had self-disclosed a same-sex sexual tendency is consistent with a *Macho* who has no difficulty resorting to violence when a family member diverges from the traditional way of life and is perceived as displaying maricon traits. Also in keeping with the homophobic Latino culture, most parents would prefer that their son or daughter become a murderer rather than gay or lesbian.

Juan, however, is not the only male in Richard's life who feels threatened by gays. Ricky, a childhood friend, also displays his unease with Richard's choice of acquaintances: "One time I saw you in San Jose with a couple of guys that looked queer as hell. Jesus, I know you're okay, but it don't do you no good to be seen with guys like that" (177). Refusing to accept Rick's reasoning, Richard corrects Ricky's real motivation for his feelings: "Oh, hell, Ricky...Now you're talking about yourself, not about me. It don't do *you* no good to be seen with a guy like me who is seen with guys like that" (177). Ricky is typical of those who feel affected by a friend's association with others who are not socially acceptable. That Richard Rubio is actually heterosexual provides little mitigation for his activities, and despite Ricky's façade of caring for his friend's well being and concern for the distance Richard has put between himself and other long-time friends, Ricky is, in fact, afraid that his own association with Richard will damage or cause his reputation to be in doubt.

Richard's movement away from the sequestered world of similar identities among his fiends and into the multicultural world may cause some concern because he leaves his buddies behind, but it becomes a threat when he actually associates with those who have been the subject of disdain. And because he then moves from simple acceptance

of members of the gay community to defense of their rights, Richard further displays his independent thinking, a definite Anglo-American trait, and his departure from communal beliefs:

And those guys you were talking about—they're queer, and they have a bunch of friends that are the same way, but they're real intelligent and good people...They can't help it, but they make the most of their life. And, another thing—they like being that way...Those two guys live together, and they really love each other...Hell, even married people don't act that good. (177-78)

This apology, however, changes nothing, and Ricky clings to his prejudicial belief that "if they're fruit, they're fruit, and that just isn't" (178). Because Richard is in a state of identity formation at the end of the novel, nothing is certain about how he is. He has questioned his cultural loyalty, associated with pachucos and gays, returned to school briefly, and volunteered for the Army. Although he has made no commitment, he has begun to discover that his views diverge from those of his community, and by leaving it, he will be able to decide who he is and what he stands for.

This questioning of one's identity did not end with the 1940s. Forty years later, Richard Rodriguez displays Richard Rubio's discomfort with who he is in his autobiography, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, and ten years later in *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*, he is finally able to identify as a homosexual. It is not, however, until he is well into his personal narrative and Introduction and Chapter One are finished that he can admit that "To grow up homosexual is to live with secrets and within secrets" (Days 30). Much like the semi-autobiographical narrator of John Rechy's *City of Night*, Rodriguez, too, must separate from his family's home in Sacramento to participate openly in same-sex sexual activity, and he also keeps his secret from his family. Unlike Rechy's narrator, Rodriguez did not experience sexual abuse from his father;

however, both were exposed to and highly enjoyed reading and education, causing Rodriguez to believe "that education was making [him] effeminate" (*Hunger* 127) and that "there was something unmanly about [his] attachment to literature" (129). These beliefs coupled with his sense that he resembled the "*braceros*" and the fact that he watched "the shirtless construction workers, the roofers, the sweating men tarring the street" because their bodies were freely exposed to the sun while his was protected from becoming darker suggest that he experienced a repressed and undeveloped sexual attraction for the men, especially since he had a shyness with girls that drove him to isolate himself rather than suffer in front of them (*Hunger* 127). Rodriguez continues to suggest that his feeling diverge from those consistent with *machismo* by admitting that he was his mother's son and that he was not "*formal* like [his] father" (129), and instead he experienced "nostalgia for sounds . . . effeminate yearning" (129). He further diverges from *machismo* by freely talking about his feelings and his "sexual anxieties and his physical insecurities" (130).

Yet Rodriguez criticizes those *braceros* for their inability to connect, for being "Persons apart" (*Hunger* 138) even though he does the same. Just as Rechy's narrator remains behind windows, watching, apart from others even in New York, Rodriguez cannot communicate with his parents or with friends in San Francisco. Whether it is after the death of a close friend, where he "stood aloof at César's memorial" (*Days* 44) or in church, where he sits alone, "the barren skeptic... shift[ing his] tailbone upon the cold, hard pew" (47), Rodriguez remains alone—like Rechy's narrator. And although Rodriguez "saw that the greater sin against heaven was [his] unwillingness to embrace life" (43), he continues to remain aloof, living within the boundaries of the Castro district in San Francisco, living inside a body whose complexion announces his Mexican heritage, but unable to live fully as gay nor at all as Chicano. He remains the "middle-class American man. Assimilated" (*Hunger* 3), the fragmented, modern American male—disassociated, unconnected, and unstable.

Thus, even though there are valid objections to the use of dominant culture norms in critiquing elements exhibited by minority groups in society, I contend that in reference to homosexuality, we cannot overlook the constructions established by the dominant as well as the Mexican-American cultures. However, we must be continuously aware of places where divergences occur. First, the dominant society accepts the premise that normative heterosexuality is the basis for gender identification because sexuality orders gender. Based on that premise, we move to the issue of performance:

- In the dominant society, if males perform masculine-identified acts, they are classified as heterosexual males.
- In the dominant society, if males perform subversive sexual acts, they are classified as homosexual males.
- In the Mexican-American society, if males appear to be masculine and perform masculine-identified acts with women or other men, that is, if they are the dominant partner during sexual intercourse regardless of the gender of their partners, they are heterosexual males.
- In the Mexican-American society, if males appear to be effeminate and/or choose same-sex sexual partners and perform in the submissive or feminine role, they are homosexual.
- In the Mexican-American society, if males appear effeminate but continue to perform masculine-identified activities, they are homosexual.
- In the Mexican-American society as well as in many other cultures, if an individual associates self-disclosed gays, the male is suspected of being homosexual even if he identifies himself as heterosexual.

Thus, just as Butler objects to normative heterosexuality defining one's gender in the dominant society, I also contend that it is not an accurate indicator of gender construction in the Mexican-American male community because the definition of gender differs in each culture. Since each culture perceives performance in a different way, Butler's assertion that "the sexualization of racial gender norms calls to be read through multiple lenses at once" (xvi) is reinforced. The Latino gender norms superimposed on men in a homophobic society to encourage machismo in the area of sexual prowess and virility whether with women or with other men are not an open acceptance of homosexual performativity. The gender norms are, instead, a homophobic exclusion of effeminate males. Furthermore, the gender norms deny that same-sex sexual activity is a characteristic of homosexual identity if intercourse is performed in a position of dominance and power, thereby erasing the homosexual identity of a male who follows prescribed norms and appears appropriately macho. Butler's premise must be expanded to include the differences in definition/description of gender in the Mexican-American society, and it must include association with self-disclosed gays as one of the many subversive activities not accepted in the construction of a heterosexual male. It is not surprising then that young men like Richard Rubio in *Pocho* and older males like Richard Rodriguez have difficulty confronting their own sexual identity when neither culture, American or Mexican-American, accepts their gay population. I contend that the stronger the cultural loyalty the Latino feels the more difficulty and guilt he will suffer because of his sexual orientation. However, if he becomes more acculturated, the Latino will begin to replace some of the strictly observed *machismo* traits with more liberal attitudes toward sexuality held by many in the Anglo society. Acculturation, however, does not relieve the effects of homophobia Rodriguez and Richard Rubio will ultimately feel.





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CHAPTER  
SEVENTEEN



*Daniel Enrique Pérez*  
*Masculinity (Re)Defined: Masculinity,*  
*Internalized Homophobia, and the Gay Macho*  
*Clone in the Works of John Rechy*

*Masculine, rough, straight-acting, chiseled, and muscular* are just a few of the many adjectives that John Rechy (b. 1934) uses to create images of men in his novels. The hypermasculinization of the male body and limitations placed on sexual roles are used in his work as a means of underscoring and praising masculinity while deflecting and chastising notions of femininity. This study postulates that the hypermasculinization of men-who-have-sex-with-men is the result of a heightened internalized homophobia that the protagonists, and perhaps even the author, possess(ed). This study explores the dynamics of this internalized homophobia and how it shapes characters and their behavior in Rechy's work. Furthermore, it suggests that these Rechian images have been a significant contribution to the development and establishment of the universal gay macho clone.

It will behoove us to focus on three of Rechy's earlier works: *City of Night* (1963), *Numbers* (1967), and *The Sexual Outlaw* (1977).

Analyzing these three novels as a trilogy will allow for a more thorough examination of internalized homophobia in these works over an extended period of time. In each of the three novels we evaluate three variables: masculinity, internalized homophobia, and the gay macho clone. We will witness an obvious steady decrease in the internalized homophobia that the protagonists exhibit during this particular fourteen-year span (1963-1977) in Rechy's writing career. Such a decrease in internalized homophobia, however, will be met by a marked increase in the masculinization of the gay male body.

For the purposes of this study, one can consider each of the main protagonists in the trilogy to be one in the same. There is substantial evidence that the protagonists in all three novels are the same character and there also exists a plethora of autobiographical references to the author. Therefore, we will refer to all of the protagonists in the novels as "the protagonist."

As we will show, *City of Night* is the most homophobic novel of the three under investigation. Our protagonist at this stage demonstrates traits representative of the pre-Stonewall homosexual male who suffers from an acute case of internalized homophobia. Denial of his sexuality, performance of exalted idealized forms of masculine behavior, and hatred directed towards nonmasculine behavior are just a few of these traits. We see images of masculinity in their most idealized form as dictated by the constraints of society during the era in which the novel was written and the corresponding narrative takes place. Also, internalized homophobia is at its highest and we witness the early signs of the development of the gay macho clone.

The protagonist is a former military man who only recently left the army. He is a nomad wandering through various major cities. There is no indication that he is particularly muscular, but we must consider that masculinity during the early 1960s did not place a great emphasis on muscles, instead there was an emphasis on other aspects of physical appearances (e.g., clothing and disregard for personal appearance),

occupations, and behavior. In fact, in the novel there are very few references to the protagonist's physical appearance. We do know he is young, attractive, has a slender to average build, and has no difficulty picking up "scores" (men who hire hustlers). The protagonist does personify masculinity as it was perpetuated in the social structure of the 60s. As Daniel Harris suggests, during this era, someone was considered masculine if they were: indifferent about their physical appearance, unkempt, unrefined, blue-collar, unintelligent, criminal, and stoic—all characteristics that the protagonist and other hustlers in the novel either possess or pretend to possess. The novel is replete with masculine stereotypes. The reader is exposed to a cornucopia of images, real and unreal, of cowboys, motorcyclists, military men, criminals, and blue-collar workers.

Throughout the novel the hustlers are forced to play traditional masculine roles whereas the "scores" and other homosexual men are free to be whatever they want, often with a price to pay for digressing from the masculine ideal. The author's description of the hustlers remains consistent throughout the novel; he continues to use words representative of the masculine ideal: "tough-looking," "young," "fugitive," "masculine," etc. It becomes evident that possessing these traits renders big rewards: you are desired, you receive money, you are praised, etc. If we compare the author's descriptions of the men identified as homosexuals in the novel: "queer," "faggots," "old," "queen," "fairyqueen," effeminate," etc., we see how possessing nonmasculine traits results in retribution: they have to pay to have sex, they are the victims of violence and gay bashing, they have low self-esteem, they are old or middle-aged, and they live lonely lives.

The protagonist and other hustlers must be doing what they are doing under the pretense that it is to make money, never reciprocate nor initiate a sexual advance, and pretend that they are heterosexual. They remain under the guise that if they did not need the money, they would be having sex with females. They consistently make comments about having sex with women—the only form of desire they are allowed to

demonstrate. This pseudoheterosexuality forces the hustler to play rigid, nonreciprocal sexual roles when engaging in sexual activity with “scores.”

For example, the first “score” with whom the protagonist has sex tries to convince himself that the protagonist is heterosexual, but acknowledges that it is all a game. He offers the protagonist ten bucks to allow the former to perform fellatio on the latter, a service the protagonist pretends not to enjoy. He offers much resistance as the prospective client proceeds to talk him into the sexual encounter:

Now stop squirming and don't hold it—relax, if you're gonna go along with it—at least pretend you enjoy it—what the hell, I should pay and you act like you don't give a damn?—punks allasame. I was like you once—you believe it?” he says, “and now look at me, playing the other side of this goddam game. What the hell, pal, people change, remember that, don't forget it for a moment, remember that and don't be so fuckin' cocky. Now lay back, close your goddam eyes and stop staring at me like I'm a goddam creep—hell, I ain't ashamed of nothing. Pretend I'm some milkfed chick back in—wherever the hell you're from. . . .Thats it, thats better...Relax...Thats it...(26)

It becomes evident that the protagonist has adopted behavior representative of the Chicano/Latino macho figure as described by Tomás Almaguer and Ilán Stavans: repression of nonmasculine traits, exalted virility, and performance of rigid sex roles. One result of this type of behavior is the inability to reciprocate desire during sexual activity. Not reciprocating becomes the single most important rule that the protagonist upholds.

That the protagonist is desired without him desiring back is the first requirement for any sexual encounter in which he engages. The second requirement is that he is paid for sex. The money he receives both confirms the one-way desire relationship and protects his masculinity.

Engaging in sex with someone without the pretense of money would imply that the protagonist is acting on his desire to be with men and identify him as a gay man—a stigma that possesses many negative consequences.

The protagonist possesses the traits associated with the gay clone prior to the gay liberation movement. He becomes aware of the masculine ideals perpetuated by society, he demonstrates disdain for what is not masculine, and he has very low self-esteem. The protagonist's need to continually don a mask indicates his lack of self-esteem. There are few examples of the protagonist ever admiring himself or saying anything positive about himself or his behavior. His biggest fear is that he is related to what is most despised in *City of Night*—stereotypical gay men. Therefore, our protagonist remains in constant motion; he moves from city to city, escaping what he most fears: himself and his homosexuality. The protagonist's indefatigable itinerancy, especially from a traditional Chicano heteronormative space to that of an Anglo homoerotic urban space, facilitates his identity deconstruction and reconstruction throughout the course of *City of Night*. We witness the protagonist's slow transformation from that of a closeted homosexual to an openly gay male as our protagonist begins to look in the mirror, and begins to accept and like what he sees in *Numbers* and *The Sexual Outlaw*.

Both *City of Night* and *Numbers* were written prior to the gay liberation movement, which was at its zenith in 1969 with the Stonewall riots. Therefore, there are more similarities between these two novels than there are between either of these two novels and the third, *The Sexual Outlaw*. Nonetheless, a look at *Numbers* reveals some of the changes in attitude, behavior, dress, and sexual practices related to masculinity and internalized homophobia. By 1967, representation of masculinity in Rechy's work begins to undergo a transformation. We see less of an emphasis on clothing worn by traditional masculine figures and more of an emphasis on body type and physique. We also see the protagonist begin to look at himself in the mirror. The protagonist admires those traits in him that are considered most masculine, yet still demonstrates a profound fear of and hatred for those characteristics that are not.

In the first few pages of *Numbers*, the reader is finally given a vivid description of the mysterious protagonist of *City of Night*: “A slight crook in his nose keeps him from being a prettyboy and makes him, therefore, much more attractive and masculine” (16). According to the narrator, the protagonist “looks to be in his early 20’s” (17). He has also spent the last few years lifting weights and toning his body. His muscularity is not exaggerated; his muscles are just the right size to make his masculinity more authentic. The protagonist exhibits a narcissistic attitude throughout the novel. He constantly looks at and admires himself; throughout the novel he looks for “numbers” which most resemble him physically. He is the paragon of masculinity and he is desired by both men and women. In *City of Night* his masculinity was attributable to his youth, his deviance, his walk and talk, his pseudoheterosexuality, and his roughness, whereas in *Numbers*, it is primarily due to his newly developed physique and his pseudoheterosexuality.

It is evident that the protagonist maintains the Latin model of homosexual identity and behavior. As the paragon of manliness, he insists that he does not desire other men, never reciprocates advances, and plays rigid sex roles (primarily that of the dominant inserter) as a means of justifying his encounters with other men and avoiding the stigma that comes with the homosexual label. The other men with whom he has sex play the role of the receiver and validate the protagonist’s masculinity, however, they are unequivocally gay according to both the narrator and the protagonist. The other images of men in the novel are primarily descriptions of gay men. The narrator often refers to them as “youngman” and in general, they are “goodlooking.” The protagonist’s exhibition of such strong narcissistic behavior renders it necessary for the men with whom he has sex to look a lot like him, but, inevitably, there is something that makes them nonmasculine or not “real men.” There is usually some very attractive feature associated with masculinity (muscles, clothing, facial features, etc.), but there is almost always a nonmasculine feature (too many muscles, white-collar clothing, too pretty, etc.).

Without the pretense of money in exchange for sex, the protagonist must create another pretext in order to engage in sex with other men—that he is on a mission to count how many people desire him and/or initiate a sexual encounter with him. The protagonist is on a conquest that resembles his conquest in *City of Night*: to validate his masculinity via other's desire for him, his body, and his phallus. The first thing he has to do in both novels is dehumanize and objectify his targets. Whereas in *City of Night* his sexual object choices were considered “scores,” in *Numbers* they become “numbers”—both terms representative of men engaging in some sort of sporting event. The protagonist's “numbers” replace the “scores” as the virtually non-human things that both desire the protagonist and become pawns in his game, the sexhunt.

Let us consider one encounter he has with a “lithe goodlooking youngman” in a park who follows the protagonist into a cave and starts groping the protagonist immediately. When the protagonist pushes the man's head down so that the latter can perform fellatio on him, the man says, “No—fuck me!” in a voice “shattered by desire” (244). The protagonist then insists that the man get him aroused first by performing fellatio. Even though the man does not seem to enjoy performing fellatio, he has to satisfy the protagonist's desire in order to get the latter to penetrate him. The man has to remove his own clothes and has minimal contact with the protagonist. The only contact allowed is between the protagonist's penis and the man's orifices: “Fiercely, Johnny pushes his cock into the other in one savage thrust. The youngman utters a gasp that softens into a long sigh. Pumping angrily in and out of the other's tight opening. Johnny comes immediately” (245). The words “fierce,” “savage,” and “angrily” create an image of deviant, violent, almost animalistic sex. Immediately after the protagonist ejaculates, he leaves the scene without uttering a word, but the man remains “bent over the branch whimpering” (245)—leaving the reader with the image of a symbolic rape. The protagonist then goes to a bathroom and begins to wash “his prick obsessively with soap, over and over (though there was no trace of the act.)” (245). The protagonist feels a need to cleanse himself of the “dirty act” (243) he



just committed. Having just performed the manly feat of rape, he looks at himself in the mirror and realizes that he is now “as goodlooking, as exciting as ever” (245).

That the protagonist derives pleasure from his encounters is obvious, but the fact that the narrator does not acknowledge or demonstrate his pleasure is an attempt to protect the protagonist’s masculinity. The protagonist does take on a traditionally nonmasculine position in a couple of sexual encounters. In one scene a blond man licks his nipples and in another the protagonist leans back and spreads his legs while a man, lying flat on his stomach, rims the protagonist while the latter straddles the man’s shoulders. The latter scene described is the only scene within *City of Night* and *Numbers* where the protagonist is penetrated in any way. His orifices, mouth, and anus had never before been penetrated by any type of phallic symbol: penis, finger, or tongue. It is obvious that the act of rimming produces pleasure in the protagonist. In fear that this could be construed as a nonmasculine or homosexual trait, the narrator insists that the protagonist ejaculate into the man’s mouth—an attempt to regain the protagonist’s status as penetrator or conqueror during the sexual encounter.

The two scenes described above are the two where the protagonist demonstrates the most pleasure when he is with another man. The sex roles he plays are still very rigid and limited, but the minor representations of the pleasure he derives are indications that internalized homophobia is subsiding. This transformation takes place as the image of the gay macho clone develops.

Although the protagonist has a muscular body, it is important to note that muscles do not equate to masculinity—masculinity is still determined by attitude and behavior. The protagonist must always be “straight acting.” The protagonist is no longer required to wear uniforms traditionally associated with masculine men and, instead, wears less clothing or clothing that is almost representative of the gay macho clone. If the protagonist wears a shirt at all, he wears one that accentuates his upper body. He has also adopted the narcissistic attitude associated with

gay macho clones: constant looks in the mirror and constant admiration of his body. These attributes combined with the hypermasculine performance he carries on make him the mold from which the gay macho clone will be created. Physically, he does not represent the ideal mold for creating the said clone only because there are imperfections in his appearance (i.e., his crooked nose), but, as we have shown above, this can be construed as a means of concealing his homosexuality.

As far as behavior is concerned, the gay macho clone exhibits a sense of pride in his homosexuality, a sexuality our protagonist has not even accepted. The said clone is also not afraid of that which is nonmasculine and he is free to perform multiple roles during sexual intercourse with other men—two traits the protagonist is still lacking. Furthermore, although the protagonist is not as peripatetic as he was in *City of Night*, he does remain in one city and interfaces much more with the gay ghetto. He maintains his distance from this gay space by remaining an outsider who only visits for a short period and then leaves. These are all traits that change in *The Sexual Outlaw*.

*The Sexual Outlaw* relays the story of Jim, the protagonist, and three days and nights of his “sexhunt” in Los Angeles. Images of masculinity in this novel differ markedly from the first two. We find an even greater emphasis on the male body itself, especially the focus on muscular bodies. We also see less of an emphasis on what the men are wearing. The traditional, stereotypical images of masculine men, as cowboys, criminals, uniformed men, and bikers, are also less prevalent. These images cease to be necessary to accentuate or legitimize masculinity. Finally, and most importantly, we see less of an emphasis on traditional masculine behavior. The protagonist is more inclined to engage in what could be construed as nonmasculine and nonheteronormative behavior without jeopardizing his masculinity.

Even though our protagonist had a muscular build in *Numbers*, in *The Sexual Outlaw* he is more muscular and he spends much more time bodybuilding. His physical appearance and strength become the essence of his masculinity. His walk, talk, behavior, and dress are no

longer defining features of his masculinity. The protagonist is obsessed with his body and he continually maintains his body on display. He generally walks around with no shirt at all.

The other images of men created in *The Sexual Outlaw* are almost all mirror images of the protagonist. The comparisons the narrator makes between the protagonist and other men in the novel are unprecedented. In both *Numbers* and *City of Night* the narrator underscores the differences between the protagonist and his sexual object choices whereas in *The Sexual Outlaw* there exist far more similarities than differences between the two. Unlike *Numbers* or *City of Night*, the men with whom the protagonist has sexual encounters are considered to be just as masculine as the protagonist and the narrator does not undermine their masculinity by identifying or relating a nonmasculine characteristic.

Like the protagonist, the other men also no longer have to play roles as traditional or stereotypical men. Their masculinity is no longer determined by the clothes they wear nor their behavior, but by the clothing they do not wear and how well defined their bodies are. Traditionally nonmasculine traits are also used to describe men without threatening their masculinity. The men are often described as both “manly” and “beautiful”—something we did not find in the other novels. The men are also considered “outlaws” as opposed to “scores” or “numbers” and it is obvious that the protagonist considers himself an “outlaw” as well. The term outlaw is used to describe all men who have sex with men—especially in public spaces.

In *The Sexual Outlaw*, the protagonist exhibits much more freedom and less internalized homophobia in his sexual encounters with other men. There is a consistent and strong sense that the protagonist is acting exclusively on his and his partners’ homoerotic desire. There is no longer any type of guise for the protagonist to be engaging in sex with men. He is not hustling nor is he playing a formal numbers game. There are no women (or female figures) in the novel nor are there any references to heterosexual desire. More importantly, the novel is replete with examples of the protagonist reciprocating during sexual

encounters. Not only does this signify a resonant decrease in internalized homophobia that the protagonist possesses, but, for the first time, we have an overt indication that the protagonist is unequivocally gay and identifies as such.

Instead of the protagonist getting through encounters quickly, he tries to make them last as long as possible. Whereas in the earlier novels the protagonist reaching orgasm took place in a relative short amount of time with a minuscule amount of stimulation, during sexual encounters in *The Sexual Outlaw*, the scenes last for an extended period of time with maximum stimulation. The protagonist holds back orgasms and participates substantially to satisfy his very own and his partners' desires. We see the protagonist engaging in a new level of intimacy with other men.

While the protagonist is cruising at Griffith Park, a “very handsome man” drives by. This man is described as “very muscular, obviously a bodybuilder too” (128). Once the man shows interest in the protagonist, the latter leads the former into the park. The protagonist goes out of his way to find an isolated spot to be alone with the man instead of settling on an easily accessible spot as customary. The protagonist makes every attempt to reciprocate everything the man does to him, but when it comes to the protagonist rimming the man, he retracts. He even takes the man’s testicles into his mouth as a sort of substitute for the pleasure he received when the man rimmed him. Rimming—as seen by the narrator—becomes the only act that the protagonist is not fully able to reciprocate in this scene even though he is aware of his desire to reciprocate fully. There is a unique combination of traditionally masculine and nonmasculine words to describe the scene that forces us to re-evaluate our notions of masculinity:

Their eyes are open wide, studying naked muscles outrageously flexed; limbs, organs. Jim touches the other’s flaring thighs, his fingers awakening the soft field of hairs; his hands about the other’s buttocks, stretching them, touching the knotted hole with his finger—as the other explores his with his tongue.

Masculine, beautiful, muscles, male. Quickly the bodies shift, head to head. Lips grasp flitting tongues. Naked, cocks, male, outlaws. They inhale deeply the sweet odor of their mixed, clean sweat. They taste it on their tongues. (130)

The use of the words *soft*, *beautiful*, and *sweet* combined with other words like *muscles*, *masculine*, and *sweat* would be considered oxymorons in the Rechian genre prior to 1977, but the masterful and consistent way the narrator utilizes these historically contradictory terms in *The Sexual Outlaw* normalizes these unique combinations and new notions of masculinity materialize. The protagonist's encounters with other men are no longer one-sided, mechanical, violent, nor dirty; instead they are reciprocal, intimate, beautiful, and natural. Also, an orifice of his is often penetrated by a phallic symbol, although he never assumes the position of penetratee during anal intercourse. Both the protagonist and most of the men with whom he participates sexually are the physical manifestations of idealized manliness despite their unquestionable gay self-identification. It is obvious that internalized homophobia has decreased markedly when compared to Rechy's previous novels. In *The Sexual Outlaw*, the protagonist no longer exhibits disdain for the gay men with whom he has encounters and, instead, he associates himself with them. The protagonist also exhibits a heightened sense of pride and self-esteem—traits often associated with the gay macho clone. Our protagonist has adopted the majority of the characteristics associated with this figure: he wears related attire, possesses the same physical attributes, lives in the gay ghetto, exhibits similar behavior, and performs similar sexual acts. The protagonist develops a new sense of self. He has absolutely no qualms about being an "outlaw" or being gay. He exhibits a sense of pride that is unmitigated by his same-sex desire.

The protagonist's sexual liberation is a significant example of his decreased homophobia and his relation to the gay macho clone. As we have shown, he demonstrates very few inhibitions about reciprocating

during his sexual encounters and he participates increasingly in traditionally nonmasculine roles during sexual encounters. He also no longer hides under the guise of heterosexual desire and engages in intimate physical contact with other men. The protagonist is no longer forced to wear a mask or play rigid sexual roles.

We have analyzed masculinity, internalized homophobia, and the gay macho clone in the first fourteen years of John Rechy's literary production: 1963-1977. We have seen a paradigm shift in idealized forms of masculinity that have forced us to reconfigure our notions of masculinity. In the span of fourteen years, masculinity has undergone a significant transformation in the Rechian genre. In *City of Night* (1963), masculinity is synonymous with youth, violence, criminality, uniforms, lack of intelligence, heterosexuality, and stoicism; in turn, homosexuality is synonymous with weakness, intelligence, effeminacy, unattractiveness, and sexual subordination. On the other hand, in *The Sexual Outlaw* (1977), masculinity becomes synonymous with: muscles, strength, beauty, intimacy, and homosexuality. Masculinity has truly been redefined. The fact that homosexuality could now be associated with masculinity and strength attests to this transformation.

Our evaluation of Rechy's work reveals that as our protagonist adopted more and more physical traits associated with the gay macho clone, he became more free from the masks he once wore. It is important to note that the protagonist still shows signs of internalized homophobia (e.g., his continued apprehension to perform select sexual roles, namely the role of receiver during anal intercourse). Nevertheless, We have traced the transformation of the protagonist in *City of Night* who was running and escaping from what he most fears and detests—himself and his homosexuality, to the protagonist in *The Sexual Outlaw* who is running and chasing after what he most admires and desires—himself and his new gay identity



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CHAPTER  
EIGHTEEN



*Karleen Pendleton Jimenez*

*From Tomboy to Drag:  
Las Notas de un Rey in Toronto*

Each drag king you ask will provide you very different answers as to why they have decided to jump on stage. As well, kings emerge from all kinds of offstage identities- there are femmes and fags, straight girls, trannyboys and butches. I identify as a butch. My butch identity offers me everyday comfortable clothes, my cologne and dildos, and my lady. I have also sought out communities of relative safety to surround my butchness. The move from butch to my moments of drag kinging heightens my expression of masculinity. I take the stage I think primarily because for two thirds of my life, I was convinced that it was a humiliating thing for me to be comfortable in men's clothing. The spectacle of the lights and the cheers and the loud booming music celebrating a woman's body or a trans body transformed into a man's for a few minutes, is powerful, and, turns me on. I want to look like a boy. I want to look like a woman. I want to look like a queer, a person who appears to move between the two. I enjoy watching this happen across someone's eyes, when they glimpse a masculine gesture fall from a feminine limb or vice versa.

To pull off a good show requires preparation:  
Here is a list of the things I carry<sup>1</sup> with me when kinging:

I carry breasts. I've got big breasts. Huge for the size of my body. I once made a sex video and saw them attached to my body. It shocked me. I looked unreal, like a cartoon or something. It didn't seem fair for someone who liked passing as a boy now and then. I don't want them to go away. Lovers tell me they like them. And they are reflections of the ones my mom had, same shape and nipple design. I like having my mom's breasts still with me.

Duct tape and my girlfriends hands are needed to push them down for the show. An important note: wear a sports bra underneath, nothing smaller or lacier, or you will lose skin and silk at the end of the night. Don't put the tape on too early, or you could lose your breath. I started having a panic attack one night, and another king told me she has puked on occasion when putting the tape on too soon.

The effect is a hard chest no further out than my stomach. I admire it in the mirror, the shape I could never get quite right since junior high when they started growing.

I carry some bad memories from elementary school. They keep me sure that I deserve this.

February 14th, 1983. Rosemead, California (I was 11 years old)  
"I was very mad at David W. for saying that my sweatshirt was made for a boy and that I was a tomboy."

As much as my mom loved me, and as much as her lenience around my clothing choices provided me a lot of room to wear my brother's hand-me-downs, we had our battles. There were Sunday church wars with high drama screaming and crying...and laughter, my brother's laughter at how red-faced and awkward-bodied I looked in frills. Once a week I was convinced by force that my humiliation was necessary for community events.

Later force wasn't needed. Laughter alone worked wonders. I tried desperately to look more like a girl and failed horribly at it. To the other kids at my school, to even some of my friends this was a grand joke - a girl who didn't know how to be a girl. Kids wagered bets on my gender, and voted me forward as a beauty contestant nominee. I wanted people to stop thinking I was weird, and I wanted to kiss and makeout. I thought that if I could look more like a girl I would accomplish both. I grew my hair out. I bought pink pants. It didn't stop the laughter. But moving to Berkeley for college, finding a Chicana community, butch mentors and a beautiful girlfriend, made me not care so much any more about it.

I carry good memories of coming out and establishing a Chicana butch pride for myself. Chicago.1992. August (I was 20 years old) "A conference of beautiful Latinas from all over the country. The Dance. I had to prepare for the dance. Dressing is half of it you know. It's meditation. Laying my slacks out, pressing the iron down to make a hard crease. Covering each inch on a white men's shirt as steam pours out over my fingers. Dressing is ritual."

I carry shiny black shoes and dark black and brown checkered slacks, with a freshly ironed crease. Under my pants I carry one black leather harness and brown realistic rubber cock stuffed into those soft stretchy kind of boxers. The boxers need to be tight enough to hold the dildo down on my thigh under my pants. I like packing because I catch my girlfriend's eyes on it. I like it because it means that I am ready to fuck at a moment's notice. I like it because it feels like I'm getting away with something, and because the dick in my brain matches what I find pushing against my pants. On the way to the bar, I get terrified that everybody on the street will see it and attack me or something. As far as I can tell nobody has noticed it yet besides me or my girlfriend. There is one danger though, I find myself drawn to playing with it when I'm suppose to be concentrating on other things like driving.

I carry adrenaline. It makes me shake and keeps me moving. I am terrified of performing. I've never been good at memorizing lyrics. I'm not a good enough dancer to do it on stage for people. My theater skills are so-so - so I start there. Can I find a gag or a sexy thing to act out a song? Can I find a story for people to follow, so that they're not following me so much? What can I find to offer drag in return for what it offers me? People are paying money, what can I make worthwhile for a show?

I carry arrogance. I need a little bit of arrogance too. I carry my chin up a little too high. It is also my oldest brother's look and a proud Chicana style gesture that I have always done unconsciously for official photos and for hellos to my buddies.

I carry a mess of politics in and around me. Feminist politics. Drag King acts got a lot of dick by in large. Entertainment is derived from drawing attention to it, to be outrageously sexist and animal with it. On one level, by virtue of women performing this, there are definite feminist subversive strategies. On another, it doesn't appear to be too different from what men just do, and embodied at times in sexist butch bodies. I wonder how much subversion is really accomplished. I try to find ways to subvert it further - ok here is my dick, but how many ways can I play it and layer it with different meanings: giving it to someone else, changing it from body part to dildo and back again, sucking, fucking, etc. I attempt taboos with it.

I carry a closeted fag within me, read butch who desires other butches. At the academy awards, Steve Martin mentioned the fact that most people around the world believe that everyone in show business is a fag. In Toronto, one drag king was overheard noting what a lot of people whisper, that he was the only "straight" man of the whole drag king troupe. Coincidence, I don't think so. What exactly is the connection between fags, femininity and masculine stage performers? None of those Hollywood butch role models, Marlon Brando, James Dean, Johnny Depp, Benicio Del Toro are straight men. I for one have a pretty clean record of only messing around with femmes, but on stage, the first thing I think of doing is choreographing some butch on butch

play. Maybe because it feels taboo, maybe because offstage it gets complicated in a way that I can't sort through, maybe because show business just attracts fags...and fag audiences, after the last number I performed, a pretty explicit love affair between two Italian men from the 1930's, I was greeted by another straight-man butch in the audience expressing how hard she was in her jeans.

Trans politics: I can't tell you how many people I know personally are taking dosages of testosterone. I can't tell you how many workshops I've attended, how many books I've read on the topic to figure out where my body and gender lie. I have gone from playing with the idea of changing my female body to feeling certain that I need my female body. But drag shows give me the possibility to make slight transformations for a few moments rather than for a lifetime. I like this type of flexibility.

I carry a male name. "What's your name?" the MC asks only seconds before my first show. Karleen. No, I mean your male name. Oh uh, hmm, I hadn't thought of that. Xavier, Xavier is what my buddies in San Diego sometimes called me for fun. My mom, who feared the thought of me being like a man, had even liked it because she said I could be Xavier Ximenez then, both beginning with X's. "You get it, DosEquis," she announced smiling, with my buddies busting up beside us.

"Xavier," I tell the MC.

"Haviwhat?" she asks irritated. That's not going to work.

"El Chicano," I say instead.

"El Chicaano?"

All right, close enough.

Renaming has become tricky business in the last couple of years. A good half of my butch friends have renamed themselves with guy's names and the corresponding pronoun. Women frequently approach my girlfriend and ask her what pronoun I go by. They sometimes give her a hard time for continuing to call me she. I encounter shocked

faces when I have sat down in a room full of butches and have had the only girl name. I feel like my name is under attack. It is the name my mom gave me and I think it's beautiful and a piece of her love. And besides, my girlfriend has always had a fetish for butches with girly names. So these MC's asking me for something else is complicated. I get why it's good for the show, but I don't want to give the queer community something to rename me.

Latino politics in Toronto: In a country not dependent on Latino labor, but never-the-less barraged with the same racist US media depictions, Latino stage identity is strange. Stereotypes of hot sexy Latinos reign, and Enrique Iglesias, Ricky Martin, Jennifer Lopez, and Carlos Santana all get frequent radio play. But who can play a Latino? The Toronto based Venezuelan-Canadian Rey, "El Papito," performs regularly as part of Latino Drag Queen shows with great reception from white audiences expecting hot sexy Latinos. Also, I have performed with him at a local Venezuelan restaurant to very warm responses from Latino audiences. While pulling off a masculine performance that has caused more than a few comments of awe, she identifies offstage as femme and has been trained professionally as an actor. He delivers highly polished, carefully choreographed shows, well-memorized lyrics, great dancing and cock rubbing. But last month when he performed to a crowd of predominantly white lesbians, expecting white lesbian performers, he was provided with a lukewarm response. It was unclear whether he received this because it was announced that she was femme offstage, not meeting a Toronto expectation of butch kings, or because the audience felt that his Latinoness did not catch their cultural expectations for a drag king show. Also TTDK, or *the* Toronto Drag Kings, the only widely recognized king performances in Toronto, have never invited him into their troupe despite his clear talent and vocalized interest. TTDK have come to name themselves over the past couple years as being a highly professionalized group. They strictly monitor the quality of their performers and are relatively closed to the idea of including drag performances that they deem mediocre. In other words, there are no karaoke nights. If you want to perform drag for fun,

do it on your own. While this troupe includes people of color, all performers seem to speak English like native speakers. And the only Latino performances have been carried out by the drag king “Stu” who “looks Latino” but is actually of I believe mixed Indian and British background and does not speak Spanish. *He* has been warmly received by white lesbians.

I performed as a Latino, as part of TTDK, two years ago when they did not think of themselves as highly. I have performed as Julio Iglesias, Richy Valens, Marc Anthony, Manu Chao, and as an Italian boyfriend sidekick outside of TTDK. I don’t look Latino enough for audiences to understand what I’m doing, but I don’t really have a desire to portray white men. Latino singers were my mom’s passion, and I want to be them for her and for me, and well, I’m not particularly concerned about the lack of white male representation.

I carry Guadalupe in gold around my neck. I carry thick cool gel to slick my hair. I carry broken Spanish becoming smooth all of a sudden in lipsynching. I carry my mom and her Placido, my grandma and her stories of my great grandpa who had a sweet voice and guitar that got him an invitation to play at every party in Camargo, and of my great great grandpa who always had a line of girlfriends into his eighties, who, according to my grandma, was adored for being a tiny man.

March, 2000, Toronto. (I was 28 years old) The audience clapped and smiled at my drag king debut. My first earned money in Canada. I was “El Chicano” for five minutes and fifty clapping hands. I checked the NAFTA list for earnings as a male impersonator but couldn’t find it, so I have to keep this event quiet. If I was in LA, I would’ve been a fake, too mixed and pale to even pull off a Spaniard. But in Canada, they’re not even sure what a Chicano or a Spaniard is. Whisked away, I could be my earliest fantasy - the man my mom was in love with my entire childhood - Julio Iglesias. His was the first concert that I ever went to. And I would’ve been embarrassed about it, except that I saw how my mom’s eyes watered when she hummed along with his suave Latino self. I watched how my mom only got these watery eyes for her Latino singers

and boyfriends. So these were my butch role models, not my white Dad, who I never saw her show affection for. Breasts strapped down, my freshly dry-cleaned tux, my shiny CD, I thought of my mom out there in the audience with her heart moving to my voice and I sang wildly.



## *Footnotes*

<sup>1</sup> The idea of the frame for this piece of the essay is based on Tim O'Brien's *The Thing's They Carried*. New York: Penguin.

T H E  
E N D

