

Subjects of Trauma:  
The Decolonial Tactics of Self-Making and Self-Healing  
by Queer Xicana Feminist Teatristas

By

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## Abstract

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This dissertation is an interdisciplinary decolonial, queer women of color cultural analysis of Xicana representations of trauma. My examination of theatrical texts and bodies-as-texts relies on a decolonial U.S. Third World queer and feminist methodology. Through this methodological lens, I situate Chicanas as (neo)colonial subjects by focusing on the colonial, imperial, and psychosocial context for Chicana trauma. I detail physical and ontological violence perpetrated upon people in the Indigenous Americas, especially in what has become Mexico and the southwestern United States. I also synthesize mental health statistics that quantify the psychic effects of colonial and imperial changes upon displaced peoples. Xicana plays and performances, I argue, aptly illuminate the *embodiment* of this locura, a psychosomatic and spiritual dis-ease rooted in colonial and imperial collective and intergenerational trauma. The primary texts for my analysis are Cherríe Moraga's drama *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, Adelina Anthony's performance *Las Hociconas: Three Locas with Big Mouths and Even Bigger Brains*, and Virginia Grise's play *blu*. These texts, I posit, illustrate how colonialism, internal colonialism, and imperialism have created subjects. I conceptualize what I term "subjects of trauma" through these three cultural productions that each make visible the social, political, and economic injustices experienced by Chicanas—many of whom live within internal colonies—in the United States. I interrogate the decolonial tactics that queer Xicana feminist playwrights employ to re-create themselves as subjects and subsequently alleviate psychic pain. I maintain that Xicana feminist theater promotes self-healing vis-à-vis self-making, as it theorizes our subject positions and intersubjective self-hood and, through consistent revisions of what have become traditional narratives, reminds us of the possibility of "decolonizing our selves" by remaking our selves.

For all of the broken pieces. To all of us becoming.

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At the beginning of my graduate studies, I was told that research and writing would be a lonely process. Fortunately, I have learned otherwise. Decolonial and feminist research and writing is comprised of communal acts. One cannot research without a collection of voices. One cannot write without a collective language. For it to be worthwhile, a decolonial feminist project necessitates an impetus to shift—even if it is only in a minute way—the collective psyche from greed, hatred, and fear to peace, love, and clarity. Throughout this project, I have kept in mind not only these ideas but also the many people who have taught me a collective shift is imperative.

I am indebted to every person who helped give shape to this dissertation. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to: the teatristas whose work I discuss in this manuscript; the writers of color who have paved the way for decolonial feminist thought; my co-chairs, Norma Alarcón and Laura E. Pérez, whose teachings, feedback, and encouragement is embedded throughout my writing; committee members, Yvette G. Flores and Paola Bacchetta, who helped build my confidence; my mentors, Theresa Delgadillo, Sonia Saldívar-Hull, Norma Cantú, and Ben V. Olguín, who have always believed in me; my good friends and colleagues, Christina L. Gutierrez, Jessica Lyman-López, Sonia I. Valencia, Marisol Silva-López, Lori Beth Rodriguez, Michael Lee Gardin, Alma Granado, and Juan Herrera, who listened to my ideas, sent me articles, picked up books, and shared writing space with me; the Third Woman Press collective for picking up my slack as I worked on this project; my spiritual mentors, Nancy Oken and Cristal Gonzalez, who reminded me not to be afraid; my dissertation coach, Janice Van Buren, who pushed me to take care of myself and taught me to be brave; and the many students with whom I have worked as a teacher, especially those in our Decolonial Feminist Research Methodologies classes, for they have taught me what it means to learn in community.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Xicana Feminist Dissent: Descending into Subjects of Trauma<sup>1</sup>

*It is hard to think of the  
raped, all the women that  
have known that wounding—  
where are their cries?  
their silent sobbings?  
their strangled anger?  
their crushed motherhood?  
their tenderness exposed?  
their forced wombs?  
their frozen bodies forever  
in submission? Here*

*in my cells I have  
carried it like a  
cancer, it births itself  
ugly, deformed on the clinical page.<sup>2</sup>*

This dissertation, titled “Subjects of Trauma: The Decolonial Tactics of Self-Making and Self-Healing by Queer Xicana Feminist Teatristas,” is an exercise in descent/dissent. I, like the speaker above in Alma Villanueva’s poem, “La Chingada,” “descend now to call on the raped,” the wounded.<sup>3</sup> I descend into psychic darkness to broach traumatic histories and come face to face with the shadow side of Chicana subjectivity; I listen to Chicanas’ and their foremothers’ cries, sobbings, anger and witness their tenderness, sexuality, and paralysis.<sup>4</sup> To discuss these topics carried in the memory of my blood, I, like the tlamatime (Nahua wise and spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this project, I use the term “Xicanas” to refer specifically to mestizas of Mexican descent in the United States, who strongly reclaim and assert a repressed Indigenous identity and spirituality for the purposes of decolonizing how one understands the self. I use this term to describe the playwrights who both self-describe using the term and employ Indigenous concepts of being and spirituality. Jennie Marie Luna explains that the “X” in this spelling represents a challenge to the Spanish language used to colonize the Indigenous peoples of the Americas. The terms “Xicana” and “Xicano,” she writes, are “attached to a politic, an Indigenous identity and spirituality.” See Luna, “Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance” (PhD diss, San Jose State University, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Alma Villanueva, “La Chingada,” in *Five Poets of Aztlán*, ed. Santiago Daydí-Tolson (Binghamton: Bilingual Press, 1985), 155-57; my italics.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>4</sup> I use “Chicana” as a more general term that refers to mestizas of Mexican descent in the United States. For me, it is a term that can refer to all consciously politicized mestizas of Mexican descent, including those who acknowledge their Indigeneity in addition to their Spanish roots. This spelling reflects the language used during the 1960s Chicano (male-dominated) movement, which used the term as a self-concept that recognized a history of oppression of Indigenous Mexicans. Like Xicana/os, Chicana/os tend to be mostly oblivious to their African ancestry.

guides) must submerge myself in the dark depths of chaos to uncover ancient principles of being.<sup>5</sup> María Anzures Rionda explains that in order to be initiated into the ranks of teachers and guides, the tlamatime had to experience several consecutive metaphorical deaths, self-transformations, to prove their willingness to relinquish what they believe they know about themselves and to venture into the unknown.<sup>6</sup>

Quién no haya soportado la angustia de la noche no acertará a recibir plenamente la beatífica iluminación del día. Quién no haya descendido hasta lo más profundo del abismo del EGO, no sabrá discernir la naturaleza del único YO.<sup>7</sup>

This dissertation project has similarly tested me, forcing me to experience various metaphorical deaths, transforming me with its subjects—both people and topics—and overall process.

I began the dissertation with an inquiry into locura, or madness, as a symbolic form of sociopolitical resistance in Chicana literature, but I eventually realized the locura we Chicanas experience daily is no metaphor, especially as Latina, American Indian, and Alaska Native teens—both queer and non-queer—in the United States consider suicide at greater rates than any other ethnic group in their age range.<sup>8</sup> I learned the cultural productions that variously treat the

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<sup>5</sup> María Anzures Rionda explains the tlamatime “se submerge en el CAOS, para desubrir ahí los propios principios de la creación.” See Anzures Rionda, *Coyolxauhqui: Nuestra Madre Cósmica* (México: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura Nahuatl, 1991), 35. Throughout this dissertation I follow Miguel León-Portilla’s use of “Nahua” in place of “Aztec” (a term coined and popularized European and Anglo-American anthropologists) or “Mexica” (a term that signifies only one ethnic group) to refer to the different ethnic groups who shared a common culture and worldview expressed in the Nahuatl language and their sociopolitical and religious practices. See, for instance, Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*. Translated by Jack Emory Davis. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Anzures Rionda describes the tlamatime as “un iniciado que pasa la prueba de las muertes sucesivas, en medio del estrecho paralelismo que existen dos dimensiones.” See Anzures Rionda, *Coyolxauhqui: Nuestra Madre Cósmica* (México: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura Nahuatl, 1991), 35.

<sup>7</sup> S/he who has not withstood the anguish of night will not be able to take in fully the blissful light of day. S/he who has not descended into the deepest parts of the abyss of the ego will not know how to discern the nature of the self. Anzures Rionda, *Coyolxauhqui*, 36; my translation.

<sup>8</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2013,” *MMWR* 63, no. SS-4 (2014): 1-168. Most, if not all, reports on suicide rates—including this one—lump together all Latinas and Latinos of various ethnicities using terms such as “Latino” or “Hispanic” to identify this heterogeneous group. That is, these reports do not distinguish between Mexican, Salvadoran, Puerto Rican, or Dominican people, for example. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Office of Minority Health website reported statistics based on the Center for Disease Control’s survey of “High School Youth Risk Behavior.” The website indicated that in 2009, American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN) males ages 15-19 died by suicide at a rate of 31.1% compared to 10.7% for AIAN females in the same age range. However, in the same year, AIAN women in grades 9-12 “seriously considered suicide” at a rate of 29.9% compared to 14.3% for AIAN men in the same age range. This group of AIAN women also “attempted suicide” at a higher rate (19.9%) than AIAN men (10.0%) in the same age range. See Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “High School Youth Risk



topic of Chicanas' locura are mostly theatrical plays and performances by queer Xicanas. These mediums are significant in that they aptly illuminate the *embodiment* of locura, a psychosomatic and spiritual dis-ease rooted in colonial and imperial trauma. My focus then shifted to this historical and intergenerational trauma and Xicana playwrights' exposition of this dis-ease "ugly, deformed on the clinical page." I have sustained this focus, and, throughout this dissertation, I argue queer Xicana feminist teatristas (i.e., dramaturges and performance artists who participate in theater) like Cherríe Moraga, Adelina Anthony, and Virginia Grise do not solely theatricalize Chicana and Xicana trauma; they, like shamanistic strategists, offer decolonial feminist tactics to uncover our open wounds, to let them breathe, and to let them finally scar, for this is one component for imagining a holistic decolonial project. I focus on three texts, Cherríe Moraga's drama *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, Adelina Anthony's performance *Las Hociconas: Three Locas with Big Mouths and Even Bigger Brains*, and Virginia Grise's play *blu* to discuss how queer Xicana productions illuminate how colonialism, internal colonialism, and imperialism have created subjects and stress the right of Chicanas and Xicanas to define our own peoplehood and write our own narratives. I argue that Xicana theater and performance promotes self-healing vis-à-vis self-making, as it theorizes our subject positions and self-hood and, through consistent revisions of what have become traditional narratives, reminds us of the possibility of "decolonizing our selves" by remaking our selves. I focus on what I term "subjects of trauma" in these three cultural productions that each make visible the social, political, and economic injustices experienced by Chicanas—many of whom live within "internal colonies," as I explain below—in the United States.

Like these playwrights' methodologies, my own decolonial feminist methodology is a tool for dissent. At a time when the works of Xicana, Chicana, and women of color thinkers are still being ignored by academia in general, my use of a methodology that necessarily upholds and integrates the work of feminist of color thinkers is an act of defiance. I employ decolonial feminist thought as a critical lens to examine the traumatic effects of colonial and imperial projects—accomplished through the oppressive and systemic classification of life (e.g., sexism, racism, capitalism)—upon Chicana subjectivity. My investigation makes space for therapeutic cultural productions by Xicana teatristas, for as Audre Lorde writes, "Caring for [ourselves] is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."<sup>9</sup>

### **Situating Chicanas as (Neo)Colonial Subjects**

Throughout this project, I focus on the notion of "Chicana" not as an *identity*, but instead as a *self-concept* that shapes the identities of mestizas of Mexican descent. In 1969, in *El Plan de Santa Barbara*, Chicano/a activists brought attention to the term "Chicano" as a political identity

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Behavior Survey Data 2012," last visited July 7, 2012, <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline>. Generally, the prevalence of having seriously considered suicide is higher among gay or lesbian youth (29.6%) and bisexual youth (40.3%) than heterosexual youth (11.7%). These trends among Latina teens and lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth suggest Latina teens who are lesbian or bisexual are more likely to consider suicide than their non-queer and non-Latina counterparts. For limited governmental study on LGTB youth risk behaviors, see Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Risk Behaviors Among Students in Grades 9-12—Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, Selected Sites, United States, 2001-2009," *MMWR* 60, no. SS-7 (2011): 15.

<sup>9</sup> Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light: Essays* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1988), 131.

grounded in a sociopolitical and economic critique of the colonial and imperial systems that decimated Indigenous Mexican peoples and their ways of being.<sup>10</sup> During this time in the 1960s and 1970s, the Chicana/o intelligentsia recognized people of Mexican descent within the United States were still suffering the oppressive effects of colonialism and imperialism despite “independence” from European countries and the civil rights movements and gains during the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> Through the diffusion of Ernesto “Che” Guevara’s writings as well as Latin American dependency theory in their circles, Chicana/o radicals learned about the theory of *internal colonialism*.<sup>12</sup> They embraced this theory of racial domination and subordination, which explained their own status of oppression in the United States and adapted it to suit their particular histories and needs.

Since then, internal colonialism has been explicated in several ways, and the theory has certainly received criticism from reputable critical race scholars.<sup>13</sup> The theory is useful, however, because it takes a history of colonialism and its vestiges seriously and encourages us to take an interdisciplinary (historical, cultural, economic) approach to analyze why and how a group is included, partially included, or excluded in the workings of a legal-political system. For the purposes of this dissertation, I situate Chicanas and Xicanas as subjects of internal colonies and adhere specifically to Robert Allen’s and Mario Barrera et al.’s theorizations of domestic and internal (neo)colonialism. Allen describes domestic colonialism:

Broadly speaking, colonialism can be defined as the direct and over-all subordination of one people, nation, or country to another with state power in the hands of the dominating power. Politically, colonialism means the direct administration of the subordinate group by persons drawn from the dominant power. Thus, in the classic African situation, European officials controlled the parliaments and governments of the colonies. Although there may have been some token representation of the indigenous population, effective power was in the hands of the European settlers. This political control was buttressed by a legal system designed to serve the interests of the white settlers.<sup>14</sup>

While critics argue that proponents of the domestic/internal colonialism model depart from the original meaning of the word “colonialism,”<sup>15</sup> theorists like Allen and Mario Barrera et al.

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<sup>10</sup> Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education (CCCHE), *El Plan de Santa Barbara: A Chicano Plan for Higher Education* (Oakland, CA: La Causa Publications, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> In this chapter, I do not use the “@” as in “Chican@” or “Xican@” because this sign points to the collapse of the feminine “a” and masculine “o” into one symbol that does not permit for one character to take precedence. Instead, I use the slash in “Chicana/o” to signal both gender (i.e., “Chicana” [female] and “Chicano” [male]) and sociopolitical *divisiveness* between Chicanas and Chicanos. I do follow Adelina Anthony’s use of “@” in Chapter 3 as I explain in note 3 of that chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Ramón A. Gutiérrez, “Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race,” *Du Bois Review* 1, no. 2 (2004): 281.

<sup>13</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (1969; Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>15</sup> Allen’s oft-ignored writings answer later critiques of the internal colonialism model. I should note, however, that these later critiques usually address Robert Blauner’s discussion of internal

differentiate between the typical definition of colonialism, which they term “external colonialism,” and internal colonialism. Barrera et alia write,

The crucial distinguishing characteristic between internal and external colonialism does not appear to be so much the existence of separate territories corresponding to metropolis and colony but the legal status of the colonized. According to our usage, a colony can be considered “internal” if the colonized population has the same formal legal status as any other group of citizens, and “external” if it is placed in a separate legal category. A group is thus internal if it is fully included in the legal-political system, and external if it is even partly excluded from equal participation in a formal sense.<sup>16</sup>

U.S.-born Chicanas, who are both fully included in the legal-political system and subordinated by state power in the hands of a White, dominating group, are thus subjects of internal colonies.<sup>17</sup> In a more recent 2005 article, Allen refers to Anibal Quijano’s, Walter Dignolo’s, and Ramón Grosfoguel’s conceptualization of “coloniality of power,” which means “the continuation of the colonial relationship without the formal colonial administration.”<sup>18</sup> This theory is similar to the internal neo-colonialism theory, as it posits, “[T]he granting of independence by a colonial power does not mean decolonization; rather the colonial relationship continues through economic and cultural domination and the dependence on imperialism of the native bourgeoisie.”<sup>19</sup> While Grosfoguel argues that “coloniality of power” offers a reconceptualization of the notion of internal colonialism, Allen notes that “coloniality of power” and “internal neo-colonialism” are similar if not identical concepts.<sup>20</sup>

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colonialism. For instance, Michael Omi and Howard Winant criticize the theory, explaining that Blauner departs from the original meaning of the term “colonialism.” Omi and Winant refer to Michael Burawoy’s definition of colonialism that “reasserts the criterion of territoriality in terms of which no ‘internal’ application can satisfy.” They cite Burawoy’s definition: “Colonialism may be defined as the conquest and administration by a ‘metropolitan country’ of a geographically separate territory in order to utilize available resources (usually human or natural) for the creation of surplus which is repatriated to the metropolis.” I find this critique unhelpful, as its insistence on pinning “colonialism” down to a single semantic meaning detracts from the theory’s illumination of how colonialism and imperialism have historically shaped social, political, and economic relationships between different groups of people. See Blauner, “Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt,” *Social Problems* (1969): 393-408; Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 101; Michael Burawoy, “Race, Class, and Colonialism,” *Social and Economic Studies* 23, no. 4 (1974), 546, quoted in Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 101.

<sup>16</sup> Mario Barrera, Carlos Muñoz, Charles Ornelas, “The Barrio as an Internal Colony,” in *People and Politics in Urban Society*, ed. Harlan Hahn (Beverly Hills: SAGE, 1972), 483.

<sup>17</sup> For a typology of different kinds of colonialisms, see Anne McClintock’s “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism,’” *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 84-98.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Allen, “Reassessing the Internal (Neo)colonialism Theory,” *The Black Scholar* 35, no. 1 (2005): 10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Nelson Maldonado-Torres defines coloniality as “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration.” See Maldonado-

Yet U.S. Third World feminists are altogether ignored in these debates about the usefulness of such theories that align ethnic minorities with the subjugated of the Third World. We, oft-ignored U.S. women of color, have to seek out connections between these theorists of internal colonialism and coloniality and our own projects. Although U.S. feminists of color have articulated anti-colonial and anti-imperial critiques since at least the 1960s and 1970s, we are forced to legitimate ourselves and our work through the appropriations of theorists of the “decolonial turn.” Still, Laura E. Pérez documents, “U.S. women of color,” in particular, “worked under the rubric of U.S. Third World women in recognition of the similarities in the general phenomena of their [multiple] oppressions [...] between themselves and women in the Third World vis-à-vis European and Euro-American (neo)colonialism.”<sup>21</sup> Queer Xicana feminist writer Cherríe Moraga also recalls how this period shaped U.S. feminism of color: “We recognized and acknowledged our internally colonized status as the children of Native and African peoples [...] and found political alliance in the great granddaughters of the disenfranchised Chinese railroad workers of the late 1800s and the daughter-survivors of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.” During this time, women of color “in movement” understood that as gendered subjects within internal colonies, they also resided within an interstitial space between heteropatriarchy in the Third World (masculinist) movement and racism in the (white) women’s liberation movement.<sup>22</sup> This self-proclaimed consciousness of inhabiting a third space, the theoretical critiques of race-based and women’s liberation movement, and the practice of working to dismantle heteropatriarchal, racist and imperialist regimes, which came to be known as U.S. Third World feminisms, or U.S. feminisms of color,<sup>23</sup> significantly marks U.S. women of color involvement in decolonizing activities. I locate my own project on Chicana trauma within this field of thought and praxis, for coloniality certainly affects the Chicana subjects I center in my dissertation. Although we are not necessarily colonized in the formal sense of the word—that is, our lives, resources, and general livelihoods are no longer directly conquered and controlled by a formal colonial administration—Chicanas’ lives have certainly been shaped by imperialistic, Eurocentric heteropatriarchal values undergird not only U.S. governmental policies but more significantly how we see our selves in the everyday.

### Subjects of Trauma

There are few sustained analyses of the impact of colonialism on women of color psyches. These analyses include Geraldine Moane’s *Gender and Colonialism*, a top-down analysis that applies psychoanalysis to oppression and, in effect, silences women of color

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Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 243.

<sup>21</sup> Laura E. Pérez, “Dussel’s *Ética de la liberación*, U.S. Women of Color Decolonizing Practices and Coalitionary Politics amidst Difference,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18, no. 2 (2010): 134.

<sup>22</sup> Here, I employ bell hooks’s rhetorically strategic use of “movement” versus “a movement” to emphasize the politicization and organization of people as part of a process made up of many movements and many individuals.

<sup>23</sup> Cherríe Moraga, “From Inside the First World: Foreword, 2001” in *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002), xvi. All quoted text from *Bridge* is from the Third Woman Press edition.

voices.<sup>24</sup> Kelly Oliver's *The Colonization of Psychic Space* takes colonization and oppression more seriously, however, as it aims "to transform psychoanalytic concepts [...] into social concepts by developing a psychoanalytic theory based on a notion of the individual or psyche that is thoroughly social."<sup>25</sup> Oliver's bottom-up approach to psychoanalytic theory gives attention to the body as a social entity and the psyche (unconscious *and* conscious) to understand the development of subjectivity. One of the few components missing from Oliver's project, nonetheless, is an engagement with the strategies recommended by women of color writers to decolonize "psychic space."

Before going any further, I must clarify that I am not advocating race- and gender-specific analyses of the mind, for these types of analyses tend to pathologize gendered and racialized groups. Anne McClintock explains that during imperialism, African women received different psychiatric treatments from white women and white men and suggests that this differential treatment happened not because each subject was treated with a sociocultural history in mind but because psychiatry and psychology deemed the human mind universal and psychopathologized any deviance from "universal" white male subjectivity.<sup>26</sup> To avoid psychopathologization of racialized, sexualized, and gendered subjects, I instead propose *sociocultural- and historically-specific* investigations into the diversity of psyches, which consider race, sexuality, gender, and class as *social categories that contribute to psychic imbalance*.

At the most basic level, I understand *trauma* to mean "a [psychosomatic] state of disruption caused by stressors severe enough to threaten life or make one believe that one is about to die."<sup>27</sup> Beginning with this definition, I develop what I call *subjects of trauma*, a term that simultaneously points to 1) groups of people who have been subjected to historical and intergenerational violence and subsequent trauma as a result of (neo)colonialism and imperialism and 2) topics that serve as a point of departure for discussions about these kinds of traumas. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) typically arises as an outcome of exposure to traumatic events. While the symptoms of PTSD can include anxiety, depression, anger, and dissociation, among many others, Van der Kolk et alia explain,

Rather than a unitary disorder consisting of separate clusters of symptoms, PTSD needs to be seen as the result of a complex interrelationship among psychological, biological, and social processes—one that varies, depending on the maturation level of the victim, as well as the length of time for which the person was exposed to the trauma.<sup>28</sup>

I posit subjects of trauma, like people with PTSD, exhibit complex interrelated psychological, biological, and social responses to historical and intergenerational violence. As I explain in

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<sup>24</sup> Geraldine Moane, *Gender and Colonialism: A Psychological Analysis of Oppression and Liberation*, rev. ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Kelly Oliver, *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Social Theory of Oppression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), xiii.

<sup>26</sup> Anne McClintock, *Double Crossings, Double Crossings: Madness, Sexuality and Imperialism* (Vancouver, BC: Ronsdale Press, 2001), 28.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Valent, "Definitions of Trauma," in *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide*, ed. Charles R. Figley (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2013), 678-79.

<sup>28</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth, eds., *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), xi.

Chapter 1, however, there exist culturally-specific terms to describe the psychological, biological, social, and spiritual effects of trauma upon groups with different collective histories.

My study treats Chicanas and Xicanas as subjects of trauma. In *Chicana and Chicano Mental Health: Alma, Mente, y Corazón*, from a Chicana feminist perspective psychologist Yvette G. Flores writes, “The multiple forms of injustice that women experience from both strangers and loved ones, especially violence and substance abuse within the home, threaten their lives and psychological health.”<sup>29</sup> Unlike psychologists who shift blame to the family,<sup>30</sup> however, Flores underscores, “The threats to the emotional well-being of Chicanas are largely structural.”<sup>31</sup> She explains, “Discrimination, marginalization, microaggressions and othering, pressures to acculturate to an often rejecting culture, and lack of understanding from immigrant parents and relational challenges rooted in acculturative stressors constitute risk factors for mood and anxiety disorders.”<sup>32</sup> Because the structures in which we participate today are manifestations of oppressive, colonial regimes, I find it necessary to consider seriously Chicanas’ positions as colonized and neocolonial subjects if we are to address the causes of Chicanas’ traumas.

As colonized and neocolonial subjects, we carry in our psyches and bodies the effects of what Pérez calls, “cultural susto,” or “the ‘frightening’ of spirit from one’s body-mind in the colonial and neocolonial ordeals, the result of which is the ‘in-between’ state of nepantla, the postconquest condition of cultural fragmentation and social indeterminacy.”<sup>33</sup> Registered psychiatric nurse, curandera, and author of *Woman Who Glows in the Dark*, Elena Avila further describes this cultural susto, as she historicizes Chicana trauma and anxiety in the conquest of the Americas. She explains, “Every illness has its story, and the job of the healer is to uncover that story.”<sup>34</sup> As a practitioner of Indigenous medical systems who works with “children of the conquest,” Avila describes curanderismo as “a medicine that developed, in large part, from the incredible healing that took place from the encounter between Europeans, Indians, Africans, and

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<sup>29</sup> Yvette G. Flores, *Chicana and Chicano Mental Health: Alma, Mente y Corazón* (University of Arizona Press, 2013), 73.

<sup>30</sup> Luis H. Zayas, *Latinas Attempting Suicide: When Cultures, Families, and Daughters Collide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Allyson P. Nolle et al., “Sacrificing for the Sake of the Family,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 82, no. 3 (2012): 319-27; Miguelina German et al., “Familism Values as a Protective Factor for Mexican-Origin Adolescents Exposed to Deviant Peers,” *Journal of Early Adolescence* 29 (2008): 16-42; Alexis O. Miranda et al., “Differences in Family Cohesion, Adaptability, and Environment Among Latino Families in Dissimilar Stages of Acculturation,” *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families* 8 (2000): 341–50; Edgar C. Trautman, “The Suicidal Fit: A Psychobiologic Study on Puerto Rican Immigrants,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 5 (1961): 98–105; A.M. Razin et al., “Suicidal Behavior Among Inner-City Hispanic Adolescent Females,” *General Hospital Psychiatry* 13 (1991): 45–58.

<sup>31</sup> Flores, *Chicana and Chicano Mental Health*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Laura E. Pérez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 21.

<sup>34</sup> Elena Avila with Joy Parker, *Woman Who Glows in the Dark: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 19.

their offspring.”<sup>35</sup> She goes on, “There was a need to develop a medicine that could heal the pain and the immense *susto*, soul loss, that resulted from the cultural destruction, enslavement, and rape that occurred during the Spanish Conquest of the Americas.”<sup>36</sup> And then she asks, “Is it any wonder that the most important illnesses that *curanderismo* has developed cures for are *susto* and *envidia* (envy)?” These diseases came from internalized oppression and the envy of the power of the oppressor.”<sup>37</sup>

In her own research and practice, Flores recognizes the effects of this *susto*, as she integrates both Indigenous and Western biomedical models in her study of Chicana/o mental health. She points out that according to the Indigenous explanatory model, “mental disorders are rooted in violations of the tonal—the spirit.”<sup>38</sup> Our soul-self is most vulnerable to trauma, and the soul wounding that results from trauma can subsequently result in *susto*.<sup>39</sup> The tonal must remain intact if we are to live healthy inner and public lives.<sup>40</sup> With this information in mind, it is certainly possible that the recent non-Latina queer and Latina queer and non-queer teen suicide epidemic is a result of an untreated cultural *susto*—a *susto* brought about by the physical and psychic violation of young beings and selves.<sup>41</sup> It is possible it is a *susto* that penetrated so deeply that these young people who were in the process of becoming saw themselves as meaningless burdens.<sup>42</sup>

In a different system of thought like European existential philosophy, cultural *susto* appears akin to what existentialist philosophers term “ontological anxiety,” or “the threat of *meaninglessness* in one’s existence.”<sup>43</sup> Philosophers from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century proto-existentialist Søren Kierkegaard to the contemporary Lewis R. Gordon examine this threat through questions of freedom, embodied agency, alienation, and authenticity.<sup>44</sup> For existentialist philosophers, a person’s recognition of this threat to *being*, the recognition that at any moment he can simply

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Flores, *Chicana and Chicano Mental Health*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> I delve further into the concept of *tonal* in Chapter 1.

<sup>41</sup> These “violations” can but do not necessarily include rape. A person’s tonal may be frightened away, for instance, by being forced to witness something horrific.

<sup>42</sup> In a 2012 study, Nolle et al. found that Latina teenagers who reported suicide attempts saw their desire to kill themselves as a way to make things better for their loved ones, for many of these young Latinas saw themselves as burdens at home. Curiously, the teenagers whose confidence had been breached—through sexual abuse by a family member or being dismissed by family when reporting sexual abuse, for example—did not want to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the family. In these cases, a teenager’s decision to kill herself represented her choice to put her needs first. See Nolle et al., “Sacrificing for the Sake of the Family,” 324. I discuss this study further in Chapter 1.

<sup>43</sup> Rollo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety* (New York: Norton, 1977), 16.

<sup>44</sup> For a comprehensive study of anxiety, see May, *Meaning of Anxiety* in which the author summarizes philosophical interpretations of anxiety. For a critical-race analysis of philosophies of existence, see Lewis R. Gordon, *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

cease *being*, induces “ontological anxiety.”<sup>45</sup> Like these philosophers of ontological anxiety, Louis Althusser, Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva posit that subjugation/subjection/subjectification is inherent in all subject formation.<sup>46</sup> All of these philosophers’ theorizations, however, focus on what they understand as a universal subject and thus neglect the subjectification of people who experience very specific forms of subjugation and oppression daily due to their race, color, sex, gender identity, nationality, religion, and ability. They ignore subjects of trauma who really do face death daily. Subjects of trauma experience symptoms—that is, physiological responses—that are the result of a series of prolonged, historical and intergenerational (systemic) events. The various manifestations of systemic oppression are indeed “stressors severe enough to threaten life or make one believe that one is about to die.”<sup>47</sup> Systemic oppression itself threatens the very existence of people of color. Maldonado-Torres emphasizes, “[T]he encounter with death is no extra-ordinary affair, but a constitutive feature of the reality of colonized and racialized subjects.”<sup>48</sup> I liken subjects of trauma to what Maldonado-Torres calls “colonized Dasein,” or what Frantz Fanon refers to as the *damné*, the condemned of the earth whose existential reality is, in Fanon’s words, “a permanent struggle against an omnipresent death.”<sup>49</sup> I focus on the very real invisibility and devaluation of one subset of the *damnés* in my consideration of Chicanas as racialized and gendered subjects who are situated at the bottom of a sociopolitical and economic hierarchy.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> May, *Meaning of Anxiety*. I use the pronoun “he” here because the subject in existential philosophy is overwhelmingly masculine.

<sup>46</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Toward an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85-126; Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism,’” in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser (New York: Routledge, 1995), 35-57; Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 777-95; Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

<sup>47</sup> Valent, “Definitions of Trauma,” 678-79.

<sup>48</sup> Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being,” 251.

<sup>49</sup> Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 128.

<sup>50</sup> A report on recent 2014 and 2015 statistics on the pay gap for women evidences that Hispanic or Latina women—which includes Chicanas—have the least median annual earnings any ethnic group (including American Indians and Alaska Natives, African Americans, Whites [non-Hispanic], and Asian Americans) and earn less than Hispanic or Latino men. An assessment of the median weekly earnings of women by race/ethnicity and level of education demonstrates Hispanic women with a bachelor’s degree or an advanced degree still earn the less than men of any race and less than women in any other ethnic group (including African Americans, Whites, and Asian Americans). Hispanic women with less than a high school diploma or some college or associate degree earn slightly more than African American women, however. See American Association of University Women, *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap*, Spring 2016, Figures 3, 6, and 7, <http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>.



I should clarify that not every person who has experienced race-, sex-, gender-, or class-based or perceived life-threatening violence fits into the category of subjects of trauma because not everyone responds to stressors in the same way. However, every person who fits into this category shows/demonstrates symptoms of trauma and has *simultaneously* experienced race-, sex-, gender-, and class-based violence. Through this defining characteristic of simultaneity, the concept of subjects of trauma draws attention to people who are systemically assigned the inferior half of dualistic thinking like White/non-White, male/female, heterosexual/queer, rich/poor, and able-bodied/differently-abled—where the non-White, female, queer, poor, and differently-abled halves of an either/or system of thought are deemed inferior by racist, heteropatriarchal, and capitalist cultures.<sup>51</sup>

These binary assignments do not work independently. Instead, as the Combahee River Collective expressed in 1977, such terms merit “an integrated analysis” that acknowledges “the major systems of oppression are interlocking.”<sup>52</sup> The Collective points to a history of rape of Black women by white men as an example in which Black women’s oppression is neither solely racial nor solely sexual but both.<sup>53</sup> In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw named this “integrated analysis,” “intersectionality.”<sup>54</sup> More recently, María Lugones uses the term “coloniality of gender” to describe “the analysis of racialized capitalist gender oppression.”<sup>55</sup> Lugones focuses on subjective-intersubjective relations to explain “the oppressive imposition [of gender] as a complex interaction of economic, racializing, and gendering systems in which every person at the colonial encounter can be found, as a live, historical, fully described being.”<sup>56</sup> These interlocking systems of oppression—racism/nationalism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy—make up the basis for the trauma of marginalized people I call subjects of trauma.

### **Narrativizing Trauma**

Cultural productions being created by, for, and about women of color during and after the antiracist and anticolonial movements of the 1960s evidence how such cultural work can bring audiences to social, political, and spiritual consciousness and thus transform the ways in which the audience views the self vis-à-vis U.S. society. In *Represent and Destroy*, Jodi Melamed tracks how the liberal multiculturalism of the 1980s and 1990s contained and managed the 1960s social movements’ deployment of culture “by turning it into aesthetics, identity, recognition, and

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<sup>51</sup> bell hooks explains that either/or dualistic thinking is a central component of all systems of domination in Western society. See hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 31.

<sup>52</sup> The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” in Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*, 234.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>54</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-67.

<sup>55</sup> María Lugones, “Methodological Notes Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology*, ed. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Eduardo Mendieta (Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2011), 77.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

representation.”<sup>57</sup> She writes more specifically about cultural productions by women of color feminists, explaining that liberal multiculturalism—as counterinsurgency—“made it possible to think that ideas of identity, knowing, and culture coming out of women-of-color feminism [...] were merely the same as positive pluralism: respect for multiple identities conceived as cultural property.”<sup>58</sup> Although these social movements centered different identity groups, “[e]ach articulated anti-racisms that prioritized collective thriving, material well-being, and self-determination above liberal-capitalist democracy as usual.”<sup>59</sup> Multicultural liberalism’s appropriation and abstraction of the cultural work that emerged during this period ensured the continuation of psychic colonization, exploitative ethico-economic orders, and transnational divisions, which the movements sought to undo.

*The Hungry Woman*, *Las Hociconas*, and *blu* resist such appropriation and abstraction, as they each present audiences with narratives of historical and systemic violence, pain, and trauma. The subjects of trauma they theatricalize are embodied representations of the effects of an Anglo, Mexican, and Chicano/a heteropatriarchal culture that splits and fragments bodies, psyches, and spirits. The Xicana playwrights offer us tactics, or as Chela Sandoval might term them, “movidas”—not strategies—to decolonize ourselves.<sup>60</sup> These tactics or movidas are short-term maneuvers that are part of a long-term strategy for structural change. Furthermore, the texts lend themselves to a forward-thinking analysis of the decolonial possibilities they help us imagine, and they incite us to consider the effects of writing *about* ourselves not only *for* ourselves but for a transformative movement for liberation. Theater and performance specifically allows for public storytelling. Since the late 1960s, the central aim of Chicano/a theater has been to form this collective identity among oppressed mestiza/os of Mexican descent in the United States.<sup>61</sup> Chicana and Xicana feminist theater affords women the possibility “to interact with staged representations of themselves as subjects, accepting or rejecting identification with them.”<sup>62</sup> For Chicanas who do not see themselves represented anywhere, Xicana and Chicana feminist theater functions as a counterhegemonic tool for the oppressed. Moraga illuminates,

Experience first generated through the body returns to the body in the flesh of the stage performance. In this sense, for me, it is as close to direct political activism as I can get as an artist, for theater requires the body to make testimony and requires other bodies to bear witness to it.<sup>63</sup>

Unlike novels or stories, Xicana performance allows for physical *embodiment* of the symptoms of trauma. It permits the actors and audience to interact wholly through mind, body, and spirit—albeit in different ways. Moraga also theorizes, “The violation of the collective body is re-

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<sup>57</sup> Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xix-xx.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>60</sup> Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 139.

<sup>61</sup> See Yolanda Broyles-González, *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

<sup>62</sup> Yvonne Yarbaro-Bejarano, *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherrie Moraga* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 25.

<sup>63</sup> Cherrie Moraga, *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness, Writings 2000-2010* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 35.

membered in these staged enactments. Here the pieces of ourselves broken by racist and colonial incursions are re-collected and reconfigured through an art of social transformation.”<sup>64</sup>

“Trauma” itself is a narrative representation of events. Nathaniel V. Mohatt et alia explain,

To the extent that *historical* trauma is a narrative representation, it connects histories of group-experienced traumatic events to present day experiences and contexts, including the contemporary health of a group or community. Thus, historical trauma operates through a layering of narrative turns, including trauma as a concept represented in stories, history as socially endorsed memory, and an internal logic linking history to present suffering or resilience.<sup>65</sup>

Xicana theater and performance reconfigures the narrative of Chicana trauma. All three playwrights I focus on in this dissertation layer Chicana historical trauma with the story of Coyolxauhqui’s dismemberment by her brother, Huitzilopochtli, and their relationships with their mother, Coatlicue. The Coyolxauhqui myth functions as a key narrative that explains Chicanas’ psychic and material conditions. Moraga, Anthony, and Grise use the Coyolxauhqui story as a reference point to elucidate Chicanas’ fragmented subjectivities. By reconfiguring this culturally-specific narrative to implicate heteropatriarchy and European colonialism—thus fusing two tactics of oppositional consciousness Chela Sandoval describes—these teatristas counteract mainstream imperatives to appropriate or simply ignore Chicana and Xicana feminist critiques of colonialism and imperialism.<sup>66</sup>

### **A (Decolonial) U.S. Third World Queer and Feminist Methodology**

At its core, this dissertation is an interdisciplinary decolonial, queer women of color cultural analysis of Xicana representations of trauma. My examination of theatrical texts relies on a decolonial feminist methodology that has its roots in U.S. Third world or U.S. women of color feminist practice. Theorist bell hooks explains feminism as not “a movement” but instead “movement,” emphasizing the elimination of patriarchy as a process of uncovering past feminist legacies and continuously engaging dialectical critique of present feminist theory and organization.<sup>67</sup> Postcolonial thinker Helen Tiffin writes similarly of decolonization: “Decolonisation is a process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling.”<sup>68</sup> The prefix “de” in “decolonial,” explains Paola Bacchetta, “has a sense of undoing, and undoing also opens a space for a different kind of doing.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>65</sup> Nathaniel Vincent Mohatt, et. al, “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative: A Conceptual Review of How History Impacts Present-Day Health,” *Social Science and Medicine* 106 (2014): 129.

<sup>66</sup> See Chela Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World,” *Genders* 10 (1991): 1-24.

<sup>67</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), x-xi.

<sup>68</sup> Helen Tiffin, “Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse,” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1995), 95.

<sup>69</sup> Paola Bacchetta and Marcelle Maese-Cohen, “Decolonial Praxis: Enabling Intranational and Queer Coalition Building,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18, no. 2 (2010): 181.

As aforementioned, women of color feminist practice is inherently “decolonial” in its approach as it aims to undo the imposition of Westernized modes of thinking and existing.<sup>70</sup> This practice recognizes the ways in which *research* has served as one of imperialism’s and colonialism’s strategies to control and dominate Indigenous and non-European populations. Under colonialism, research aimed to define Othered peoples. It defined their status as subhuman and the validity of their knowledges and cosmologies. My methodology keeps in mind that research is implicated in, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, “[t]he whole process of colonization [that] can be viewed as a stripping away of *mana* (our standing in our own eyes), and an undermining of *rangatiratanga* (our ability and right to determine our destinies).”<sup>71</sup> Western notions of history, writing, and theory must be rethought and reorganized in order to include the silenced voices of Indigenous and non-European peoples—that is, to restore *mana* and *rangatiratanga*.<sup>72</sup>

In its efforts, women of color feminist practice underscores decolonizing methodologies as not only non-western but also non-academic ways of reading and doing research. Decolonial methodologies do more than deconstruct Western scholarship, however. Smith writes,

In a decolonizing framework, deconstruction is part of a much larger intent. Taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions. It provides words, perhaps, an insight that explains certain experiences—but it does not prevent someone from dying.<sup>73</sup>

She further emphasizes, “Fragmentation is not an indigenous project, it is something we are recovering from.”<sup>74</sup> In terms of my research project, the decolonial feminist methodology I employ takes into consideration how colonization as a process created subjects—in the sense of those who are under dominion of a government or ruling power and thus materially and psychically shaped by those powers. I follow the path of women-of-color efforts to understand our daily experiences through an intersectional lens. My dissertation stands apart from a normative project of deconstruction in that it utilizes a research practice that *makes space for the creation of new selves*, subjects-in-process motivated to survive and thrive in the face of heteropatriarchal, racist, and class-based hatred.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Women of color feminist practice especially focuses on ways to deconstruct the category “woman,” noting Western/colonial concepts of not only “gender” but also what is understood as the biological category of “sex.” This node of deconstruction emerges first in Anzaldúa’s theorization of *mita-y-mitas*. See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 41. All citations refer to this edition. A more sustained deconstruction of the “biological” categories of sex is María Lugones, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (2007): 186-209.

<sup>71</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1999), 173.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-40.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>75</sup> Norma Alarcón, “Conjugating Subjects: The Heteroglossia of Essence and Resistance,” in *An Other Tongue: Nation and Ethnicity in the Linguistic Borderlands*, ed. Alfred Arteaga (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 136.

Pérez argues that a U.S. Third World feminist and queer critique is integral to any decolonial project of liberation, for such a project “entail[s] the de-gendering and de-heteronormativizing of our conscious subjectivities, alongside class consciousness and awareness of racialization as the idealization and rendering invisible and normal of ‘whiteness’ and the negative marking of Third World difference as *the* site of the enactment of racial difference.”<sup>76</sup> That is, because colonialism and imperialism introduced divisive categories of being (race, sex, gender, class, and sexuality) that produced us as Others, and U.S. Third world feminist queer critique investigates the subject produced at the intersections of these categories, any project that seeks to undo the production of Othered subjects must consider U.S. Third World feminist queer analyses. Cultural studies critic Grace Kyungwon Hong also emphasizes the significance of a women of color feminist thought as methodology: “[W]omen of color feminism is not a reified subject position but a reading practice, a ‘way of making sense of’ that reveals the contradictions of the racialized and gendered state.”<sup>77</sup> Women of color feminism is a necessary approach to making sense of one’s self, as it allows us to understand how the material effects of traumatic events and/or everyday drama affect *every* part of our lives.

One practice that is essential for a decolonial feminist research methodology is *dialogic listening*. Moraga cautions, “In defense of our embattled cultures, we do not often allow ideas to grow within the context of an evolving community base, to live within the site of political contradictions, to abnegate our own need to control knowledge in the plain effort to listen on the road to learning.”<sup>78</sup> Toni Cade Bambara’s foreword to *This Bridge* similarly invokes dialogic listening: “We have got to know each other better and teach each other our ways, our views, if we’re to remove the scales (‘seeing radical differences where they don’t exist and not seeing them when they are critical’ – Quintanales) and get the work done.”<sup>79</sup> And she stresses “the habit of listening to each other and learning each other’s ways of seeing and being. Of hearing each other ...”<sup>80</sup> Listening becomes a method to resituate our “seeing and being.” In her discussion of *This Bridge*, Melamed notes that for women of color feminism, dialogic listening becomes a learned “habit of relating to others without epistemic violence.”<sup>81</sup> Indeed, when Spivak asks, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and concludes that the subaltern *cannot* speak because she is not heard, we might also say that *no one is listening—except ourselves to ourselves*.<sup>82</sup>

While epistemological and ontological shifts that acknowledge diversity must occur before our speech is wholly validated, my project joins other decolonial feminists in enacting dialogic listening especially as I listen to/read and honor the labors of U.S Third World feminists

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<sup>76</sup> Laura E. Pérez, “Enrique Dussel’s *Ética de la liberación*, U.S. Women of Color Decolonizing Practices and Coalitionary Politics amidst Difference,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18, no. 2 (2010): 122; emphasis in original.

<sup>77</sup> Grace Kyungwon Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), x.

<sup>78</sup> Moraga, *Xicana Codex*, 171.

<sup>79</sup> Toni Cade Bambara, “Foreword,” in Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*, xlii.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*, 106.

<sup>82</sup> Spivak, in fact, says that the immolated widow cannot be heard because patriarchy and colonialism work within different grids of intelligibility. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 271-313.

to structure a decolonial feminist framework independent of systemic intellectuals. Liberal multiculturalism's management of antiracist intellectual activism has made it easy for us to misrecognize the radical thought of poor people of color as "clichéd" and has encouraged us, instead, to engage scholars who employ methodologies, epistemologies, and disciplines deemed valid within the academy.<sup>83</sup> For these reasons, the primary and secondary texts I engage stem mostly from feminists of color, white feminists who work in solidarity with feminists of color, and queer communities of color and our allies.

A decolonial feminist methodological approach enables me to take seriously the social, political, and economic contexts out of which each object of study—whether codex, philosophical treatise, dramatic play, and/or psychology research article—emerges. For instance, in my assessment of psychiatric articles, I remain vigilant of the snares of positivism, careful not to objectivize trauma and its seeming symptoms as if they exist independently of psychiatrists who diagnose it, the patients with whom the doctor interacts, and their surrounding culture. I do not want to reify the syndromes proposed by psychiatrists, so I must grapple with the tension between 1) specific cultural and historical conditions neglected by psychiatrists yet under which they present diagnoses and 2) organic (biological) and somatic illnesses that arise as a result of historical and political situations. From Pérez's critique of Enrique Dussel's *Ética de la liberación*, I have learned not to be divisive in my critiques, however, by actively calling for productive coalitions that are "based on principal associations of mutual understanding and respect, not just declarations of solidarity that mean well but because of privileges of class, 'race' or ethnicity, gender, and sexuality do not engage the work of transforming such subjectivity."<sup>84</sup> Pérez explains, "Addressing the hidden politics of privilege [...] in and among ourselves is crucial to the task of understanding what decolonization itself might mean and therefore entail for a decolonizing practice."<sup>85</sup> Like Pérez, the object of my critiques is based on an effort to effect change.

## Chapter Overview

I begin with "The Scene(s) of the Crimes: A Xicana Psychosocial Exposition of Colonial-Based Trauma" in which I focus on the colonial, imperial, and psychosocial context for Chicana trauma. I emphasize the monarchical and Catholic reorganization of physical and psychic space in the Indigenous Americas. I detail the physical and ontological violence perpetrated upon the Indigenous peoples, especially in what has become Mexico and the southwestern United States. I then synthesize mental health statistics that quantify the psychic effects of colonial and imperial changes upon displaced peoples. I point to the psychic underpinnings of present-day modes of relating to one another, such as familismo, as symptoms of historical and intergenerational trauma, or cultural *susto*, and suggest a shift from "psychologizing" to "spiritualizing."

In the next three chapters, I posit Xicana *teatristas* tactfully assuage Chicana/o historical and intergenerational trauma through the creative form and content of their plays. I explore how each playwright performs a collective spiritual *limpia* with her audience. Each playwright, I show, makes use of what Audre Lorde conceptualizes as "the erotic" to ameliorate psychic pain. In the second chapter, "'An Honest Portrait of Our Pain': Reimagining the Terms for a

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<sup>83</sup> For a sustained analysis of multicultural liberalism's management of radical anti-racist literature, see Melamed, *Represent and Destroy*.

<sup>84</sup> Pérez, "Dussel's *Ética*," 123.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

Decolonial Future in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman*, ” I explore how Moraga situates ancient stories of heteropatriarchal betrayal within what Emma Pérez terms “a decolonial imaginary” to help us reconsider our plans for decolonization. Moraga illustrates how the roots of many of the injustices we confront today are results of colonialism and imperialism. I argue Moraga calls for a shift from our present heteropatriarchal understandings of the self to a decolonized conceptualization of the self, which emphasizes *intersubjectivity*.

I further elucidate the decolonizing potential of theater and performance spaces in the third chapter, “Public Acts of Desiring Affect(ion): Anger, Sadness, and Chisme in Adelina Anthony's *Las Hociconas*.” I explain Anthony, like Moraga, points to the effects of colonialism and imperialism as traumatic, but I shift to affect as discursive point of departure. I explore how Anthony's use of “affect-centered humor” guides us through a series of affects including anger, melancholia, and desire. I explore Anthony's role as a healer who encourages the audience to shift through the affects trauma scholars and psychobiologists emphasize in their therapeutic models. I emphasize what Teresa Brennan calls “the transmission of affect” to argue how theater and performance spaces can be conducive to a temporary decolonization of the self. Thinking about the necessary stages toward trauma recovery, I further show how the trajectory of Anthony's *Las Hociconas* resembles Gloria Anzaldúa's “path of *conocimiento*,” which is a useful map to assuage Chicana trauma.

In the fourth and final chapter, “‘Cut Limb by Limb’: Memories of Chicana/o Violence in Virginia Grise's *blu*,” I investigate how Grise illustrates the continued effects of imperialism as well as a different form of colonialism, internal colonialism, epitomized by chaotic life in U.S. barrios. The playwright theatricalizes different registers of war in these internal colonies and demonstrates how “*la vida loca*,” or the crazy life, is but an attempt for barrio inhabitants to make sense of their lives. Like Moraga and Anthony, Grise makes use of themes of fragmentation and reassemblage to emphasize physical and psychic states of war subjects of trauma undergo. By integrating the Coyolxauhqui myth in *blu*, she stresses not being but becoming for subjects of trauma, and she makes space for completely reimagining our potential.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**The Scene(s) of the Crimes:**  
**A Xicana Psychosocial Exposition of Colonial-Based Trauma**

A haunting. This trauma feels like a haunting, forcing Chicanas to come to terms with historical memory. Our trauma began in 1519 when “two expanding nations ... two radically dissimilar cultures, two radically different modes of interpreting existence” clashed.<sup>1</sup>

*A hundred times, a hundred times they came to the door. In metal armor, in stiff leather, in uniforms of a dozen colors. They came with swords and spears and bayonets and guns and cannons. Death came on horses. Death and disease and poverty. Acts of violence soaked the ground with blood again and again, hunting the people with dark skin and darker eyes and sky wide faces.*<sup>2</sup>

I point to the arrival of Europeans and their brutality against the Indigenous peoples of the Americas as one of the traumatic moments that birthed, shaped, and now haunts Chicana subjects almost 500 years after this initial clash of peoples and their ontologies.

This chapter provides the colonial, imperial, and psychosocial context for Chicana trauma. Here, I contextualize what I conceptualize as “subjects of trauma,” a term that simultaneously points to 1) groups of people who have been subjected to historical and intergenerational violence and subsequent trauma as a result of colonialism and imperialism and 2) topics that serve as points of departure for discussions about these kinds of traumas. I point to Chicanas as subjects of trauma, who are products of sexual violence that includes not only rape and mutilation of our Indigenous foremothers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and after but also the monarchical and Catholic reorganization of physical and psychic space in the Indigenous Americas since that time. The conquest of the Americas was made possible through these attacks. Various 16<sup>th</sup>-century letters and other writings from friars in New Spain composed to the Spanish Crown illuminate the particularly sexual nature of the physical violence used to conquer American peoples and territories. I recount their descriptions here not for the purpose of sensationalizing the violence against Indigenous bodies but instead for the purpose of illuminating the similar mentality that justified and continues to justify the treatment of non-European bodies and non-Western thinking in New Spain and the disregard for these types of bodies, minds, and spirits today in the United States and Mexico. I posit that the monarchical and Catholic disorganization of Indigenous thought, especially regarding the feminine and masculine, affected both physical and psychic bodies. The systems of thought that developed in the Americas and have been codified into law and social tenets today were thus based on the traumatization of Indigenous peoples. The traumatic “clash of nations” persisted as Anglos and Europeans took power. Later epochs of segregation, lynching, forced removals, and cultural erasure in the United States traumatized people in ways that psychologists today study. In the latter part of this chapter, I discuss how these historical traumas and soul wounds have been passed down inter-generationally and continue to affect the way the descendants of these peoples—like Chicanas—are psychically situated.

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<sup>1</sup> Miguel León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, expanded and updated edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992; 1962), xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> ire'ne lara silva, *flesh to bone* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 2013), 50; my italics.



## The Physical Violence of Colonial “Recreation”

In *A Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies*, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas expresses his indignation at the Spaniards’ cruel treatment of the native population throughout the New World. He describes the spectacles of violence in the provinces of Pánuco and Jalisco, and the Yucatán region during the period between April 1518—when, according to Las Casas, the Spaniards set foot in New Spain—and September 1542—the time when Las Casas wrote his account.<sup>3</sup> Las Casas explains that the grotesque violence inflicted upon the people during the conquest of what was known as the Mainland, or present-day southern Central America and northern South America, was “nothing compared to what went on in New Spain.”<sup>4</sup> The territories of New Spain (present-day Southwest of the United States, México, and northern Central America) were ground for the enslavement, rape, torture, sale, and butchering of the Indigenous population.<sup>5</sup> In 1525 in the province of Jalisco, he describes, one Spanish officer alone was responsible for the indiscriminate slaughter of many locals, hanging some, burning others alive, and throwing yet others to wild dogs, sometimes sawing off their hands and feet, sometimes pulling out their tongues or hacking off their heads. Even though the locals never raised a finger against the Spaniards, the distinguished commander knowingly allowed this spate of atrocities to continue unchecked, directed as it was to terrorizing the local people into doing his bidding and into bringing him gifts of gold or other precious objects.<sup>6</sup>

The friar further explains, “On top of this, the Spaniards inflicted pain and untold misery on the entire native population, subjecting them to an unrelenting daily—even hourly—round of lashes, beatings, and cruel treatment of every kind.”<sup>7</sup> Similar cruelties ensued in Yucatán especially between 1526 and 1537, when Francisco de Montejo served as governor in the region. Wild dogs were common weapons used to dismember and literally devour the natives.<sup>8</sup>

One woman, who was indisposed at the time and so not able to make good her escape, determined that the dogs should not tear her to pieces as they had done her neighbours and, taking a rope, and tying her one-year-old child to her leg, hanged herself from a beam. Yet she was not in time to prevent the dogs from ripping the infant to pieces, even though a friar did arrive and baptize the infant before it died.<sup>9</sup>

While the conquerors seemed “indiscriminate” in the degree of torture they inflicted upon young, old, women, men, and children, their horrific acts were often sex-specific. In Jalisco,

One Spaniard, who wished to satisfy his evil lust on a young girl, took out his dagger—or as it may be his sword—and cut off the hand of the girl’s mother who was trying to

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<sup>3</sup> Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, trans. Nigel Griffin (New York: Penguin, 1992), 42.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> In Griffin’s translation, Las Casas uses “butcher” to describe the Spaniards in charge of areas like Panuco, Jalisco, and the Yucatán. These men include Beltrán Nuño de Guzmán and Francisco de Montejo, “who had been one of Cortés’s companions in 1519 and conquered much of the Yucatán Peninsula between 1526 and 1537.” See Las Casas, *Short Account*, 71 n. 92.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 73. Numerous colonial accounts report “dogging” as sport. See John Grier Varner and Jeannette Johnson Varner, *Dogs of the Conquest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983).

<sup>9</sup> Las Casas, *Short Account*, 73-74.

wrench her from his grasp. When the girl persisted in refusing him, he stabbed her to death.<sup>10</sup>

In Yucatán,

He [Francisco de Montejo] selected the most beautiful maid from fifty or a hundred and gave her to him who chose her in exchange for arroba of wine, or oil, or for a pig; and similarly a handsome boy, chosen from among two hundred or three hundred, for the same amount.<sup>11</sup>

Pointing to their physical attractiveness, Casas suggests both female and male natives were purchased for the buyers' sexual use. Yet a woman's value was not based solely on her attractiveness, for, Las Casas explains, one Spaniard boasted "without any sign of shame or remorse, that he always labored long and hard to make the local women pregnant so that they would fetch a higher price as slaves."<sup>12</sup> Like female animals to be bred and consumed, Indigenous women who could give birth to more slaves could be exchanged for more valuable goods. Yet, as one of Fray Lorenzo de Bienvenida's letters to the Crown makes known, even their reproductive capabilities did not protect these women from abuse and death.

In a 1548 letter to the Crown, Bienvenida identifies one of the perpetrators of these crimes against natives in Chetumal as Captain Alonso Pacheco. Bienvenida reports that Pacheco passed by this province, "which was at peace," and "[e]ven though the natives did not make war, he robbed the province and consumed the foodstuffs of the natives."<sup>13</sup> Pacheco set dogs on the natives and "with his own hands" killed many others with a garrote.<sup>14</sup> Bienvenida provides further details:

Tying them to stakes, *he cut the breasts off many women, and hands, noses, and ears off the men*, and he tied squashes to the feet of women and threw them in the lakes to drown merely to amuse himself. He committed other great cruelties which I shall not mention for lack of space. He destroyed the entire province."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Augustus McNutt, *Bartholomew de las Casas: His Life, Apostolate, and Writings* (Cleveland, OH: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1909), 363. Interestingly, McNutt's translation includes "similarly a handsome boy," while other translations, like Nigel Griffin's, do not: "A man would be invited [by Francisco de Montejo] to choose from among fifty or a hundred young girls the one he most fancied, and she would then be handed over in exchange for an arroba of wine or oil or vinegar, or for a side of salt pork. Two or three hundred young men would be lined up in a similar fashion, the price being much the same." See Las Casas, *Short Account*, 72. In Spanish, Las Casas describes the chosen girl as "una de mejor parecer que otra" and the chosen boy as "un muchacho bien dispuesto." See Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción [sic] de las Indias* (Santafe de Bogotá: C. José Maria Rios, 1813), 81.

<sup>12</sup> Las Casas, *Short Account*, 73-74.

<sup>13</sup> Translated in Robert S. Chamberlain, *The Conquest and Colonization of the Yucatan, 1517-1550* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1948), 235. Original letter from Bienvenida to Felipe II dated 10 February 1548 is published as "Carta de Fray Lorenzo de Bienvenida á S.A. el Príncipe Don Felipe, dandole cuenta de varios asuntos referentes á la provincia Yucatan—10 de febrero de 1548," in *Cartas de Indias*, ed. Ministerio de Fomento (Madrid: Imprenta de Manuel G. Hernández, 1877), 80.

<sup>14</sup> Chamberlain, *The Conquest and Colonization of the Yucatan*, 235.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

In his own *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan*, written circa 1566, Bishop Diego de Landa partially corroborates Bienvenida's account:

The Indians of the provinces of Cochua and Chetumal revolted, the Spaniards pacified them in such a way, that these provinces, which were formerly the thickest settled and the most populous, remained the most desolate of all the country; committing upon them unheard-of cruelties, cutting off noses, arms and legs, and the *breasts of women*; throwing them into deep lagoons with gourds tied to their feet; stabbing the little children because they did not walk as fast as their mothers; and if those whom they drove along, chained together around the neck, fell sick or did not move along as fast as the others, they cut off their heads between the others, so as not to stop and untie them.<sup>16</sup>

Both accounts significantly mention sex-specific mutilation. In his account, Bienvenida highlights how Pacheco inflicts different types of mutilations based upon sex. Pacheco amputates women's breasts—a symbol of their reproductive functions and their capacity to nourish another generation of Indigenous peoples—and cuts the hands, noses, and ears off men—conspicuous mutilation that not only evidenced their capture but may have also kept men from fighting.<sup>17</sup> The nose, more specifically, functioned as a type of emasculation, for unlike a castrated penis, an amputated nose was more visible.<sup>18</sup> The accounts diverge as Bienvenida notes that the natives were peaceful and did not make war, and Landa implies that the Spaniards' brutality was a way of quelling the natives' rebellion, suggesting the Spaniards' actions were justified. Montejo, the governor, had been granted permission to enslave the natives only if they 1) persisted in rebellion or refused to accept Castilian domination and Christianity; 2) were taken in war; and/or 3) had been held as slaves by other natives.<sup>19</sup> Bishop Diego de Landa takes care to protect the governor, clarifying, "And it is said that Don Francisco de Montejo did not commit any of these barbarities nor was he present at them. On the contrary they seemed very evil to him, but he could do nothing more."<sup>20</sup> Landa, who was not known for his gentle treatment of the natives either,<sup>21</sup> thus justifies Montejo could do nothing more because the "rebellious" natives had been "lawfully" enslaved and tortured.

Bienvenida's relation more directly conveys Pacheco's sadism. As indicated above, Pacheco, Bienvenida notes, tortures the natives "merely to amuse himself." Bienvenida adds that

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<sup>16</sup> Diego de Landa, *Landa's Relación de las cosas de Yucatan*, ed. and trans. Alfred M Tozzer (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1941), 60-61.

<sup>17</sup> Brett Rushforth similarly posits colonial French officers in New France maimed indigenous men's hands to prevent them from escape or rebellion. See Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slavery in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 43.

<sup>18</sup> Patricia Skinner traces historical literature and finds that nose-cutting was punishment for political betrayal and adultery. She argues that male honor is at the heart of both of these crimes. In the case of natives' rhinotomies, then, we might argue Pacheco's honor was at stake. See Skinner, "The Gendered Nose and its Lack: 'Medieval' Nose-Cutting and its Modern Manifestations," *Journal of Women's History* 26, no. 1 (2014): 45-67.

<sup>19</sup> Landa, *Landa's Relación*, 61 n. 291.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>21</sup> Grant D. Jones, *Maya Resistance to Spanish Rule: Time and History on a Colonial Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 43.

looking upon the outrages he committed in Chetumal, Pacheco commented, “Oh how well I finished them off.”<sup>22</sup> Pacheco’s words here serve as a reminder that the Spaniards were not simply witnesses, innocently gazing upon Indigenous bodies; they were directors of and main actors in these scenes of rape, torture, and dismemberment, which apparently became recreational spectacles for Spaniards like Pacheco. Antagonist officers, obliged soldiers, loyal bishops, and empathetic friars together were re-scripting the American world. Landa’s relation of events, especially his emphasis on rebellious natives, reminds us that each writer had his own political agenda in writing to the Crown. Yes, even Bartolomé de las Casas, who seemed to be a better friend of the natives, had a political aim in mind—namely, to Christianize the natives. That is, he supported the colonial project to transform the Americas, but he did not condone the violence heaped upon the Indigenous population. He empathized with natives’ distrust for Christian teachings in light of the massacres carried out by Spaniards who described themselves as Christians.<sup>23</sup> One of the motivations behind his letters, then, was not to dissuade the Crown from colonizing the Americas but instead to encourage re-scripting the new world in an environment of less blatant hypocrisy.

### **Ontological Violence: From Balanced Duality to Gender Hierarchy**

Yet the Indigenous peoples and their worlds were being destroyed and re-created through not only these physical attacks but ideological and hence ontological attacks as well. These attacks upon ways of thinking transformed both psychic and material relations amongst the natives—many of whose descendants became mestizos who lived and continue to live in present-day Mexico and the U.S. Southwest. Indigenous ways of relating to one another transformed through the enforcement of a new language, mode of governance, systems of categorization (e.g., sex-based, racial, and economic stratification), and a different form of spirituality. Physical and psychic uprooting, as I explain in more detail below, very likely had traumatizing effects upon these Indigenous people.

While the American Indian and Chicano Movements of the 1960s and 1970s summoned these memories of lost lands and customs and focused on the ways in which European colonization restructured life in ways that still affected their groups centuries later, Chicana feminists of this period illuminated the idea that, in addition to these new systems of order, Spaniards and other Europeans also imported a hierarchical organization of life based on sex and gender. Faced with the sexism of the Chicano movement, Chicanas of the late 1960s and 1970s brought attention to the forgotten egalitarian relations amongst Indigenous peoples prior to La Conquista. For example, in 1969, Enriqueta Longeaux Vasquez problematized Chicana culture’s insistence that women must be subservient to men because it is part of the “great tradition.” She recognized it was time to “blow up that little dream bubble for us” and presented documented facts that before European colonization,

our highly cultured Indian woman usually held an honored position in the ‘primitive’ society in which she lived. She was mistress of the home and took full part in tribal elections. The position of the woman was not only free, but honorable. She was a strong

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<sup>22</sup> Chamberlain, *The Conquest and Colonization of the Yucatan*, 235.

<sup>23</sup> The priests and missionaries themselves also sexually violated the natives. For an analysis of these incidents and Mayan reports, see John F. Chuchiak IV, “The Sins of the Fathers: Franciscan Friars, Parish Priests, and the Sexual Conquest of the Yucatec Maya, 1545-1808,” *Ethnohistory* 54, no. 1 (2007): 69-127.

laborer, a good mechanic, a good craftsman, a trapper, a doctor, a preacher, and, if need be, a leader. It seems that among the so-called *savage* people of this continent, women held a degree of political influence never equaled in any *civilized* nation. The woman of the Aztecs was far superior to that of Spain, then and now. And in Oaxaca, Mexico, the Mayan [sic] woman to this day is equal to her man.<sup>24</sup>

Like other Chicanas of her time, Vasquez underscores how Chicano male supremacy is not traditional or customary amongst the Indigenous peoples of whom Chicanos are descendants. At a time when the Chicano Movement contested anything of European or colonial origin, Vasquez suggested that sexism is a European custom—that is, sexism is a tradition or custom that even Chicano male supremacists cognizant of colonialism’s efforts to divide and conquer should understand as divisive and oppressive.

Similarly, in a 1971 piece, Marta Vidal explains that the inferior role of la Chicana “does not date back to the beginning of time,” as enforcers of Chicano patriarchal norms would have it. She posits, instead, the origins of Chicano male supremacy in European colonization of the Americas, explaining, “In fact, before the Europeans came to this part of the world women enjoyed a high position of equality with men. The submission of women, along with institutions such as the church and the patriarchy, was imported by European colonizers, and remains to this day part of Anglo society.”<sup>25</sup> Vidal also draws attention to patriarchy itself as a colonial introduction and, like Vasquez, she stresses Indigenous women’s equality with men before Spanish colonialism. Both feminists encourage their audiences to investigate the origins of patriarchy in the New World to show how colonialism affected Indigenous female and males differently. For Vasquez and Vidal, Chicanos enforce the norms of the colonizer through their demands for Chicanas’ subservience to Chicanos.

Unlike these two writers, however, Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez, in 1972, steers clear of blanket generalizations, romanticizing native women’s positions before La Conquista. She presses,

Although the native Indian women [sic] of the Americas was, before the Spanish conquest, far from being completely free, she often participated more fully in the life of the society than did her sister under Spanish rule. The coming of the European, with his Catholic Church and feudal social system, was a turning point. Our roots lie in the act of rape: the rape of women, the rape of an entire continent and its people.<sup>26</sup>

Martínez provides us with examples of the perhaps more “material” (as opposed to “ideological”) ways in which men and women were affected differently by pointing to not only the violence of gender ideologies but also gendered physical violence, such as rape. Unlike other writers of her time, however, Martínez strategically underscores how Chicanas and Chicanos are similarly victims of sexism. The oppressor’s sexist attitudes toward Chicanos, she highlights, are manifested in the idea of Chicanos’ “machismo,” “a sense of supposed manhood in order to get him to kill Vietnamese.” She writes further, “Sexism is a useful tool to the colonizer; the men are oppressed but they can beat and mistreat women, who thus serve as targets for a frustration that

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<sup>24</sup> Enriqueta Longeaux Vasquez, “¡Despierten Hermanas! The Women of La Raza—Part II,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, ed. Alma M. García (New York: Routledge, 1997), 110.

<sup>25</sup> Marta Vidal, “New Voice of La Raza: Chicanas Speak Out,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Martínez, “La Chicana,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought*, 32.

might otherwise become revolutionary.”<sup>27</sup> In an effort to help Chicanos recognize how sexism has been used as a tool of colonialism, Martínez illuminates the various ways in which Chican@s, as a whole, colonized group, are affected. Martínez is also transparent about the complexity of American women’s positions before colonization, noting that native Indian women were “far from being completely free.”<sup>28</sup> In 1976, Anna Nieto Gomez echoes this sentiment, emphasizing, “Don’t get me wrong, I’m not saying that she wasn’t oppressed; I’m not saying that at all. I’m saying it was different, and comparatively speaking, it was a freer role.”<sup>29</sup> Yet neither Martínez nor Nieto Gómez expresses what she perceives as oppressive in Indigenous women’s roles. Chicana theorist Gloria E. Anzaldúa similarly reiterates “the exalted role of women before the Aztec nation became centralized,” but attributes the fall of the Aztec nation to “the ruling elite [who] had subverted the solidarity between men and women and between noble and commoner.”<sup>30</sup> Anzaldúa also underscores and elaborates what anthropologist June Nash, in 1978, identifies as the “rejection of the balanced duality that characterized [the Nahuas] at an earlier stage.”<sup>31</sup> Throughout *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa takes up as her task a call to restore the “principle of balanced opposition between the sexes.”<sup>32</sup> For me, “the loss of the balanced oppositions”<sup>33</sup>—not only between the sexes but amongst all life forms—is one of the most significant ontological philosophies of living that had to be transformed in order to conquer Nahua groups.

Scholars Miguel León-Portilla, Alfredo López Austin, and Silvia Marcos, amongst many others have also pointed to the concept of *balanced duality* at the root of the cosmos for pre-Conquest Aztecs. León-Portilla calls it “Omeyotization of the universe,” “universal dualization” or “the dual principle of life and of power that governs man.”<sup>34</sup> López Austin refers to this concept as “opuestos complementarios [complementary opposites]” and “dualism fundamental [fundamental dualism].”<sup>35</sup> Marcos refers to it as “dual oneness” and “divine dual unity,”<sup>36</sup> and she explains this duality as “homeorrheic” [sic] instead of “homeostatic”<sup>37</sup>:

[W]e could say that more than a kind of homeostasis, Nahuatl [sic] equilibrium could be called homeorhesis [sic] (from *rheoo*, to flow) or balance of conjunctions in flux. Being situated between opposite poles implied, for the Nahuas, the necessity of working or

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>29</sup> Anna Nieto Gómez, “Chicana Feminism,” in *Chicana Feminist Thought*, 57.

<sup>30</sup> Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 55-56.

<sup>31</sup> June Nash, “The Aztecs and the Ideology of Male Dominance,” *Signs* 4, no. 2 (1978): 362.

<sup>32</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 53.

<sup>33</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Miguel León-Portilla, trans. Jack Emory Davis, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 99-111.

<sup>35</sup> Alfredo López Austin, “La Parte Femenina del Cosmos,” *Arqueología Mexicana* 5, no. 29 (1998): 7; my translation.

<sup>36</sup> Silvia Marcos, *Taken From the Lips: Gender and Eros in Mesoamerican Religions* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 16-17.

<sup>37</sup> Marcos, *Taken from the Lips*, 15-16. Marcos uses the term *homeorrheic* as the adjective form of *homeorhesis*. Most literature uses *homeorhetic* as the adjective form of *homeorhesis*, which means a restoration of flow.

‘negotiating’ constantly with the movement and plasticity of opposites as these transformed themselves continuously within an endless flow.<sup>38</sup>

Marcos uses gender as an example, for it is the “most pervasive expression [of the ultimate duality] in the intermediary human domain.”<sup>39</sup> She writes,

If we ascribe the term ‘Mesoamerican gender categories’ to the concepts of feminine and masculine emerging from Mesoamerican sources, we will have to define them as indeed opposite, but also fluid, open, in an unceasingly shifting balance, making and remaking themselves without ever reaching any fixed hierarchical stratification.<sup>40</sup>

Contemporary Western feminists studying pre-Columbian gender dynamics in the Americas seem to miss this fluidity and openness, especially when the topic of dualities or binaries arises in their analyses. Evidence of dualistic thinking as well as what may be interpreted as strictly divided gender roles amongst Mesoamerican groups becomes central to arguments aiming to “prove” the universality of male-dominated cultures and female submissiveness.<sup>41</sup>

The work of Sharisse D. McCafferty and Geoffrey G. McCafferty, who together explore the past of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica through archeology, art history, and ethnohistory, is useful as it clarifies Mesoamerican gender relationships from a standpoint critical of Western interpretations. They stress *balance* and suggest homeorhesis (although they do not use this term) as does Marcos, and “assume the dialectical interaction of individuals and interest groups in the continual negotiation and renegotiation of social power and prestige.”<sup>42</sup> For them, reading a “gender hierarchy” in Mesoamerican artifacts “masks many interesting relationships, while reifying a static social order.”<sup>43</sup> The relationship between male power and female power, they explain, was a dialectical relationship—a relationship in which maleness and femaleness and everything in between was in *balance*. This inherent dualism mirrored the cosmovision of the Nahuas. These scholars argue that even as the Aztec State developed into one based on warfare and tribute, gendered relationships were not hierarchical but instead provided “heterarchical access to status, with males and females having distinct avenues to different arenas of power.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth M. Brumfiel, “Figurines and the Aztec State: Testing the Effectiveness of Ideological Domination,” in *Gender and Archaeology*, ed. Rita P. Wright (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 143-66; Rosemary A. Joyce, *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000); Rosemary A. Joyce and Lynn M. Meskell, *Embodied Lives: Figuring Ancient Maya and Egyptian Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 119-27, discussion of “phallic culture”; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Goddesses and the Divine Feminine: A Western Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Sharisse D. McCafferty and Geoffrey G. McCafferty, “Powerful Women and the Myth of Male Dominance in Aztec Society,” *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 7, no. 1 (1988): 46.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Geoffrey G. McCafferty, “Hierarchy, Heterarchy and the Role of Women in Social Complexification,” in *Que(e)rying Archeology: Proceedings of the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Chacmool Conference*, ed. Susan Terendy et al. (Calgary, AB: The Chacmool Archaeological Association of the University of Calgary, 2009), 22.

McCafferty and McCafferty grant researchers, who point to the loss of Aztec women's power, the possibility of reduced female participation in certain realms of the Aztec State,<sup>45</sup> yet they emphasize how the "[b]iases of the original chroniclers, who were usually Catholic clergy, as well as those of later interpreters of the documents, have resulted in a skewed perspective on gender relations."<sup>46</sup> They underscore that colonial chroniclers as well as present-day scholars reading the chronicles through a Western lens "mask the discordant voices of those who failed to meet the engendered ideals of colonial Mexican society."<sup>47</sup> As an example, McCafferty and McCafferty draw attention to researchers' claims that women were excluded from ritual battle and were thus denied the social mobility and prestige associated with militarism.<sup>48</sup> For them, feminist researchers' misrecognition of the structural equivalents of male combat—such as birthing and the use of female material correlates for weapons during ritual contexts—as disempowered or disempowering emblems points to a simplistic understanding of a very complex set of relationships.<sup>49</sup> Like men who died in war, women who died during childbirth were held in high regard and considered to reside in a place of honor.<sup>50</sup> To be sure, there were indeed gendered relationships before and after the rise of the Aztec State. However, these relationships were not hierarchical and were a significant part of the social structure that stressed balance and harmony of contrasts. McCafferty and McCafferty explain,

Males did not dominate women, although the resources of power which they controlled may have been more "important," at least under an androcentric Western definition of cultural relevance. Instead, males and females interacted as structural complements dialectically renegotiating control over resources of social power.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, it is we, present-day, Western academic interpreters of Nahua life, who assign "importance" to the daily tasks of the Aztecs—until Nahua peoples themselves begin to share and clarify these tasks.

It is with great care and caution that I approach these arguments. Aligned with the Chicana feminists of the 1960s and 70s mentioned above, I look to a Mesoamerican past to assess the philosophies of living Indigenous peoples like the Aztecs lost due to the physical, emotional, and psychic violence inflicted upon them through the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Yet, heeding McCafferty and McCafferty's warning to avoid making sense of non-Western artifacts and stories from a Western standpoint, I emphasize differences between Mesoamerican gender and Western constructs of gender to illuminate that it was a particular understanding of gender that was taken away from Indigenous peoples after years of forced

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Sharisse D. and Geoffrey G. McCafferty, "Alternative and Ambiguous Gender Identities in Postclassic Central Mexico," in *Que(e)rying Archeology*, 197.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>48</sup> McCafferty and McCafferty cite Pedro Carrasco to explain that social mobility was possible through successful participation in trade and the priesthood in addition to warfare, while Nash only mentions warfare; McCafferty and McCafferty, "Powerful Women," 52; Pedro Carrasco, "Social Organisation in Ancient Mexico," in *Handbook of Middle American Indians Vol. 10: Archaeology of Northern Mesoamerica Part 1*, ed. Gordon Ekholm and Ignacio Bernal (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), 349-75.

<sup>49</sup> McCafferty and McCafferty, "Powerful Women," 52.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



assimilation into European cultures. In this way, I also heed a principle of women of color feminist thought to avoid generalization when interpreting the practices of any group. Just as I acknowledge the differences between European understandings of the life in the cosmos and the Nahuas' understandings of this, I also recognize there have always been differences among the many Nahua ethnic groups' and even kinship groups' beliefs.

On the surface, it may seem Mesoamerican gender was perceived as it is in Western academic circles—as a social construction attributing masculine and feminine qualities to bodies, behaviors, and objects. However, in Nahua cosmology, these qualities are understood as energies.<sup>52</sup> Because all things are imbued with the divine energy of Ometeotl, a primordial male/female creative force or what James Maffie refers a “twofold oneness,” all things have both feminine and masculine energies.<sup>53</sup> The Europeans did not understand that all humans have both feminine and masculine energies, as we are *conceived* through those energies.<sup>54</sup> Psychologist Eduardo Duran narrativizes an explanation of the repercussions of European repression of female energy. He posits Europeans, like the Spaniards who invaded the Americas repressed their inner feminine energy, and like anything pushed into the unconscious, this energy took on the shadow quality of a demonic potential of its own. He writes, “Their inner female energy created a deep anxiety within their ego, and instead of dealing with her and integrating her, they projected her onto human females—women.”<sup>55</sup> This anxiety also helped generate the concepts of sin and evil taught to Indigenous peoples by Spanish clergy.<sup>56</sup> Christianity teaches we are born of sin and that there is one perfect God to whom we are all subservient, for we can never be perfect like this god. The Nahuas believed, however, that God energy lived in all of balanced existence, including

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<sup>52</sup> James Maffie offers a book-length discussion of Nahua conceptualizations of cosmic energy. See Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> See Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*, 169-72.

<sup>54</sup> Notably, biological sciences have only recently determined this. Humans assigned “female” as a sex at birth possess two X sex chromosomes, while those assigned “male” at birth possess one X chromosome and one Y chromosome. The extra X chromosome is typically understood as the determinant for femaleness. In 2001, Jeremy Wang et al. discovered that the X chromosome carries a large collection of male sperm genes, supporting the Nahua concept of humans possessing both feminine and masculine energies. Seema Kumar, “Genes for Early Sperm Production Found to Reside on X Chromosome,” *MIT News: On Campus and Around the World*, April 4, 2001, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://newsoffice.mit.edu/2001/sperm-0404>.

<sup>55</sup> Eduardo Duran, *Buddha in Redface* (New York: Writers Club Press, 2000), 127.

<sup>56</sup> For an exposition of how the Nahuas were forced to integrate the Catholic concept of sin into their cosmivision, see Sigal, “The Cuiloni, the Patlache, and the Abominable Sin: Homosexualities in Early Colonial Nahua Society,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (2005): 555-93. For a discussion of how Catholic clergy used the sacrament of confession of sin as a tool for ideological and social control, see Serge Gruzinski, “Individualization and Acculturation: Confession among the Nahuas of Mexico from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century, in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 96-117; Jorge Klor de Alva, “Sin and Confession among the Colonial Nahuas: The Confessional as a Tool for Domination,” in *Memorias de la Reunión de Historiadores Mexicanos y Norteamericanos* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1992), 91-101.

human life.<sup>57</sup> Christian teachings thus radically changed the Nahua cosmovision. Spanish clergy promoted what María Lugones refers to as “categorical, dichotomous, hierarchal logic.”<sup>58</sup> They taught things were not connected and some beings and things deserved more respect than others. Missionaries taught hierarchies between concepts the Indigenous people understood as equal and in balance such as male/female, light/dark, sky/earth, mind/body, and life/death. Once these teachers promoted maleness, light, sky, mind, and life to a higher level, it followed that they would demote femaleness, darkness, earth, body, and death. what María Lugones emphasizes and Andrea Smith describes as “the logics of heteropatriarchy”<sup>59</sup> Andrea Smith offers a reason for this kind of training with respect to the divine duality of femaleness and maleness:

[W]hen colonists first came to this land, they saw the necessity of instilling patriarchy in Native communities, because they realized that indigenous peoples would not accept colonial domination if their own indigenous societies were not structured on the basis of social hierarchy.<sup>60</sup>

Put another way, Smith observes, “heteropatriarchy is the logic that makes social hierarchy seem natural.”<sup>61</sup> The conquerors placed great value on difference, differentiation, and hierarchy. For them, the cosmos—especially the relationship between self and other—was hierarchically ordered and maintained through Western ideologies of capitalism, heterosexism, racism. These ideals were rooted violently in the Americas and, overtime, forced many Indigenous peoples to reimagine the interrelatedness of everything within the cosmos. More recently, quantum physics, which is impressively aligned with Indigenous conceptualizations of the cosmos, is returning us toward this understanding.<sup>62</sup>

### **Psychic Responses to Colonial and Imperial Changes**

As I shall argue shortly, the effects of these physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental attacks are still felt—whether consciously or unconsciously—by the descendants of these Indigenous peoples. Today, we witness the quantification of these effects through statistics. For instance, Indigenous communities in the United States are twice as likely to experience feelings

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<sup>57</sup> See Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*.

<sup>58</sup> María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742.

<sup>59</sup> Andrea Smith, “American Studies without America: Native Feminisms and the Nation-State,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2008): 312.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> In 1992, Dan Moonhawk Alford was asked to serve as moderator for a dialogue between world-class quantum physicists and Native American intelligentsia. Alford noted eight points of agreement between the physicists and Native Americans: 1) “Everything that exists vibrates,” 2) Everything is in flux,” 3) “The part enfolds the whole (not just the sum of its parts),” 4) There is an implicate order to the universe,” 5) This ecosphere is basically friendly,” 6) Nature can be taught new tricks,” 7) Physicists use the term “quantum potential” in a nearly identical way to Native American’s use of “spirit,” and 8) “the principle of complementarity.” See Alford, “A Report on the Fetzer Institute-Sponsored Dialogues Between Western and Indigenous Scientists” (presentation, Annual Spring Meeting of the Society for the Anthropology of Consciousness, April 11, 1993), <http://hilgart.org/enformy/dma-b.htm>. See also F. David Peat, *Blackfoot Physics: An Exploration of the Native American Universe* (York Beach, ME: Red Wheel/Weiser, 2005).

of nervousness or restlessness and other psychic dis-ease compared to other ethnic groups in the United States.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, descendants of other groups forced from their homes, separated from their traditions and worldviews, and violently assimilated into an oppressive U.S. American culture experience daily the material and psychic effects of attacks from long ago through intergenerational trauma, as I explain below. While mental health studies report inconsistent statistics regarding the prevalence of mood disorders across ethnic groups, they still consistently find that Indigenous peoples, non-Hispanic Black Americans, and Hispanics experience symptoms of mood disorders—for example, depression (e.g., sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, and that everything is an effort all of the time)—at higher rates than their White counterparts.<sup>64</sup> Take, for instance, one report’s indication that as of 2010, non-Hispanic Black Americans have the highest rate of depression (12.8 percent) of any ethnic group, followed by non-Black Hispanics (11.4 percent).<sup>65</sup> A 2011 report shows that non-Hispanic Blacks are diagnosed and treated for depression at a higher rate (53.2 percent) than Hispanics (49.3 percent), suggesting the possibility that more Hispanics might be diagnosed at a rate higher than 49.3 percent if they had access to and received this type of mental healthcare.<sup>66</sup>

These high rates are consistent with risk factors for mental illness that these marginalized groups often experience such as socioeconomic inequality, encounters with racial discrimination, increased pervasiveness of some chronic diseases, and less access to healthcare.<sup>67</sup> These greater risk factors themselves are effects of colonialism and its ensuing systemic oppression. The intersection of these risk factors with gender discrimination and parenting responsibilities makes

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<sup>63</sup> Center for Disease Control, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. “Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS),” last visited July 1, 2016, <http://www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html>; Fred Beauvais, “American Indians and Alcohol,” *Alcohol Health and Research World* 22, no. 4 (1998): 253-59; Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 24, 94-95; Indian Health Service: The Federal Health Program for American Indians and Alaska Natives, “Fact Sheet: Behavioral Health,” last visited January 26, 2013, [https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/includes/themes/newihstheme/display\\_objects/documents/factsheets/BehavioralHealth.pdf](https://www.ihs.gov/newsroom/includes/themes/newihstheme/display_objects/documents/factsheets/BehavioralHealth.pdf); Colleen Anne Kagan, “Impact of Cultural Identity on MMPI-2 Profiles in Northern Plains American Indians” (PhD diss., The University of North Dakota, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> JS Schiller, JW Lucas, BW Ward, JA Peregoy, *Summary Health Statistics for U.S. Adults: National Health Interview Survey, 2010*, Vital and Health Statistics 10, no. 54, Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, 2012, Table 14, [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr\\_10/sr10\\_252.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_10/sr10_252.pdf); O. Gonzalez et al., “Current Depression Among Adults – United States, 2006 and 2008,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 59, no. 38 (October 2010): 1229-1235.

<sup>65</sup> Chris Iliades, “Stats and Facts about Depression in America,” *Everyday Health*, January 23, 2013, <http://www.everydayhealth.com/health-report/major-depression/depression-statistics.aspx>.

<sup>66</sup> See U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report, 2011*. Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, 2012, Table 7\_1\_1.2b., <http://archive.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrdr/nhdr11/nhdr11.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Office of the Surgeon General, Center for Mental Health Services, and National Institute for Mental Health, *Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity—A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*, Rockville, MD: U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2001.

non-White women more vulnerable to depression and other mental illnesses than their non-White male counterparts. One study shows that 20% of Alaska Native women score positive for depression compared to 13% of Alaska Native men.<sup>68</sup> Black women (10.99%) are twice as likely to experience a major depressive episode than their male counterparts (4.99%).<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the prevalence of depression is higher in Latinas (46%) than Latinos (19.6%).<sup>70</sup> Given the above trends, it is perhaps no surprise that American Indian and Alaska Native women in high school have the highest rate of suicide attempts (19.9%), followed by Latinas (13.5%), Black women (8.8%), and White women (7.9%) of the same age group.<sup>71</sup>

Scholar-activists underscore how dramatic changes in sociopolitical and economic structures contribute to psychic dis-ease by drawing attention to concepts like historical trauma and intergenerational trauma, two distinct but related terms. Both of these concepts address how one may experience symptoms of trauma without having been present for the traumatic event(s).<sup>72</sup> Nathaniel V. Mohatt defines historical trauma as “a complex and collective trauma experienced over time and across generations by a group of people who share an identity affiliation or circumstance.”<sup>73</sup> “Intergenerational trauma” refers to the experience of trauma across generations but not specifically a traumatic event experienced collectively by a group. In this case, one person or a family could have experienced a trauma like domestic abuse, and the effects of the trauma (such as learned behavior and coping skills) are transmitted across generations. The scale on which the trauma occurs distinguishes the two concepts. Historical trauma functions on a mass, systemic scale, and intergenerational trauma functions on a smaller, individual scale.

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<sup>68</sup> Denise A. Dillard et al., “Depression Prevalence and Associated Factors Among Alaska Native people: The Alaska Education and Research Toward Health (EARTH) Study,” *Journal of Affective Disorders* 136, no. 3 (2012): 1088-97.

<sup>69</sup> Chanequa Walker-Barnes, *Too Heavy a Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 56. See also Maigenete Mengesh and Earlise C. Ward, “Psychotherapy with African American Women with Depression: Is It Okay to Talk about Their Religious/Spiritual Beliefs?” *Religions* 3, no. 1 (2012): 19-36; Terrie M. Williams, *Black Pain: It Just Looks Like We’re Not Hurting* (New York: Scribner, 2009), especially chapter 2 titled, “I’m Not Your Superwoman: Overworked, Undervalued, and Under Pressure”; Kumea Shorter-Gooden, “Therapy With African American Men and Women,” in *The Handbook of African American Psychology*, ed. Helen Neville, Brendesha Tynes, and Shawn Utsey (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 445-58; and Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

<sup>70</sup> National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), “Latino Community Mental Health Fact Sheet,” NAMI Multicultural Action Center, last visited July 12, 2012, [http://www.nami.org/content/navigationmenu/find\\_support/multicultural\\_support/annual\\_minority\\_mental\\_healthcare\\_symposia/latino\\_mh06.pdf](http://www.nami.org/content/navigationmenu/find_support/multicultural_support/annual_minority_mental_healthcare_symposia/latino_mh06.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “United States, High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011,” last visited July 20, 2012, <https://nccd.cdc.gov/youthonline/>.

<sup>72</sup> Nathaniel Vincent Mohatt, et. al, “Historical Trauma as Public Narrative: A Conceptual Review of How History Impacts Present-Day Health,” *Social Science and Medicine* 106 (2014): 128.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

Recognizing the feminist argument that “the personal is political,” experiences on a small, generation-to-generation scale are reflective of a bigger system of power that structures collective history, including our individual and familial lives. Consider the case of the descendants of physically- and psychologically-tortured Africans or Indigenous peoples in the Americas; the case of the descendants of people living near the Rio Grande in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose national and cultural allegiances were forcefully shifted overnight; descendants of Mexican and Mexican-American people deported during several anti-immigration campaigns in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As I will argue below, because of their collective, large scale, and violent nature, these cases possibly led to historical trauma, affecting these people’s descendants long after the traumatic moment passed. I posit these case examples likely also prompted ideological shifts that made way for internalized racism, sexism, colorism, and overall self-hatred that are projected onto other people of color and passed down inter-generationally. In this way, we can see how intergenerational trauma may emerge from historical trauma. Ph.D. and initiated, practicing Indigenous healer, Patrisia Gonzales coins the term Post-Indian Stress Disorder (PISD) to describe Indigenous peoples’ historical trauma in its relationship to intergenerational trauma.<sup>74</sup> While recognizing that not all Mexicans are Indigenous or claim to be so, Gonzales describes Mexicans and/or Chicana/os as “culturally mixed, detribalized Indigenous peoples and communities.”<sup>75</sup> PISD thus can refer to the historical traumas of Mexicans and Chicano/as. She explains,

For many Indigenous peoples disconnected from, or with limited access to, their ancestral cosmo-logic, it is what is not known, the loss of their ancestral and communal names, the dislodgement of ancestral memories from their embodied experience, that form part of their historical trauma.<sup>76</sup>

PISD is a “disordering” that “comes from being disallowed to connect to what helped their ancestors makes [sic] sense of their place in the world, their specific spiritual teachings that help them know themselves.”<sup>77</sup> Dominant macrosystems such as colonial and White supremacist governments strengthened themselves through the historical traumatization of Indigenous Mexicana/os and Chicana/os. These same large-scale historical traumas “disordered,” as Gonzales puts it, microscale intergenerational relationships that were necessary for assuaging historical wounds.

Through a similar vein, Joy DeGruy uses the term Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome to address specifically the intergenerational and historical traumas experienced by descendants of African slaves. She emphasizes that “almost four centuries of legalized abuse, programmed enslavement and institutionalized oppression”<sup>78</sup> have triggered a legacy of trauma amongst African Americans. DeGruy notes that in studies with other ethnic groups, while the first generation may experience PTSD, subsequent generations may experience “survivor syndrome,” the characteristics of which are stress, self-doubt, problems with aggression, and interpersonal

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<sup>74</sup> Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine: Traditional Indigenous Rites of Birthing and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 221.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, xxv and 222.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

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

<sup>78</sup> Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy Of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Portland, OR: Joy DeGruy Publications, 2005), 138.

relationship problems.<sup>79</sup> The researcher takes her cue from these studies and argues that the effects of trauma amongst African Americans, many of whose ancestors have likely suffered from PTSD, have been transmitted intergenerationally via adaptive survival behaviors such as what she terms “vacant esteem,” “ever present anger,” and “racist socialization.”<sup>80</sup> She coins “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,” or PTSS, to describe the conjunction of “multigenerational trauma with continued oppression” and “a belief (real or imagined) that the benefits of the society in which they live are not accessible to them.”<sup>81</sup>

Other scholar-activists more directly point to these traumas as psychic responses to structural changes. For example, Antone, Hill, and Myers point to at least four conditions that characterize what they term “ethnostress”:

1. Disruption of the cultural beliefs that support a joyful identity
2. Oppressive conditions forced upon a people in their own environment
3. Negative feelings experienced when interacting with members of either one’s own or other cultural groups (e.g., internalizing negative stereotypes used to describe their own group)
4. Feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness that disrupt one’s ability to achieve one’s basic needs.<sup>82</sup>

For the Aboriginal peoples upon whom these writers focus, these disruptive conditions emerged through European colonists’ enforcement of a social organization based on sexist and racist hierarchies, institutionalized religion, institutionalized education (especially boarding schools), and the resulting economic dependence on a capitalist system that devalues the lives of non-assimilating and/or non-European peoples. Similarly, African peoples and their descendants in the Americas have endured systemic enslavement and oppression for almost 400 years. Taken from their homes and families, they were forced to change their names, languages, and understandings about social relations, their homelands, and the cosmos. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), the United States’ largest grassroots mental health organization, recognizes this history of slavery and abuse as a risk factor for the greater severity and persistence of depression amongst African American women.<sup>83</sup>

The Anglo takeover of northern Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century also brought about drastic changes for Mexicans. Yet for this group—descendant of a violent mestizaje of Indigenous peoples, African peoples of the diaspora, and Spanish colonists—significant changes in structure and life were not new, for their African and Indigenous ancestors had experienced the slave trade and Conquest of the Americas discussed above. Under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, half of Mexico was ceded to the United States. The imperial acquisition included present-day Texas (bordered by the Rio Grande), California, New Mexico,

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 119-20.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 110-38.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>82</sup> Robert A. Antone, Diane L. Miller, and Brian A. Myers, *The Power Within People: A Community Organizing Perspective* (Deseronto, Ontario: Peace Tree Technologies, Inc., 1986).

<sup>83</sup> National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), “African American Women and Depression Fact Sheet,” last visited July 12, 2012, [http://www2.nami.org/PrinterTemplate.cfm?Section=Women\\_and\\_Depression&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=88884](http://www2.nami.org/PrinterTemplate.cfm?Section=Women_and_Depression&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=88884).

Arizona, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and Oklahoma.<sup>84</sup> Mexicans living in these areas suddenly became American citizens, and because whiteness was a condition of citizenship, explains Evelyn Nakano Glenn, reverse logic dictated that “if Mexicans were American citizens they must be white.” The violent drawing of new borders disrupted understandings of identity, belonging, and citizenry, as Mexicans’ legal and national status was simply “transferred” to the United States.<sup>85</sup> These aggressive changes became seeds for historical trauma that today contributes to a sense of not-belonging for mestiz@s of Mexican descent in the Southwest.

The inhabitants of the new borderlands and their descendants in these areas experienced violence again during “the Porfiriato” (1876-1911), the years of the dictatorship of Mexican President Porfirio Díaz, and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). During these years, Mexicans revolted against unjust land grabs and the exploitation of natural resources by both Mexican and foreign governments. Through calls for “Tierra y Libertad” (“Land and Liberty”) and violent uprisings, Mexican revolutionaries actively pressed for their freedom from oppressive systemic practices under a corrupt government. Such violence on the border as well as the threat of reclamation of once-Mexican land contributed to Anglo-Americans’ growing anti-Mexican sentiment. During the Revolution, many Mexicans sought refuge on the U.S.-side of the border and thus added to Anglo-Americans’ fear of an invasion by “barbaric” Mexicans.<sup>86</sup> Like the Mexicans born on the freshly demarcated U.S.-side of the border, the newly arrived Mexicans seeking refuge “were treated as conquered people and foreigners by Euro-Americans.”<sup>87</sup> Literature scholar Louis G. Mendoza notes that “as a signifier of identity,” the border “plays a role in defining Mexicans as ‘others’ because it demarcates their national and ethnic identity as well as citizenship status in relation to the U.S. mainstream.”<sup>88</sup> Mexicans, especially those living on or near the border, recognized that the geopolitical line separating Euro-Americans from Mexicans had designated them as “Others.”

Still, like their Indigenous and African ancestors forced across geographic and psychic spaces, these Mexicans were active in assuaging isolation and trauma in the United States.<sup>89</sup> Drawing from research by Inés Hernández-Avila (née Tovar), Mendoza posits that Mexicans and Mexican Americans crafted what Benedict Anderson terms “an imagined community” via Mexican-owned, Spanish-language newspapers printed in the United States and circulated in both the United States and Mexico.<sup>90</sup> Through these publications, Mexicans, who were linguistically and culturally isolated from U.S. American media outlets, developed a sense of

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<sup>84</sup> Laura E. Gómez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 164, n. 19.

<sup>85</sup> Louis Mendoza, *Historia: The Literary Making of Chicana and Chicano History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 63.

<sup>86</sup> Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 170-76.

<sup>87</sup> Mendoza, *Historia*, 65.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> I should note that while Mexicans recognized their ancestry with Indigenous peoples and fought alongside them during the Revolution, dominant cultural Mexicans, for the most part, did not (and still do not) acknowledge their African ancestry.

<sup>90</sup> Mendoza, *Historia*, 103.

community in the face of Anglo racism on the American side of the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>91</sup> The Revolution became an inspiration for imagining a socially, politically, and economically just future. As Enrique Flores Magón, a Mexican journalist and co-founder of the Partido Liberal Mexicano (Mexican Liberal Party), expressed, people armed themselves with both muskets and pens. Yet he considered the latter “a weapon more formidable and far more feared by tyrants and exploiters.”<sup>92</sup> Mexican-oriented newspapers facilitated a shared, alternative national vision amongst people of Mexican descent in the United States. For Mexicans living in the United States in the early part of the twentieth century, these publications helped to promote a sense of commonality amongst Mexicans with similar experiences. Such cultural productions functioned as a form of maintaining one’s cultural integrity and resistance to assimilation into mainstream (read: Anglo) U.S. society. As I argue in the remaining chapters of this project, such visionary cultural productions also bear empowering possibilities. This type of defiance around the turn of the twentieth century was especially significant, for it underscored Mexican opposition to the Porfiriato’s fundamental goals of “orden y progreso” (“order and progress”). Historian Juan Gómez-Quiñones links the concept of order to “assimilation, rewards, and mobility” in the case of Mexican history.<sup>93</sup> Anti-Díaz Mexicans were opposed to these goals, masked as “civilizing” endeavors, for assimilation as part of the path to “orden y progreso” ultimately served imperial interests.

The imposition of capitalist relations upon people of Mexican descent, we know, has not ceased after Díaz’s downfall and resignation in 1911. Instead, in its own efforts toward order and progress, the United States has deployed various tactics to control Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States. Sociologist Evelyn Nakano Glenn draws attention to four main technologies deployed by the United States to control this group. These oppressive technologies enforce the structural changes that undergird historical traumas that are passed down intergenerationally and impact how we understand our selves in White American sociopolitical and economic culture. The first of these technologies includes *containment* through separation and segregation. Mexican Americans in the Southwest were segregated not only into designated physical spaces like barrios, schools, and balcony sections of theaters but also into the most menial jobs. A lesser-known technology is the *terrorism* inflicted by Euro-Americans upon Mexican Americans through violence and lynching.<sup>94</sup> Historians William Carrigan and Clive Webb report, “The scale of mob violence against Mexicans between 1848 and 1928 is staggering, far exceeding the violence exacted on any other immigrant group and comparable, at least on a per capita basis to the mob violence suffered by African Americans.”<sup>95</sup> The United States’ hatred

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Enrique Flores Magón, *Anarchism and the Mexican Revolution*, qtd. in Mendoza, *Historia*, 63; For more on the literary arts as a tool of empowerment and resistance for people of Mexican descent in the United States, see Mendoza, *Historia*.

<sup>93</sup> Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 1990), 220, qtd. in Mendoza, *Historia*, 23.

<sup>94</sup> Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation,” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015): 65.

<sup>95</sup> William D. Carrigan and Clive Webb, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence Against Mexicans in the United States, 1848-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1, qtd. in Glenn, “Settler Colonialism as Structure,” 65.



for non-White people also gave way to a third technology that involves the *removal* of Mexicans and their American descendants through expulsion and deportation. There have been at least three eras in which mass deportations of Mexicans served to carry out this technology. One of the most cited of these removals occurred in the 1930s when between 350,000 and 600,000 Mexicans, many of them United States citizens, were shipped off to Mexico on trains.<sup>96</sup> Another grand-scale deportation scheme was “Operation Wetback,” the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service-sponsored expulsion of 1.3 million undocumented agricultural workers in 1954.<sup>97</sup> Today, we are witnesses to a third enactment of the removal technology as new immigration and deportation laws and new agencies such as the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement counteract the entry of poor Mexicans into the United States.<sup>98</sup>

A final technology—erasure through assimilation—is more furtive than containment, terrorism, and removal because it still evokes (incomprehensible) feelings of dis-ease but is less easily observed. This technology functions mostly on a psychic level and permeates our everyday lives and is more efficiently transmitted across generations. Even today Mexican Americans and Mexicans in the United States feel the effects of strong encouragement to abandon their language and cultural customs in the name of progress. We, like Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, enslaved African Americans, and their descendants, have been forced to adopt a Eurocentric value system based on hierarchies. Frantz Fanon points to this value system, writing, “Fact: some Whites consider themselves superior to Blacks. Another fact: some Blacks want to prove at all costs to the Whites the wealth of the black man’s intellect and equal intelligence.”<sup>99</sup> That is to say, a system of White supremacy encourages people of color, like the quintessential black man Fanon theorizes, to prove “at all costs” they are not inferior but in fact equal. In order to prove their humanness within this value system, people of color may even “desire to be white.” Fanon explains,

My patient is suffering from an inferiority complex ... If he is overcome to such a degree by a desire to be white, it’s because he lives in a society that draws its strength by maintaining this complex, in a society that proclaims the superiority of one race over another; it is to the extent that society creates difficulties for him that he finds himself positioned in a neurotic situation.<sup>100</sup>

In other words, this psychiatrist’s assessment evidences the mental effects of racism I referred to earlier. While she does not cite Fanon, DeGruy similarly refers to African American adoption of “the slave master’s value system.” DeGruy, however, extends Fanon’s analysis—although she does not ever mention him—by naming the resultant neurosis: Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.

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<sup>96</sup> David G. Gutierrez explains the repatriation statistics are highly unreliable. See Gutierrez, *Walls and Mirrors: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the Politics of Ethnicity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 72; and Mark Reislter, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Mexican Immigrant Labor in the United States, 1900-1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976) qtd. in Glenn, “Settler Colonialism as Structure,” 65.

<sup>97</sup> Carlos Véllez-Ibañez, *Border Visions: Mexican Cultures of the Southwest United States* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 289 qtd. in Glenn, “Settler Colonialism as Structure,” 66.

<sup>98</sup> Glenn, “Settler Colonialism as Structure,” 66.

<sup>99</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (1952; New York: Grove Press, 2008), xiv.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

Indeed dominant ideology inculcates in us belief in the superiority of Whiteness, a belief that is a result of Anglo-centrism, Pan-Protestantism, capitalism and the values of individualism, competition, and reason, and certainly a strict separation of mind and body.<sup>101</sup> In this mythos, the basis for blackness as a signifier for inferiority is status as non-White. That is to say, *non-Whiteness* signifies inferiority albeit to different degrees on a hierarchy that intersects with other sociopolitical, economic, and historical identity markers.

Whiteness also upholds the idea of the English language as superior to any non-English tongue. Exemplifying this type of thinking, beginning in 1905, the Texas legislature enacted a statute that school officials and teachers in myriad cases in the U.S. Southwest forced Spanish-speaking Mexican and Mexican-American students to stop speaking the language of their first colonizers, the Spaniards, and required them to speak the language of the imperial United States.<sup>102</sup> School authorities in Texas exacted control over language between these students through the institutionalization of what was termed the “No Spanish” rule in classrooms and school grounds.<sup>103</sup> Teachers punished violators of the policy through fines; separation from their peers; extra assignments such as writing, “I must not speak Spanish at school” over and over; having their parents notified; spending time in “Spanish Detention”; and visits to the principal’s

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<sup>101</sup> See Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: Norton, 2010), especially pages 387-88. Disability Studies informed by Critical Race Studies also emphasize “deviant” categories of bodies (e.g., Black, Jewish, “feebleminded”) that do not fit into a set of values that perceived of Whiteness, Protestantism, and “reasonability” as superior. See, for example, Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, ed., *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), especially pages 100-12. For a brief discussion of the association of whiteness with the privileging of mind over body, see Radhika Mohanram, *Imperial White: Race, Diaspora, and the British Empire* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 62. Also, Howard Winant points explicitly to the association of whiteness “with a range of capitalist virtues: productivity, thrift, obedience to law, self-denial, and sexual repression.” See Howard Winant, “Behind Blue Eyes: Whiteness and Contemporary U.S. Racial Politics,” *New Left Review* 225 (1997): 78. Two other significant books on Whiteness are George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006) and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991).

<sup>102</sup> Steven H. Wilson, “Brown over ‘Other White’: Mexican Americans’ Legal Arguments and Litigation Strategy in School Desegregation Lawsuits,” *Law and History Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 155.

<sup>103</sup> Richard R. Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts: The Mexican American Legal Struggle for Education Equality* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 157. For other discussions of the “No-Spanish” rule, its history, and its effects, see also Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: The Chicano’s Struggle Toward Liberation* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972), 146-47; Guadalupe San Miguel, *Brown, Not White: School Integration and the Chicano Movement in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M, 2005), 23-24; Guadalupe San Miguel, Jr., “The Schooling of Mexicanos in the Southwest, 1848-1891,” in *The Elusive Quest for Equality: 150 Years of Chicano/Chicana Education*, ed. José F. Moreno (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review, 1999), 43-44; Chad Richardson, *Batos, Bolillos, Pochos, and Pelados: Class and Culture on the South Texas Border* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), especially pages 129-131.

office.<sup>104</sup> During hearings on the “educational problems of the Spanish speaking” before the Commission on the Civil Rights Subcommittee in 1972, administrators admitted to punishing Spanish-speakers, yet they did not admit to using corporal punishment as students had testified.<sup>105</sup> In the report from these hearings, titled “The Excluded Student: Educational Practices Affecting Mexican Americans in the Southwest,” two San Antonio students explained that they had been hit, slapped in the face, and suspended for speaking their native language.<sup>106</sup> Another student at the San Antonio hearing expressed that he had dropped out of school because he was “repeatedly beaten for speaking Spanish.”<sup>107</sup> Aside from these accounts, Chicana testimonios (published and more unpublished) attest to other instances in which speaking Spanish was subject to “paddling,”<sup>108</sup> getting “three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler,”<sup>109</sup> and having one’s mouth rinsed out with soap.<sup>110</sup> Teachers further fostered a sense of “wrongness” associated with the Spanish language and Spanish-speaking peoples by Anglicizing Spanish-origin names: Jesus became Jesse; María became Mary; Juan became John; Roberto became Robert or Bobby; and Inés became Agnes, for instance.<sup>111</sup> Still, at other times, teachers took liberties to transform students’ names completely. In one instance, María de Jesús Servantez became Hazel.<sup>112</sup> These repeated “corrections” likely took a physical, emotional, and psychic toll upon Spanish-speaking students, especially as the intent behind such instances of humiliation was to change how these students understood themselves. The purpose of this humiliation was to assimilate—that is, psychically transform—the Mexican-American students.<sup>113</sup> In general, forced psychic shifts cause one psychic and emotional distress.

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<sup>104</sup> Richard R. Valencia, *Chicano Students and the Courts*, 157.

<sup>105</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Civil Rights Oversight Subcommittee (Subcommittee No. 4), *Education of the Spanish Speaking: Hearings Before the Civil Rights Oversight Subcommittee (Subcommittee No. 4) of the Committee on Reports of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on the Education of the Spanish Speaking*, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong. 320, 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1972.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Anjela Villarreal Ratcliff, “In My Classroom,” in *Chicken Soup for the Latino Soul: Celebrating la Comunidad Latina*, ed. Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and Susan Sánchez-Casal (New York: Chicken Soup for the Soul Publishing, 2012).

<sup>109</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 75.

<sup>110</sup> Patricia Zavella, “Silence Begins at Home,” in *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*, ed. The Latina Feminist Group (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 48.

<sup>111</sup> Thomas P. Carter and Roberto D. Segura, *Mexican Americans in School: A Decade of Change*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1979), 190; Teresa A. Garcia, “Mexican Room: Public Schooling and the Children of Mexican Railroad Workers in Fort Madison, Iowa, 1923-1930” (PhD diss. University of Iowa, 2008), 82.

<sup>112</sup> Garcia, “Mexican Room,” 82.

<sup>113</sup> A case in point is Richard Rodriguez, a Mexican-American born to working-class parents in California. Rodriguez rejects bilingual education in the US public school system and advocates acculturation and assimilation for the purpose of achieving “public individuality.” He criticizes Chicano/as who wear ethnic garb and proudly and publicly speak Spanish as well as any attempts to reconnect with one’s ethnic history. For Rodriguez, Chicana/os must lose their ancestral connections in order to become “educated.” Rodriguez accepts the interests of dominant society and internalizes its hatred for brown people and their ancestors. The painful

Still, there continue to be resurgences of English-only mandates in the U.S. American school system—and the U.S. public sphere in general<sup>114</sup>—even though studies confirm that such modes of acculturation present a risk for the development of mental health disorders amongst those pressured to acculturate. While the definition of “acculturation” in clinical research certainly varies,<sup>115</sup> these studies consistently measure “psychological and social changes that groups and individuals experience when they enter a new and different cultural context.”<sup>116</sup> One of the first of these studies in 1987 included U.S.-born Mexican Americans and immigrant Mexican Americans in Los Angeles. M. Audrey Burnam et al. found a higher prevalence of phobia, alcohol and drug abuse/dependence among Mexican Americans born in the United States compared to Mexican Americans who immigrated to the United States. A more recent 2011 study found that Mexican migrants are at a higher risk for depression or anxiety than their nonmigrant family members back home.<sup>117</sup> These researchers in addition to many others<sup>118</sup> link

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alienation and subsequent self-loathing in this case represent psychic tolls English-only mandates can take on Chicano youth. See Rodriguez, *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Bantam Dell, 1982).

<sup>114</sup> In September 2007, a Catholic elementary and middle school principal in Kansas banned any “native language other than English” in school. Qtd. in Ralph D. Mawdsley and Johan Beckmann, “Language and Culture Restrictions in K-12 Non-Public Schools in the United States: Exploring the Reach of Federal Non-Discrimination Law and Implications for South Africa,” *De Jure* 46, no. 1 (2013): 317. See also “Court Permits School to Implement English-Only Policy,” Liebert Cassidy Whitmore, September 10, 2008, accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.lcwlegal.com/68958.html> (page discontinued). In October 2007, Robert Aumaugher, a superintendent of one Nevada county’s schools, institutionalized a ban on Spanish on the school bus. See “ACLU Asks Esmeralda County To Stop English-Only Rule On School Bus,” [aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org), January 31, 2008, accessed March 19, 2015, <https://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights/aclu-asks-esmeralda-county-stop-english-only-rule-school-bus.html>. In November 2013, Amy Lacy, a middle school principle in Texas, announced to the student body (made up of 50% Latinos) that they were banned from speaking Spanish in class. “Hempstead Students Say Principal Tried to Ban Them From Speaking Spanish,” [khou.com](http://www.khou.com), December 2, 2013, accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.khou.com/story/local/2015/03/19/12269076/>.html. There also exist English-only ordinances outside of schools. For a discussion of motives and effects of these ordinances see, for instance, Thomas J. Vicino, “Inklings of a Public Problem,” in *Suburban Crossroads: The Fight for Local Control of Immigration Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 63-97.

<sup>115</sup> Javier I. Escobar and William A. Vega, “Mental Health and Immigration’s AAAs: Where Are We and Where Do We Go from Here?,” *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease* 188, no. 11 (2000): 736-40.

<sup>116</sup> Leopoldo J. Cabassa, “Measuring Acculturation: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go,” *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 25, no. 2 (2003): 127-46; Marielena Lara et al., “Acculturation and Latino Health in the United States: A Review of the Literature and Its Sociopolitical Context,” *Annual Review Public Health* 26 (2005): 367-97.

<sup>117</sup> Joshua Breslau et al., “Migration from Mexico to the United States and Subsequent Risk for Depressive and Anxiety Disorders: A Cross-National Study,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 68, no. 4 (2011): 428-33.

this prevalence of psychopathology with acculturation and acculturative stress experienced by Mexican Americans. Some acculturative/acculturation stress variables include discrimination, legal status, and language conflict.<sup>119</sup> These studies make apparent the psychic dis-ease of Mexicans and their descendants whilst navigating two different cultural worlds—one of which is English-speaking, anti-Mexican, and Anglo American with an emphasis on individualism and another that is Spanish-speaking and Mexican with an emphasis on familism. Still, early sociological studies find that by the third generation, descendants of immigrant populations in the United States almost wholly resemble the American mainstream population in its language and customs. Research shows, for instance, that by the third-generation, the ability of descendants of Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants to speak their mother tongue drops drastically.<sup>120</sup> Another report finds that by the third generation, 50 to 60 percent of these descendants assimilate linguistically, speaking English as their primary and only language at home.<sup>121</sup> Despite their similarity to dominant American society in English language proficiency, later-generation Mexican Americans' general and mental health profiles certainly differ from the American mainstream population's average health characteristics. William A. Vega et al. report that, for Latina/os, time increasingly spent in the United States through familial generations correlates with a decrease in later generations' (second and third, for instance) general health status and mental health well-being.<sup>122</sup> That is to say, by the third generation, Latina/os report higher rates of mental health disorders than their White counterparts and their second-generation parents.<sup>123</sup> Even in comparison to Mexico-born Mexican American immigrants in the United States, later generations of U.S.-born Mexican Americans of the same birth cohort experience

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<sup>118</sup> M. Audrey Burnam et al., "Acculturation and Lifetime Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders Among Mexican Americans in Los Angeles," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 28, no. 1 (1987): 89-102; William A. Vega and Rubén J. Rumbaut, "Ethnic Minorities and Mental Health," *Annual Review of Sociology* 17 (1991): 351-83; Alexander N. Ortega et al., "Acculturation and the Lifetime Risk of Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders among Hispanics," *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 188, no. 11 (2000): 728-35; Joseph D. Hovey and Cristina Magaña, "Acculturative Stress, Anxiety, and Depression, among Mexican Immigrant Farmworkers in the Midwest United States," *Journal of Immigrant Health* 2, no. 3 (2000): 119-31.

<sup>119</sup> Brian Karl Finch and William A. Vega, "Acculturation Stress, Social Support, and Self-Rated Health Among Latinos in California," *Journal of Immigrant Health* 5, no. 3 (2003): 109-17.

<sup>120</sup> Rubén G. Rumbaut, Douglas S. Massey, and Frank D. Bean, "Linguistic Life Expectancies: Immigrant Language Retention in Southern California," *Population and Development Review* 32, no. 3 (2006): 447-60.

<sup>121</sup> Richard Alba et al., "Only English by the Third Generation? Loss and Preservation of the Mother Tongue among the Grandchildren of Contemporary Immigrants," *Demography* 39, no. 3 (2002): 467-84.

<sup>122</sup> William A. Vega et al., "Putative Psychotic Symptoms in the Mexican American Population: Prevalence and Co-Occurrence with Psychiatric Disorders," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 194 (2006): 471-77. See also Richard C. Cervantes, et al., "Acculturation-Related Stress and Mental Health Outcomes Among Three Generations of Hispanic Adolescents," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 20, no. 10 (2013): 1-18.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

higher rates of mental health issues.<sup>124</sup> Richard C. Cervantes et al. clarify, however, immigrant parents may be more optimistic—and thus report less depression, anxiety, etc.—because they see their life in the United States as markedly better than in their home country.<sup>125</sup> Cervantes et al. write, “However, this immigrant optimism may be nonexistent in third- or later-generation individuals who only see the social inequalities when they compare themselves with the majority group.”<sup>126</sup> Breslau et al. add that the age during which a person emigrates from Mexico to the United States significantly impacts her/his risk for a psychiatric disorder.<sup>127</sup> Given the positive correlation between socioeconomic status and mental health, researchers expect that immigration from poor conditions to better socioeconomic conditions—as in the instance of leaving Mexico, a developing country, to the United States, a developed nation—would better one’s mental health profile. Paradoxically, this is not the case.<sup>128</sup> Significantly, a 2008 study of people living on the Texas-Mexico border near El Paso and Ciudad Juárez found that people living in the borderlands experience higher rates of depression, for instance, than Latina/os living in Mexico City or California.<sup>129</sup> From this information, I speculate that it is not necessarily the physical places we are born but instead the initial age at which we experience the stress of hierarchical and thus unequal epidermalized (i.e., those perceived characteristics on the surface of one’s body) and ideological clashes that gives rise to increased levels of mental health issues Chicana/os experience. Overall, these findings show that acculturation to White American society does not necessarily benefit Mexican immigrants and their descendants as it does other White, European-descended or professional class immigrants. Other non-White immigrants and their descendants—like Asian Americans and Black Americans—do not seem to benefit from assimilation and acculturation either, for they too experience higher rates of general health

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<sup>124</sup> Margarita Alegría et al., “Prevalence Of Mental Illness in Immigrant and Non-Immigrant U.S. Latino Groups,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 165 (2008): 359–69. Zhihuan Jennifer Huang et al., “Depressive Symptomatology and Mental Health-Seeking Patterns of U.S. and Foreign-Born Mothers,” *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 11 (2007): 257–67. Javier I. Escobar et al., “Immigration and Mental Health: Mexican Americans in the United States,” *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 8, no. 2 (2000): 64-72; Ortega et al., “Acculturation and the Lifetime Risk of Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders among Hispanics.”

<sup>125</sup> Cervantes et al., “Acculturation-Related Stress,” 464.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Breslau et al. find that Mexican immigrants who arrived in the United States as adolescents or adults (i.e., older than age 13) have a lower lifetime risk for mood and anxiety disorders than those who arrived before age 13. One hypothesis is that “differences associated with U.S.-nativity arise from cross-national differences in disposition to mood and anxiety disorder acquired in childhood.” See Breslau et al., “Immigration to the USA and Risk for Mood and Anxiety Disorders: Variation by Origin and Age at Immigration,” *Psychological Medicine* 39, no. 7 (2009): 1117–1127.

<sup>128</sup> For more on this “Hispanic Paradox,” see, for instance, Kant Patel and Mark E. Rushefsky, “Hispanics and Health Care,” in *Health Care in America: Separate and Unequal* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 74-122.

<sup>129</sup> Kathleen O’Connor et al., “Prevalence of Mental Health Issues in the Borderlands: A Comparative Perspective,” *Hispanic Health Care International* 6, no. 3 (2008): 140-49.

diseases and mental health disorders than White Americans and more recent European immigrants.<sup>130</sup>

So what is it about time spent in the United States that affects non-White groups differently than descendants of and recent White European immigrants? A history of discrimination against non-White people in the United States can help account for these disproportionate rates of mental health disorders. Western Europeans and their descendants throughout the world are more capable of assimilating into mainstream (read: White and able-bodied) U.S. culture not because they possess superior abilities to adapt but instead because their physiognomy fits the mold of a stereotypical White, able-bodied U.S. American. Any deviance from this basic mold arouses suspicion amongst those who “belong” and/or generates negative assumptions about the Other’s origins, citizenship status, and/or intentions in “the land of the free.” Belonging is to be white. Studies show that such racism, in addition to other forms of discrimination that I discuss below, greatly affect a person’s overall health.<sup>131</sup> Psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce finds that a lifetime of microaggressions—although they are a process of “subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns” directed at people of color—also “can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence.”<sup>132</sup> There exists a positive association between racial discrimination and higher rates of internalized behavior like anxiety (disorder), depressive disorder, anger, sadness, nervousness, psychosis, PTSD symptoms, low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, among other forms of psychological distress.<sup>133</sup> There are also higher rates of externalized behavior such as

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<sup>130</sup> Huong Nguyen, “Asians and the Immigrant Paradox,” in *Asian American and Pacific Islander Children and Mental Health*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick T. Leon (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011), 1-22; David R. Williams et al., “The Mental Health of Black Caribbean Immigrants: Results from The National Survey of American Life (NSAL),” *American Journal of Public Health* 97, no. 1 (2007): 52-59.

<sup>131</sup> Gilbert C. Gee et al., “Self-Reported Discrimination and Mental Health Status Among African Descendants, Mexican Americans, and Other Latinos in the New Hampshire REACH 2010 Initiative: The Added Dimension of Immigration,” *American Journal of Public Health* 96, no. 10 (2006): 1821-28; David R. Williams and Selina A. Mohammed, “Discrimination and Racial Disparities in Health: Evidence and Needed Research,” *Research Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 32 (2009): 20-47.

<sup>132</sup> Chester M. Pierce, “Stress Analogs of Racism and Sexism: Terrorism, Torture, and Disaster,” in *Mental Health, Racism, and Sexism*, ed. Charles V. Willie, Patricia Perri Reiker, Bernard M. Kramer, and Bertram S. Brown (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 281. See also Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

<sup>133</sup> Williams and Mohammed, “Discrimination and Racial Disparities in Health”; Gee et al., “Self-Reported Discrimination”; Risa Broudy et al., “Perceived Ethnic Discrimination in Relation to Daily Moods and Negative Social Interactions,” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 30, no. 1 (2007): 31-43; Anna Khaylis, Lynn C. Waelde, and Elizabeth J. Bruce, “The Role of Ethnic Identity in the Relationship of Race-Related Stress to PTSD Symptoms among Young Adults,” *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 8, no. 4 (2007): 91-105; Kevin A. Yoder et al., “Suicidal Ideation among American Indian Youths,” *Archives of Suicide Research* 10, no. 2 (2006): 177-90; Mia Smith Bynum, E. Thomaseo Burton, and Candace Best, “Racism Experiences and

substance abuse, rebellious behavior, and violence.<sup>134</sup> These behaviors may be coping mechanisms to deal with the stressors of acculturation and the frustration of feelings of not belonging. While White people certainly exhibit similar externalizing behaviors due to other forms of trauma, people of color encounter a greater risk for problems (e.g., incarceration, dropping out of school, death) associated with substance abuse and “rebellious behavior” that dominant culture interprets as “violence” because of racial profiling.

These reports typically study “self-reported” or “perceived” discrimination and thus contribute to a discourse that focuses on discrimination on an individual level. There are fewer discussions of the mental health effects of structural racism and other forms of systemic discrimination.<sup>135</sup> In addition to treating individuals’ mental health, we must also focus on the psychic underpinnings of systems of governance—at both familial and national levels—in order to holistically assuage historical and intergenerational trauma.

### **Psychic Underpinnings of Familismo**

A majority of these studies on discrimination and the negative effects of acculturation note that family can serve as a protective barrier to illnesses such as substance abuse, anxiety, depression, and even suicidality.<sup>136</sup> Some researchers attribute the higher prevalence of psychiatric disorders among later generations of Mexican Americans to a breakdown in traditional Mexican family structure.<sup>137</sup> In a study of Latinas who have attempted suicide, psychiatrist Luis H. Zayas proposes a model illustrating the many variables that work together to influence human development and family functioning and spatially indicates the factors’ degree of influence on young Latinas. According to his model, the “distal” factors, and hence least influential on Latina adolescents, are immigration, socioeconomics and economic hardship,

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Psychological Functioning in African American College Freshmen: Is Racial Socialization a Buffer?” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 13, no. 1 (2007): 64-71.

<sup>134</sup> Williams and Mohammed, “Discrimination and Racial Disparities in Health.”

<sup>135</sup> Gilbert C. Gee and Chandra L. Ford, “Structural Racism and Health Inequities,” *DuBois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 8, no. 1 (2011): 115-32; Edna A. Viruell-Fuentes, et al., “More Than Culture: Structural Racism, Intersectionality Theory, and Immigrant Health,” *Social Science & Medicine* 75 (2012): 2099-2106; E.J.R. David and Kevin L. Nadal, “The Colonial Context of Filipino American Immigrants’ Psychological Experiences,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 19, no. 3 (2013): 298-309.

<sup>136</sup> Alexis O. Miranda et al., “Differences in Family Cohesion, Adaptability, and Environment among Latino Families in Dissimilar Stages of Acculturation,” *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families* 8 (2000): 341-50; Miguelina German et al., “Familism Values as a Protective Factor for Mexican-Origin Adolescents Exposed to Deviant Peers,” *Journal of Early Adolescence* 29 (2008): 16-42; Paul Richard Smokowski et al., “Influence of Risk Factors and Cultural Assets on Latino Adolescents’ Trajectories of Self-Esteem and Internalizing Symptoms,” *Child Psychiatry and Human Development* 41 (2009): 133-55.

<sup>137</sup> Ortega et al., “Acculturation and the Lifetime Risk of Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders among Hispanics”; Escobar et al., “Immigration and Mental Health”; William A. Vega, et al., “12-Month Prevalence of DSM-III-R Psychiatric Disorders among Mexican Americans: Nativity, Social Assimilation, and Age Determinants,” *Journal of Nervous Mental Disorders* 192, no. 8 (2004): 532-41.



community neighborhood, schools, social images.<sup>138</sup> The investigator explains, “These are systems that have overarching influences on Hispanic and other families and their children but are not as close as microsystems.”<sup>139</sup> For Zayas, the microsystem is the family, which, he argues, primarily mediates the influence of the distal factors, (e.g., school, trauma, friendships, peers, and social images).<sup>140</sup>

Chicana feminists have publicly articulated critiques of familismo in Chicano families since the Chicano movements and women’s movements, which gained momentum in the 1960s. In a 1971 essay, for instance, Bernice Rincón delineates different roles for Chicanos and Chicanas in the family. She notes that men take on a paternal role, “wield[ing] almost unlimited power within the home.”<sup>141</sup> When there is no biological father, the eldest son or male is expected to assume this role, which transforms his word into “law” and dictates “he is obeyed unquestioningly by [the] wife and children, especially the girls.”<sup>142</sup> Women conversely must comply with a maternal role. The woman is

expected to be submissive, faithful, devoted, and respectful to her husband and to take major responsibility for rearing the children. A good wife is not expected to find fault with her husband or to be curious or jealous of what he does outside the home, nor is she supposed to share in his political, economic or social activities unless they are centered around the home.<sup>143</sup>

That is, women are expected to ensure the survival and maintenance of the patriarchal, heteronormative family as a unit. Unlike men or boys who can participate in activities outside the home, women must be committed solely to the domestic sphere. This pressure on female family members can sometimes be internalized to such a great degree that girls and women believe they live only for the sake of the family.<sup>144</sup> In an essay published in 1977, Sonia A. López takes an Althusseran approach to conceptualizing the family, situating it alongside other institutions such as the Catholic Church, the education system, and the legal system. As an Ideological State Apparatus, the traditional Chicana/o family ensures control of females by males. López explains,

The family structure in the traditional Chicano household is headed by the husband, who exercises authority. He is the main provider in the family, consequently, the economic situation of the woman is directly related to her dependency on him. In Mexican culture,

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<sup>138</sup> Luis H. Zayas, *Latinas Attempting Suicide: When Cultures, Families, and Daughters Collide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 150-57.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Bernice Rincón, “La Chicana: Her Role in the Past and Her Search for a New Role in the Future,” in García, *Chicana Feminist Thought*, 25.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> The group of suicide attempters in Allyson P. Nolle’s study—as I discuss in a bit—evidences the extreme pressure familismo puts on women, especially as the Latinas in the study were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice (to kill themselves) to ensure that the family unit did not feel burdened with their presence. Some of the young women noted the emotional and financial stress they believed they caused their families and saw their absence (through suicide) as the only way to relieve their families of this stress. See Nolle et al., “Sacrificing for the Sake of the Family: Expressions of Familism by Latina Teens in the Context of Suicide,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 82, no. 3 (2012): 319-327.

the role of the Mexicana/Chicana, whether single or married, has been to serve her family, particularly the men: her father, brothers, husband, and sons. In short, the role of Chicana *abuelitas* [grandmothers], mothers, and *tías* [aunts], with few exceptions, has been to bear children, rear them, and be good wives.<sup>145</sup>

As Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us in 1987, the exceptions left reinforce the virgin/whore dichotomy. Anzaldúa writes, “For a woman of my culture there used to be only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or the home as a mother.”<sup>146</sup> That is, women—whether they are daughters, sisters, wives, or mothers—exist solely to serve and care for the males in the family. Like religion, the school system, and the law, the family maintains and perpetuates the notion of female-ness as inferior under the guise of “maternity” (maternal-ness) and what is “natural” and “inherently” necessary for life and survival. Familismo is “the belief in la familia as a sacred institution.”<sup>147</sup> For women and girls, it is “the mandate to put your family’s needs before your own.”<sup>148</sup>

The origins of familismo are obviously rooted in the concept of family, a word—as Frederick Engels reminded us in 1884—that comes from the Latin term *famulus*, meaning domestic slave, and *familia*, the total number of slaves belonging to one man. In *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels explains that such sexual inequality did not exist before the idea of private property came about. The social organism invented by the Romans, which came to be known as “the family,” helped to delineate the property owned by one man. Under this system of property-owning, a patriarch inherited all wealth and had absolute power—including power of life and death—over all members of the household, including a wife, children, and slaves.<sup>149</sup> Because it is rooted in this concept of family, the social cohesion particular to familismo emerges from a type of cohesion based on connection to one male. The Western notion of “family” hierarchically organizes relationships amongst its members, allowing men to decide the worth of lives under their dominion.

While White feminists have certainly critiqued these traditional notions of family and marriage,<sup>150</sup> U.S. Third World/decolonial feminists remind us women’s roles vis-à-vis family do not function in the same way across different cultures. Non-Western groups that are legible to Westerners as “family” are not necessarily undergirded by Western tenets of “family” at all. During a trip across the Masai Plains in 1973, for example, Angela Davis learns about the egalitarian relationships among females and males in the Masai community. She writes, “Within

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<sup>145</sup> Sonia A. López, “The Role of the Chicana within the Student Movement,” in García, *Chicana Feminist Thought*, 103; italics and translations in original.

<sup>146</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 39.

<sup>147</sup> Rosa Linda Fregoso, *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 33.

<sup>148</sup> Rosa Maria Gil and Carmen Inoa Vazquez, *The Maria Paradox: How Latinas Can Merge Old World Traditions with New World Self-Esteem* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1996), 39-40.

<sup>149</sup> Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884; Chippendale, New South Wales, Australia: Resistance Books, 2004), 67.

<sup>150</sup> Fran Ansley, “Functions of the Theory and Practice of Male Chauvinism,” *Female Liberation Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1969): 5; Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (UK: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1970); Margaret Benston, “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation,” *Monthly Review* 21, no. 4 (1969): 13-27; Jennifer Sommerville, *Feminism and the Family: Politics and Society in the UK and USA* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

the pre-capitalist, nomadic economy of the Masai, women's domestic labor is as essential to the economy as the cattle-raising jobs performed by their men. As producers, they enjoy a correspondingly important social status."<sup>151</sup> That is, among the Masai women and men witnessed by Davis in 1973, there existed a complementary as opposed to hierarchical division of labor. One type of labor is not more productive than other, as all work is essential (and valued as such) in the community. Similarly, Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí explains that among the Yoruba people there is no "women's work" or "men's work" because 1) there are no Yoruba words that translate into "woman" or "man" with the same hierarchical connotations as in Western languages, and 2) the division of labor and other social expectations are not based on gender but instead on chronological age or time of entry into the kinship group.<sup>152</sup> The early 1970s writings of Chicana feminist activists Enriqueta Longeaux Vazquez, Marta Vidal, and Elizabeth Martínez resonate with the work of Davis and Oyèwùmí. As I explain above, these Chicanas emphasize that women and men of México enjoy/ed equal, complementary privileges in their kinship groups/communities before colonization. Andrea Smith more recently suggests these hierarchicalizing concepts were introduced by and benefited colonialism, imperialism, and the accompanying capitalist economic system that served to subjugate people of color all over the world.<sup>153</sup>

The U.S. American slavery system certainly exploited and distorted African peoples' understandings of "family" as an extended kin group with a territorial base. Angela Davis noted in 1971 how slavery disorganized family life through constant separation of mothers and fathers, children and parents, sisters and brothers.<sup>154</sup> These brutal separations strategically kept slaves from forging a collective that might help them gain some sense of solidarity and unity. The people under slave quarters' roofs were not necessarily blood related and many times, due to constant separation, these slaves could not expect a stable sense of home or belonging. Nonetheless, as Davis further explains, "Where families were allowed to thrive, they were, for the most part, external fabrications serving the designs of an avaricious, profit-seeking slaveholder."<sup>155</sup> Masters coupled healthy men and healthy women for the sole purpose of producing more healthy (read: productive) slaves. "Family" in the capitalist sense, then, contributes to the goals of a dominant culture invested in ownership and profits.

Cathy J. Cohen underscores the heteronormative requirement of this type of family. She reminds us that in addition to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans folks, poor, heterosexual people of color as well as poor, heterosexual white people stand outside of state-sanctioned white middle- and upper-class heteronormativity. Cohen defines "heteronormativity" as "those localized practices and those centralized institutions which legitimize and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships."<sup>156</sup> *Poor* families headed by—for instance—straight, single mothers

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<sup>151</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 224-25.

<sup>152</sup> Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), especially chapter 2.

<sup>153</sup> Smith, "American Studies without America."

<sup>154</sup> Angela Davis, "The Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies* (1971): 1-14.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>156</sup> Cathy J. Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," *GLQ* 3 (1997): 440. In this essay, Cohen makes a call to expand the category "queer" to include heterosexual, non-heteronormative people—i.e., non-White, poor individuals whose familial systems are not state-sanctioned.

or straight grandmothers or straight aunts are not considered heteronormative according to the dictates of heterosexual patriarchy. Cohen emphasizes there must be “an understanding of the ways our multiple identities work to limit the entitlement and status some receive from obeying a heterosexual imperative.”<sup>157</sup> Ideological state apparatuses and repressive status apparatuses help shape these multiple identities. Sociopolitical and capitalist systems like the prison industrial complex that targets people of color and the medical industrial complex that underserves and/or exploits people of color still force and keep families apart. These systems leave us with single mothers. They leave us with older sisters or grandmothers we come to know as “mom.” They leave us with mothers and fathers and siblings who we will never know. For many families of color—whose members have been separated through disproportionate rates of incarceration and untimely deaths due to preventable diseases and murders—recognition through heteronormativity is not easily achieved.

As a result of settler-colonialism and racism, Mexican/Mexican-American families in the United States maintain a unique status as formal citizens and social outcasts. Dominant culture has for a long time deemed the Mexican/Mexican-American family backwards and dysfunctional. In a study of domestic space in the early twentieth-century Southwest, Pablo Mitchell examines criminal appeals cases involving Mexicans. He highlights how Anglo trial participants deemed Mexican families inferior, tending to focus on the poor condition of Mexican houses and the nonnuclear domestic arrangements of Mexican families. Mexican witnesses challenged these critiques, testifying to the usefulness of extended kinship networks, such as having grandparents or aunts and uncles living in the home, especially during times of need. Mitchell argues that Eurocentric ideals of sexual propriety, heteropatriarchy, and domesticity became critical components for Mexican and Mexican-American families to move closer to full civic inclusion.<sup>158</sup> Acknowledging that U.S. American discourse buttressed stereotypes of “the” Chicano family, the Chicano Movement utilized a similar strategy for civic recognition and inclusion, as its leaders generally engaged “la familia” as a thematic and organizational structure for solidarity amongst Chicanos. These leaders idealized la familia as a source of nourishment and protection from an external racist, dominant culture. Indeed, as mentioned previously, various psychological studies find that family can serve as a protective barrier against the discrimination young Latinas experience outside the home.<sup>159</sup> Yet, as Richard T. Rodriguez emphasizes, this political familism—a term used by sociologist Maxine Baca Zinn to describe “a phenomenon in which the continuity of family groups and the adherence to family ideology [would] provide the basis for struggle”—reproduces a paradigm that centers

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>158</sup> Pablo Mitchell, “Borderlands/La Familia: Mexicans, Homes, and Colonialism in the Early Twentieth-Century Southwest,” in *On the Borders of Love and Power: Families and Kinship in the Intercultural American Southwest*, ed. David Wallace Adams and Crista DeLuzio (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 185-206.

<sup>159</sup> Javier I. Escobar et al., “Immigration and Mental Health”; R. Enrique Varela et al., “Anxiety Reporting and Culturally Associated Interpretation Biases and Cognitive Schemas: A Comparison of Mexican, Mexican American, and European American Families,” *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology* 33, no. 2 (2004): 237-47; William A. Vega, et al., “12-Month Prevalence of DSM-III-R Psychiatric Disorders among Mexican Americans”; Luis H. Zayas, *Latinas Attempting Suicide*.

heterosexual male needs and voices.<sup>160</sup> Considering its European origins and its development in the face of the devaluation of brown peoples, familismo has become an appeal to civic inclusion in a heteronormative, capitalist society. Familismo is a response to the effects of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. It distorts ancestral Indigenous egalitarian kinship models in which co-existence did not necessitate the subjugation of any one group of members, and all lives were and are equally valued because everyone in the community served a valuable role. Familismo purports to be a kin group's social system of cohesion and respect, yet one of its main components is hierarchical organization/"cohesion" that demands unequal/disproportionate respect for its members. Females can have respect if they abide by gendered dictates. Still, their domestic work is devalued. Males, on the other hand, obtain respect by virtue of their penises, and their work is always considered more valuable.

In *Chicana and Chicano Mental Health: Alma, Mente, y Corazón*, psychologist Yvette Flores speaks to the anxiety and traumas Chicanas too often experience. In a chapter on gender and mental health, she points out although anxiety disorders may be genetic, social and cultural factors certainly play roles in the mental health of Chicanas. She writes, "The multiple forms of injustice that women experience from both strangers and loved ones, especially violence and substance abuse within the home, threaten their lives and psychological health."<sup>161</sup> Familismo and our commitments to it function differently for females and males who are expected to adhere to stereotypical Western, gender roles. For Chicanas, our relationships to our families can serve as both protectors and precipitators of psychic dis-ease. In a 2012 paper, Allyson P. Nolle and her colleagues explore aspects of the relationship between familism/familismo and suicidal behavior among young Latinas. The researchers define familismo in a broad sense as "a core value promoted by many individuals of Hispanic or Latino descent that emphasizes the primacy of the family over the individual."<sup>162</sup> Nolle's study finds that suicide attempters and nonattempters demonstrate familismo in different ways. While both groups make material and/or emotional sacrifices for their families, those who express a desire to die are willing to sacrifice their *selves* for the sake of the family. Those in the sample who reported suicide attempts saw their desire to kill themselves as a way to make things better for their loved ones, for many of these young Latinas saw themselves as burdens at home. Nolle et al.'s study draws attention to the fact that the "concept of *sacrifice* permeates familism research."<sup>163</sup> They write, "Children of immigrants are often acutely aware of the great sacrifices that their parents have made (i.e., departure from their social support networks in their home countries, enduring long, dangerous journeys to the United States, struggling to learn English, or working long hours), and so they feel a duty to repay their parents by supporting and assisting the family."<sup>164</sup> Witnessing the physical effects of their parents' hard labors and listening to their parents' stories, daughters thus feel obligated to sacrifice for their families in multiple ways including materially and emotionally. One 11 year-old daughter explained she did not want to have a quinceañera

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<sup>160</sup> Maxine Baca Zinn, "Political Familism: Toward Sex Role Equality in Chicano Families," *Aztlán* 6, no. 1 (1975): 13-26, qtd. in Richard T. Rodríguez, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 21-24.

<sup>161</sup> Yvette G. Flores, *Chicana and Chicano Mental Health: Alma, Mente y Corazón* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 73.

<sup>162</sup> Allyson P. Nolle et al., "Sacrificing for the Sake of the Family," 319.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 320; emphasis in original.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

because, as she expressed, “I don’t want my mom and dad to spend a lot of money on those parties.”<sup>165</sup> Besides having to see their parents’ bodies deteriorating after long days’ of manual work, these daughters may also have to hear their parents’ complaints that can culminate into messages such as “No sirves para nada” (You aren’t good for anything), for instance, when the daughter does not fulfill her familial duties. How do these messages translate for the children of poor and working-class parents? It is possible these linguistic messages—in addition to socioeconomic circumstances—can be the basis for other psychological studies that find a disproportionate prevalence of substance abuse,<sup>166</sup> mood and anxiety disorders,<sup>167</sup> and suicidality<sup>168</sup> among Mexican and Mexican-American women and children compared with Mexican and Mexican-American men in the United States.

Familismo is one possible family structure with the potential to provide self-protection in a hostile world, however, it is a system that diminishes women. Proposals of familismo as an explanatory model for mental health disorders experienced by Latinas do not take into account how familismo—a patriarchal system that uses gender to determine a person’s worthiness in relation to others in the system—is in itself dysfunctional. We must remember that Mexican and Mexican-American families are composed of individuals who have had various types of traumas passed on to them and may have directly experienced trauma due to their sociopolitical and economic positioning in the United States.

We learn from our environments and people’s reactions to our presence. The work of psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon, who emphasizes colonized, Black French men’s internalization of the oppressor’s ideals, illuminates this point. Fanon assesses the Black-White relationship as a colonized-colonizer or oppressed-oppressor relationship. White colonizers believe themselves superior to colonized, non-White peoples. The colonized, in turn, “want to prove at all costs to the Whites” that they are equal, and in these attempts internalize or “epidermalize” the identities fabricated by their oppressors.<sup>169</sup> Confronted by colonizers, settlers, and imperialists, who promulgate belief in their racial superiority as European, the colonized

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>166</sup> William A. Vega et al., “Illicit drug use among Mexicans and Mexican Americans in California: The effects of gender and acculturation,” *Addiction* 93 (1998): 1839-50; Vega et al., “12-Month Prevalence of DSM-III-R Psychiatric Disorders among Mexican Americans”; Janet Okamoto et al., “Perceived Discrimination and Substance Abuse among Latino Adolescents,” *American Journal of Health Behavior* 33 (2009), 718-27.

<sup>167</sup> Vega et al., “12-Month Prevalence of DSM-III-R Psychiatric Disorders among Mexican Americans”; Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor and Kimberly A. Updegraff, “Latino Adolescents’ Mental Health: Exploring the Interrelations among Discrimination, Ethnic Identity, Cultural Orientation, Self-Esteem, and Depressive Symptoms,” *Journal of Adolescence* 30 (2007): 549-67; Elena Flores et al., “Perceived Racial/Ethnic Discrimination, Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms, and Health Risk Behaviors among Mexican American Adolescents,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 57 (2010): 264-73.

<sup>168</sup> Julia Muennich Cowell, “Depression and Suicidal Ideation among Mexican American School-Aged Children,” *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice* 19 (2005): 77-94; Luis H. Zayas, “Can Better Mother-Daughter Relations Reduce the Chance of a Suicide Attempt among Latinas?” *Depression Research and Treatment* 41, no. 3 (2011): 330-41; Luis H. Zayas, *Latinas Attempting Suicide*; Allyson P. Nolle, “Sacrificing for the Sake of the Family.”

<sup>169</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xiii-xv.

internalize the idea that *something is wrong with them*. Fanon elucidates this feeling in relation to black men, writing,

I couldn't take it any longer, for I already knew there were legends, stories, history, and especially historicity that Jaspers had taught me. As a result the body schema, attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema . . . . I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all the grinning *Ya bon Banania*.<sup>170</sup>

According to Fanon, this feeling of “wrongness” stems from seeing ourselves through white eyes, for they are white eyes which have historically perceived us, people of color, as backwards cannibals and caricatures.

Robert A. Antone et alia argue that such internalization of inferiority can contribute to seemingly unexplainable feelings of anger, shame, loneliness, fear, and hurt experienced by the oppressed.<sup>171</sup> These Indigenous researchers point to mainstream media that promotes stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples as one of the ways Aboriginals learn how to see their selves and others. Aboriginal peoples who see themselves cast as racist and sexist caricatures in the media eventually internalize these stereotypes and hold shame and anger about themselves, believing they are “too dark” or “not dark enough” or that they behave in ways that are “backwards or uncivilized,” for example.<sup>172</sup> Carlos P. Hipolito-Delgado, Stephany Gallegos Payan, and Teresa I. Baca further account for how such internalized oppression can impact mental health. They find that U.S. Latina/os' experience of internalized racism can lead to ethnic self-hatred that includes shame or embarrassment about one's family and community, especially those members who are less assimilated into White American culture.<sup>173</sup> This self-hatred is coupled with self-doubt vis-à-vis a culture that tells us who we are and where we come from is not “normal.” I have lost count of the number of times family, friends, students, and acquaintances of Mexican descent refer to themselves as “Hispanics” or make a concerted effort to pinpoint their Spanish origins. Their declaration functions to differentiate them from the people of Mexican descent who—because of systemic erasure of proletarian histories—may not be able trace their origins to Europe even if they do exist. This claim also attempts to boost self-image; a connection to a bourgeois history or to Europe, we have learned, is certainly held in higher regard than a connection to comparatively “poor” Indigenous or African heritages that colonialism and imperialism devalue as “savage,” “uncivilized,” or simply “not normal.”

Audre Lorde takes note in regard to Black women: “[W]e have each learned to be at home with cruelty because we have survived so much of it within our own lives.”<sup>174</sup>

*If I have learned to eat my own flesh in the forest—starving, keening, learning the lesson of the she-wolf who chews off her own paw to leave the trap behind—if I must drink my*

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>171</sup> Antone, Miller, and Myers, *The Power Within People*.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Carlos P. Hipolito-Delgado, Stephany Gallegos Payan, and Teresa I. Baca, “Self-Hatred, Self-Doubt, and Assimilation in Latina/o Communities: Las Consecuencias de Colonización y Oposición,” in *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups*, ed. E.J.R. David (New York: Springer, 2014), 109-36.

<sup>174</sup> Audre Lorde, “Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (1984; Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 146.

*own blood, thirsting, why should I stop at yours until your dear dead arms hang like withered garlands upon my breast and I weep for your going, oh my sister, I grieve for our gone.*<sup>175</sup>

To devalue the lives of those who are most like us because we are convinced that we have no value, are not worthy, and do not belong. These are adaptive behaviors that psychically destroy the parts of us as well—the parts of us that are “gone” collectively and for which Lorde grieves. Similarly, bell hooks theorizes stories of black mothers punishing their children without giving them any clear indication of what they had done wrong “because they felt that the child might assert themselves in ways outside the home that might lead white people to abuse and punish them.”<sup>176</sup> Given historic dominant and general hatred directed toward black people, hooks notes, black mothers have had to “attempt to second-guess what the critical white world might say to disparage, ridicule, or mock and to prevent that from happening through self-critique and changing one’s behavior accordingly.”<sup>177</sup> Mexican Americans too have learned to avoid pain and punishment through “vigilant self-scrutiny” and “a system of internal checks.”<sup>178</sup> Paying close attention to the emotions that drive us to perform in these ways, however, may help us recognize the stories that have been invented for people of color. To save our lives, we internalize the oppressor’s ideals and repress feelings of dis-ease, for taking note of them would bring us closer to acknowledging the injustices around us. Recognizing these injustices would prompt us to look backward, to search for a time and place when living and relating and being were not so violent. Though we have been taught by dominant culture there is nothing of value in the past, locating that time and place—through books, *limpias*, *danzas*, herbs, art, and the imagination—may help us move forward in a more conscientious way.

### **From “Psychologizing to Spiritualizing”**

While humans traversed the globe before the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the encounter between Europeans and Indigenous peoples of the Americas was vastly different. After initial encounters, the aim of the European excursions into the Americas was not simply to exchange ideas and goods, but instead to capitalize on these ideas and goods by transforming the people and land into instruments for a profitable, colonial enterprise. That is, this encounter was not a simple meeting of peoples but instead an aggressive invasion. To subdue their adversaries and thus meet their goals, Spaniards enacted physical, emotional, and psychic violence upon the Indigenous peoples, which had deeply physical, emotional, and psychic repercussions. While intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome may help us understand the structural components of the pain that is passed on through one’s elders, these concepts alone cannot account for the deep hurt felt. Intergenerational trauma, historical trauma, and PTSS do not consider how such violence affects its victims, targets, on the level of spirit and/or soul.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Lorde, “Eye to Eye,” 156; my italics.

<sup>176</sup> bell hooks, *Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 24.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>179</sup> I am hesitant to use the word “soul” as it is loaded with oppressive religious connotations. I use it here in the sense of the Nahuatl concept of *tonalli*, which, Alfredo López Austin clearly notes, “was not the equivalent of ‘soul’ in Western terms. From colonial times on, the expression



To begin the process of healing, one must address both public and inner worlds, which are intimately linked. We see this connection when we consider how “public” historical loss manifests symptomatically through “inner” anger, anxiety, and depression.<sup>180</sup> Concepts like ethnostress, which describes a loss and confusion of identity for Aboriginal peoples, help us make sense of this connection. Ethnostress refers to the impact that experiential reality of oppression has on the psycho-social development of an Aboriginal person.<sup>181</sup> Gregory Cajete defines it as

a psychological response pattern stemming from the disruption of deeply held cultural life and belief systems that one cares about deeply. Such a disruption may be abrupt or occur over time and generations. Its initial effects are readily visible, but its long-term effects are many and varied, usually affecting self-image and an understanding of one’s place in the world.<sup>182</sup>

Aboriginal researchers recognize ethnostress through various distress patterns such as:

1. not being able to meet basic needs that impact one’s human growth and spiritual development
2. losing faith and belief in oneself, family, and community
3. accepting and supporting the beliefs of one’s oppressor
4. accepting a limited version of culture instead of seeing culture as a living dynamic
5. isolating oneself from other Aboriginal people due to fear, mistrust, and shame
6. internalizing stereotypes and factionalism
7. developing compulsive and harmful coping mechanisms to deal with daily oppression

Researchers acknowledge that these distress reactions are responses to the repetitive and consistent traumas that have been experienced as patterns emanating from a system based on hierarchies that include racism and sexism. Ethnostress takes seriously the impacts of structural changes upon a person or group’s identity and self-image. This concept underscores the importance of one’s sense of self as it is grounded in spirit and soul, two parts of one’s being that are distinct but related. One useful way to understand this relationship is through an analogy proposed by Registered Psychiatric nurse and curandera Elena Avila. She explains,

When our spirit, the aura that surrounds us, is strong, our sacred soul—our essence, the root and core of who we really are—will not be deeply affected by the trials and tribulations of everyday life. One way of thinking of a healthy spirit is to compare it to the skin of a fruit. If the skin of the fruit is intact, it protects the fruit from bacteria and

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‘loss of the soul’ was used because of Christian influence.” Tonalli is instead both “the soul and the spirit.” It also describes “the destiny of a person according to the day of his [sic] birth.” See Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, vol. 1, trans. Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1988), 206.

<sup>180</sup> Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native Peoples* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>181</sup> Antone, Miller, and Myers, *The Power Within People*.

<sup>182</sup> Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: Ecology of Indigenous Education* (Durango, CO: Kivaki Press, 1994), 189.

damage. If the skin is weakened or punctured, soon brown spots of decay begin to appear and spread through the fruit.<sup>183</sup>

Avila's use of the term "soul" does not appear aligned with religious understandings of the term, which separate the soul from the body. Instead, her use of "soul"—described as an "essence," "root," and "core"—is more aligned with the Nahuatl concept of "tonalli," which refers to both "the spirit and the soul."<sup>184</sup> However, Avila posits that the soul is incased by spirit. The spirit is the sum total of the outside world including our education, and nutritional habits, and our inner world including the energy generated by our feelings, thoughts, and intentions. It connects us to the "Great Spirit," the Divine. According to this nurse and healer, unhealthy eating habits, and negative feelings, thoughts, and intentions can weaken our spirits, thus making our souls more susceptible to wounding.<sup>185</sup>

Psychologist Eduardo Duran underlines the significance of the soul in *psychology*, a word that literally translates into "study of the soul." Duran attributes present-day psychology's digression from working with the soul to the Cartesian split of being into mind and body. Through his research, he learns that elders in the Indigenous community describe their present problems as a result of "spiritual injury, soul sickness, soul wounding, and ancestral hurt" that has been passed down through generations. Duran's study of Native American mental health through an Indigenous research methodology takes care to honor these voices in his community as well as non-Western modes of thinking. He thus shifts from "psychologizing to spiritualizing," two functions linked with soul-work, in order to engage "spirit" metaphors that are useful to the Indigenous community with whom he works. The elders understand intergenerational trauma as "ancestral wounding" that came about as a result of the systematic extermination of native peoples. The plundering of the earth for resources since the 16<sup>th</sup> century has also had serious consequences:

[W]hen the earth is wounded, the people who are caretakers of the earth also are wounded at a very deep soul level. Earth wounding speaks to the process whereby people become destructive to the natural environment and disturb the natural order.<sup>186</sup>

Because the soul is energy and—like all energy—is interconnected to every thing (liquid, gas, solid, animals, plants, rocks, you, and me) as part of a cosmic balance, when the soul is injured, all cosmic energy is thrown off balance. The Mayan greeting, "In lak'ech," which translates into "You are my other me, and I am your other you," emphasizes this interconnectedness, reminding us how our actions unto others are actions unto ourselves. Soul wounds are core wounds that impact all parts of the world-self. This soul trauma is passed on intergenerationally, and it is cumulative. Duran stresses, "[T]here is a process whereby unresolved trauma becomes more severe each time it is passed on to a subsequent generation."<sup>187</sup>

Like the Indigenous research in which it is grounded, some Chicana/o psychology also honors the significance of the spirit and soul, observing that "mental disorders are rooted in

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<sup>183</sup> Elena Avila with Joy Parker, *Woman Who Glows in the Dark: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 66-67.

<sup>184</sup> López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 204.

<sup>185</sup> Avila with Parker, *Woman Who Glows in the Dark*, 172-173.

<sup>186</sup> Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound*, 16.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

violations of the tonal—the spirit.”<sup>188</sup> Describing the colonial encounter, psychologist Yvette Flores reports,

Those who survived the genocide carried in their spirits, bodies, and hearts the trauma of conquest and domination. They also kept in their souls and psyches the connection to the ancestors and their past. Both the legacy and the trauma and the connection to traditional values were passed on to subsequent generations. Centuries later, historical or intergenerational trauma continues to pose threats to the well-being of Mexicans and Chicanas and Chicanos.<sup>189</sup>

Present-day research into the genetic transmission of memories including traumatic memories supports Indigenous-centered accounts. A study of epigenetic modifications (alterations in the expression of genes) showed that fear can be inherited through the generations. Neurobiologists Dias and Ressler studied epigenetic inheritance in laboratory mice that were trained to associate a particular smell with pain by giving small electric shocks each time the scent was introduced. The mice eventually grew fearsome of the smell so that they shuddered even without a shock. This reaction was passed on to their pups and their “grandchildren.”<sup>190</sup> Our ancestors’ experiences alter the epigenetic expression of genes that we eventually inherit physiologically. Laura E. Pérez describes our colonial, cultural inheritance as “cultural susto,” or “the ‘frightening’ of spirit from one’s body-mind in the colonial and neocolonial ordeals, the result of which is the ‘in-between’ state of nepantla, the postconquest condition of cultural fragmentation and social indeterminacy.”<sup>191</sup> Avila defines susto as a spiritual disease that is a result of losing one’s soul.<sup>192</sup> She explains,

Trauma causes a part of the soul to get frightened and run away into hiding. When this happens, a part of our energy is no longer accessible to us. We need 100 percent of our soul’s energy to be in good physical, mental, and spiritual health.<sup>193</sup>

Susto, or soul loss, refers to a state in which we do not feel like we are really ourselves and/or that something is missing.<sup>194</sup> Avila holds that these feelings emerge as an effect of a violation of the tonal/spirit that encases and protects the soul. It stands to reason that the recent non-Latina queer and Latina queer and non-queer teen suicide epidemic be a symptom of an untreated cultural susto—a susto brought about by the violation of young beings and selves. In her own research and practice, Flores integrates both Indigenous and Western biomedical models in her study of Chicana/o mental health. Biomedical explanations for mental disorders tend to refer to chemical imbalances in the body. Still, the physiological, cognitive, and emotional expressions

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<sup>188</sup> Flores, *Chicana and Chicano Mental Health*, 65.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>190</sup> Brian G. Dias and Kerry J. Ressler, “Parental Olfactory Experience Influences Behavior and Neural Structure in Subsequent Generations,” *Nature Neuroscience* 17, no. 1 (2014): 89-96. Two similar studies include Katharina Gapp et al., “Implication of Sperm RNAs in Transgenerational Inheritance of the Effect of Early Trauma in Mice,” *Nature Neuroscience* 17, no. 5 (2014): 667-71; and Ian C.G. Weaver et al., “Epigenetic Programming by Maternal Behavior,” *Nature Neuroscience* 7, no. 8 (2004): 847-54.

<sup>191</sup> Laura E. Pérez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 21.

<sup>192</sup> Avila with Parker, *Woman Who Glows in the Dark*, 63.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

of illnesses like PTSD and *susto*, for instance, are similar. The dissociation that occurs with PTSD, which I delve into in chapter 3, is much like the soul loss that accompanies *susto*.

No matter what we call it, this psychic dis-ease requires healing through daily soul-spirit work because we experience daily harmful thoughts and feelings as a result of intolerance. This is not to say that we—targets of sexism, racism, elitism, homophobia, transphobia and other forms of intolerance—are responsible for the weakening of our spirits, for it is certainly difficult to “grow a thick skin” when the skin is not given the chance to develop. Persistent micro-aggressions, blatant discrimination, and emotional, verbal, and physical attacks especially by our family will not give our soul-spirits time to heal even if we are trying our best to mend this part of our being. Witnessing representations of ourselves in the media and other cultural productions that aim to convince us that something is wrong with us also impede the healing process. We are so barraged with damaging voices and images that we—our spirits and souls—internalize negative thoughts and feelings about our selves so that even when we are alone, we invoke deprecating voices that reinforce the dominant culture’s narrative about women, people of color, queers—the intolerable. It is imperative that we reinvent and learn new stories about our selves and each other in order to sustain nurturing relationships and positive interactions with our selves and other people.

During this time when Latinas, American Indian, and Alaska Native (queer and non-queer) female teenagers are considering suicide at a higher rate than women their age in any other ethnic group in the United States,<sup>195</sup> the arts and other healing strategies are invaluable resources for subjects of trauma. I argue the arts enable us to express our selves and to make meaning of the world around us for our selves. It is common knowledge that when U.S. public school budgets are cut, arts programs, including theater and performance, are the first to suffer the consequences. In an epoch during which no child is supposed to be left behind, youth—who are predominantly youth of color<sup>196</sup>—are being cheated by curricula that focus heavily on preparing students for state-administered standardized tests that do not assist them in learning about themselves in relation to their communities and the world as do dominant cultural children as a matter of course, or how they can create for and with each other. Research has found theater to benefit youth’s psychosocial development. For instance, Cassandra Kisiel et al. investigated the behavioral and psychological effects of a theater-based youth violence prevention program on inner-city elementary school youth. They found that the program increased prosocial behaviors (like cooperation, assertion, and self control), prevented new-onset aggression, and decreased hyperactivity and internalizing symptoms (i.e., negativity turned inward) among

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<sup>195</sup> See note 8 in the Introduction to this dissertation.

<sup>196</sup> As of 2015, students of color make up more than 75% of the public school system in California, where *Las Hociconas* premiered. See Lucile Packard Foundation, “Public School Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity,” KidsData.org, accessed September 15, 2015, <http://www.kidsdata.org/>. In Texas, where Anthony has also performed parts of the triptych, the latest data (2014) shows that students of color make up over 70% of those enrolled in public schools. See Texas Education Agency, *Enrollment in Texas Public Schools, 2013-14* (Austin, Texas: Texas Education Agency, 2014), 8. Texas is the state that has approved public school textbooks that blatantly erase the histories of people of color in the United States. See Benjamin Wermund, “National Debate Revives Criticism of Texas Textbook Standards on Civil War,” *San Antonio Express News*, July 10, 2015, <http://www.expressnews.com/news/education/article/Texas-textbook-standards-on-Civil-War-concern-6377518.php>.

students.<sup>197</sup> With these findings in mind, theater and performance should be integral and not merely supplemental to youth's education.

In the chapters that follow, I explore how Xicana dramatists and performers, Cherríe Moraga, Adelina Anthony, and Virginia Grise, use theater to assuage our historical and intergenerational traumas through the creative form and content of their plays. Each playwright, I argue, offers tactics for decolonizing the psyche and remaking sense of the self as part of an interconnected world. Through their creativity, showcased before groups of subjects of trauma, these teatristas perform a type of collective *limpia*, a spiritual cleansing of sorts, for a group of people that has been collectively traumatized.

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<sup>197</sup> Cassandra Kisiel et al., "Evaluation of a Theater-Based Youth Violence Prevention Program for Elementary School Children," *Journal of School Violence* 5, no. 2 (2006): 19-36.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**“An Honest Portrait of Our Pain”: Reimagining the Terms for a Decolonial Future  
in Cherríe Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman***

*Possibly, as we move into the next century, we must turn our eyes away from racist Amerika and take stock of the damages done to us. Possibly the greatest risks yet to be taken are entre nosotros, where we write, paint, dance, and draw the wound for one another in order to build a stronger pueblo.*<sup>1</sup>

*The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, the focus of my analysis in this chapter, might be read as an dramatized culmination of Xicana feminist lesbian playwright, poet, and essayist Cherríe Moraga’s thinking up until the publication of the play in 2001.<sup>2</sup> In *The Last Generation*, Moraga explains she is inspired to depict “[a]n honest portrait of our [Chicana/os’] pain.”<sup>3</sup> A prevalent goal in Moraga’s oeuvre is a call for Chicana/os to take inventory of historical wrongdoings and to “write the wound” for each other—ultimately, that is, to contend with our traumas. In a 2007 interview with her mentee and co-director for the 2005 performance of *The Hungry Woman*, dramatist Adelina Anthony, Moraga explains:

[M]y job as a writer, then, is to cure. I’ve talked about that for years, and I can be misguided and I can be wrong, but the impetus or the energy behind my work is *servirle de algo*. It’s worth something: you put it out there because it will do *something*, just a little something, that might slightly alter this nation’s death wish.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I stress that Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman* indeed encourages audiences to “take stock of the damages done to us,” for this is one of the first steps we must take when dealing with historical and intergenerational trauma. We must name the wound. For Moraga, one of the wounds inflicted upon Chicana/os as a people is the staunch idea that Chicanas cannot be “more than the bent back in the fields, more than the assembly-line fingers and the rigid body beneath him [any man] in the bed, more than the veiled face above the rosary beads.”<sup>5</sup> Moraga wants to create “a portrait of la Mechicana before the ‘Fall,’ before shame, before betrayal, before Eve, Malinche, Guadalupe; before the occupation of Aztlán, la llegada de los españoles, the Aztecs’ War of Flowers.”<sup>6</sup> She calls for a decolonial portrait of the Chicano/a people.

I argue that through *The Hungry Woman*, Moraga offers us one version of this decolonial portrait by first “looking backward” to the ancient stories that narrativize what I describe as “heteropatriarchal betrayal” in order to construct a vision of a decolonial future. Moraga takes note in *The Last Generation*:

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<sup>1</sup> Cherríe Moraga, *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1993), 71; my italics.

<sup>2</sup> *The Hungry Woman* was commissioned by the Berkeley Repertory Theater. Directed by Tony Kelly, the play received a staged reading on April 10, 1995. See Cherríe Moraga, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (Albuquerque: West End Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 71.

<sup>4</sup> Adelina Anthony and Cherríe Moraga, “Cherríe Moraga,” *BOMB* 98 (2007): 63; emphasis in original.

<sup>5</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 72.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

The Chicano [sic] scribe remembers, not out of nostalgia but out of hope. She remembers in order to envision. She looks backward in order to look forward to a world forgotten not on greed, but on respect for the sovereignty of nature. And in this, she suffers—to know that fertility is both possible and constantly interrupted.”<sup>7</sup>

Looking backward enables us to identify the “Fall” as the introduction of what María Lugones terms “categorical, dichotomous, hierarchical logic [that is] central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality.”<sup>8</sup> I identify such logic as one of the wounds inflicted upon Chicana/os as a people. Through this wound, colonialism instilled not only heteropatriarchy (and subsequent heteropatriarchal betrayal) but also a separative and individualistic conceptualization of the relationship between self and other. Categorical and hierarchical logic also established rules and borders for community belonging and inclusion. That is, dichotomous and hierarchical logic maintains the nation as what Benedict Anderson calls, “a deep, horizontal comradeship.”<sup>9</sup> *The Hungry Woman* problematizes this notion of “horizontal” camaraderie among citizens, demonstrating that in order to maintain a horizontal comradeship, citizens must agree to the principles of the nation. Moraga demonstrates through her work, in order to “belong” to a Chicana/o nation, specifically, citizens must acknowledge and agree to their place in a sex- and sexuality-based hierarchy. That is, individuals must adhere to heteropatriarchal principles that are an effect of categorical, dichotomous, and hierarchical logic. Recognizing the introduction of categorical, dichotomous, and hierarchical logic helps us realize that there was a time before colonialism, before betrayal before the Fall. However, as *The Hungry Woman* illuminates, while a decolonial future may be possible, we must recognize the myriad ways in which divisive logic manifests, becomes the source of constant interruption, and is the basis upon which subjects of trauma come into being.

In what follows, I first focus on the sociopolitical and economic context for the foundational narratives that serve as templates for *The Hungry Woman*’s basic plot. I explore the overlap between Euripides’ *Medea*, La Llorona, Moraga’s *Hungry Woman*, and the Coyolxauhqui myth and situate these ancient stories as instances of heteropatriarchal betrayal. In the next section, I compare Moraga’s description of the play’s setting as a “historical place” with the Nahua concept of “time-place.” I posit that the play’s setting facilitates what Emma Pérez terms “a decolonial imaginary” and thus invites us to contend with the roots of the heteropatriarchal betrayal as we negotiate terms for decolonization and subsequent healing for subjects of trauma. In the third section, I focus on how Moraga’s use of mirrors enables us to consider alternative ideas about the relationship between self and other. I draw comparisons between Western conceptualizations of subjectivity, which are undergirded by dichotomous and hierarchical logic, and Nahua understandings of the self or the subject as part of a collective. I emphasize that a reimagining of subjectivity as intersubjectivity can help us address the root of colonial, imperial, and accompanying heteropatriarchal destruction and thus move us closer to decolonial practice. In the final section, I discuss how alterative understandings of intersubjectivity capacitate subjects of trauma, people who are “hungry” for home, to reimagine belonging through what Audre Lorde identifies as “the erotic.”

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 742.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 7.

### The Context: Remembering Heteropatriarchal Betrayal of the “Foreign and Female”

One of the most obvious tasks Moraga undertakes through *The Hungry Woman* is resurrecting stories of “heteropatriarchal betrayal,” a type of betrayal enacted by an agent who seemingly benefits from the maintenance of heterosexual and patriarchal relations. Through this resurrection of similar ancient stories, Moraga emphasizes elements that have helped shape the social, political, and economic conditions under which Chicanas and Xicanas, who are subjects of trauma, live today. In a piece titled “Looking for the Insatiable Woman,” which was written around 1995 and published in the second expanded edition of *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios*, Moraga reflects on the play she is writing, which we now know as *The Hungry Woman*. She notes that the original title of the play “Mexican Medea,” which later becomes the published play’s subtitle, refers to both the ancient Greek Euripidean drama and the Mexican story of La Llorona.<sup>10</sup> Moraga comments on her commitment to writing La Llorona’s story in particular, especially as she is developing *The Hungry Woman*. She observes,

And if this play doesn’t satisfy my hunger for La Llorona’s story, maybe another later work will. Maybe it’s a story I’ll work on for the rest of my life in many shapes and voices and styles. Maybe, as James Baldwin once said, we each have just one story to tell and every writing effort is just an attempt to say it better *this time*. Maybe somewhere in me I believe that if I could get to the heart of the Llorona, I could get to the heart of the mexicanaprisson and in the naming I could free us . . . if only just a little.<sup>11</sup>

*The Hungry Woman* is one of Moraga’s attempts “to get to the heart of the Llorona,” to name the traumas that imprison Mexicanas and Chicanas, and to “free us . . . if only just a little.”

Moraga’s commitment to re-scripting *mythohistorical* figures, in particular, to get to the “heart” of that which maintains Chicana/os’ oppression is poignant given the value of myth as a genre. Critic Irma Mayorga notes,

Myths are simultaneously sacred truths and symbolic metaphors, illuminating and mysterious, fiction and history, safe-guarded and public, newly fashioned or of ancient origin, fantastical and quotidian; and, they often escape the opposition of these binaries. But, most importantly, myths are stories.<sup>12</sup>

Myths are the stories we tell and retell ourselves and each other to give meaning to our lives. Re-envisioning myths that explain not only the why’s but also the how’s of our present-day conditions gives audiences permission to re-imagine new how’s—in other words, new tactics—for themselves and their futures. Moraga’s re-envisioning weaves and layers various stories that illuminate “heteropatriarchal betrayal,” a type of betrayal that is rooted in the maintenance of heteropatriarchal laws and the denigration of the feminine. Euripides’ *Medea*, the story of La Llorona, and the Coyolxauhqui myth, a pre-Columbian Aztec creation story, are three such stories. These tales cast women as locas, madwomen, yet Moraga recuperates these subjects of trauma by contextualizing their positions as women under heteropatriarchal rule.

The Euripidean story focuses on Medea, who murders her own brother and slays a dragon in order to help her husband, Jason, acquire the Golden Fleece, which is a symbol of royal

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<sup>10</sup> Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: South End Press, 2000), 146.

<sup>11</sup> Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, 150.

<sup>12</sup> Irma Mayorga, Afterword, “Homecoming: The Politics of Myth and Location in Cherríe L. Moraga’s *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* and *Heart of the Earth: A Popul Vuh Story*,” in Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 155.



power. Despite the fact that Medea's magic enabled Jason to ascend to power, Jason betrays her and marries the King's daughter. Fearing Medea's revenge for this betrayal, King Creon plans to send Medea into exile. Medea exacts revenge by murdering her own children, fathered by Jason. Similarly, the ancient story of La Llorona, which takes on different details depending on the storyteller, centers a woman's betrayal by her lover and subsequent infanticide. With the exception of Chicana feminist retellings, in most, if not all, of the oral and written versions of the story, La Llorona is condemned to walking the earth in search of her lost children.<sup>13</sup>

Moraga incorporates some of these plot details into *The Hungry Woman* and incites us to think about the implications of the stories' overlapping elements. Moraga's protagonist, Medea, is a quintessential subject of trauma. Analogous to Euripides' Medea, who is—by other mythical accounts—a sorceress, Moraga's protagonist is a curandera and midwife. The playwright's development of this character as a woman who once led the Chicano revolution for the Mechicano Nation of Aztlán, Chicanos' mythical and decolonial homeland, similarly echoes the Greek Medea's influence upon a history of power; just as the Greek Medea facilitates Jason's ascent to the throne, the Mexican Medea mitigates Jasón's and other Chicana/os' rise to power.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, like the Greek Medea and La Llorona, Moraga's protagonist also commits infanticide. All three figures are thus exiled or threatened with exile. Moraga's Mexican Medea, however, is notably a lesbian exile in Tamoanchan (Phoenix, Arizona), along with her son, Chacmool; her lover, Luna; and her grandmother, Mama Sal, who is also a lesbian. After murdering her son, Medea is confined to the psychiatric ward of a prison, a detail that helps liken her to La Llorona and the Greek Medea who are believed to have gone mad. The play's action takes place in this setting in which Medea reflects on the events leading up to her crime.

Moraga's interpretation of the plights of these figures—powerful women, who are betrayed by patriarchs and who subsequently commit murder and are thus considered mad—becomes clearer through a juxtaposition of these stories with the Coyolxauhqui myth. In the prelude to the second act of *The Hungry Woman*, Moraga re-imagines her characters, Medea, Luna, and Chac-Mool, as the three key figures in the original Coyolxauhqui myth. Medea plays Coatlicue, the mother/earth goddess. Luna enacts the role of Coatlicue's daughter, Coyolxauhqui, the moon goddess. Medea's son, Chac-Mool, represents Coatlicue's son, Huitzilopochtli, the sun and war god. The original creation story begins with Coatlicue sweeping the floor of the temple. A ball of feathers drops from the heavens and into her apron pocket, impregnating her with Huitzilopochtli. Coatlicue's daughter, Coyolxauhqui, interprets her elderly mother's pregnancy as betrayal, so, along with her four hundred siblings, she plots to murder Coatlicue. Huitzilopochtli, still gestating in the womb, learns of the conspiracy against his mother. When he emerges, he attacks Coyolxauhqui and dismembers her, flinging her head into

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<sup>13</sup> For a book-length analysis of how the story of La Llorona has shaped Mexican cultural identity, see Domino R. Pérez, *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> At this point, I should note Moraga adopts only two names from the Euripidean drama: Medea and Jason. Yet, she Hispanicizes the man's name as Jasón, pronounced, "ha-SOHN." None of the other characters' names resemble those dramatized by Euripides.

the heavens, where she becomes the moon goddess. Her siblings become the Four Hundred Stars. Huitzilopochtli, the war god, becomes Coyolxauhqui's opposite, the sun.<sup>15</sup>

In Moraga's rendition, her characters reenact this basic plot, but the playwright offers the audience a Xicana feminist interpretation of the myth by giving the key figures voices. In her revisioning, Moraga characterizes Huitzilopochtli/Chac-Mool as saying the following at the end of the reenactment: "Is this my sister's moonface I hold bleeding between my hands? I exile you foreign and female into that vast hole of darkness that is your home."<sup>16</sup> In this way, the playwright suggests the Greek Medea's, La Llorona's, and the Mexican Medea's exiles are also attempts to exile the "foreign" and "female." Stage directions then indicate, "He tosses 'the head' into the heavens. They all watch the moon rise into the night sky."<sup>17</sup> Moraga's characterization of this mythical moment points to Huitzilopochtli as the god who initiates the "Fall," that moment when heteropatriarchy rules and equates femaleness with "foreignness" and "darkness." Coyolxauhqui's position as the moon, which is often believed responsible for lunacy,<sup>18</sup> further aligns her with the Greek Medea, La Llorona, and the Mexican Medea, who are also branded as lunatics. The significance of this scene becomes evident when we realize it dramatizes Moraga's explication of the Coyolxauhqui myth in one of her essays, "Looking for the Insatiable Woman," where she indicates more explicitly:

As we feministas have interpreted the myth, Coyolxauhqui hopes to halt, through the murder of her mother, the birth of the War God, Huitzilopochtli. She is convinced that Huitzilopochtli's birth will also mean the birth of slavery, human sacrifice and imperialism (in short, patriarchy).<sup>19</sup>

Xicana feminists like Moraga contextualize power dynamics to explain Coyolxauhqui's murderous goals and her eventual plight. Coyolxauhqui attempts to murder her mother not out of spite for femaleness but instead out of spite for imminent patriarchal rule. Coyolxauhqui aims to stop the "Fall," the impending destruction of egalitarian social relations that Huitzilopochtli's birth will bring. Huitzilopochtli epitomizes patriarchal domination that destroys the feminine. In her own work, Gloria Anzaldúa refers to Coyolxauhqui as "the first sacrificial victim" of Huitzilopochtli's patriarchal reign.<sup>20</sup> In a similar feminist vein, Alicia Gaspar de Alba considers Coyolxauhqui as "the first femicide victim in Mexico, her ritual beheading and dismembering reenacted on the tortured female bodies on the U.S.-Mexico border..."<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the Greek

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<sup>15</sup> This version of the myth is an amalgamation of Moraga's and Anzaldúa's retellings. See Moraga, *Last Generation*, 73, and AnaLouise Keating, ed., *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 320.

<sup>16</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> This is now common knowledge. One of the earliest publications supporting this idea, however, is John Charles Bucknill and Daniel Hack Tuke, *A Manual of Psychological Medicine Containing the Lunacy Laws: The Nosology, Aetiology, Statistics, Description, Diagnosis, Pathology, and Treatment of Insanity, with an Appendix of Cases* (London: J & A Churchill, 1879).

<sup>19</sup> Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, 147.

<sup>20</sup> AnaLouise Keating, ed., *Interviews/Entrevistas: Gloria E. Anzaldúa* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 257.

<sup>21</sup> Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]framing the "Bad Woman": Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui and Other Rebels with a Cause* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 132.

Medea, La Llorona, and the Mexican Medea's *femininity combined with power* invites victimization and the label "madwoman," "lunatic," or "loca" in a heteropatriarchal culture. Given this myth that serves to explain "why things are the way they are," it seems the Nahuas may have recognized the inevitable coming of a heteropatriarchal age just as they had predicted the coming of a new age in 1519, the year when the Spanish conquerors arrived in the Aztec Empire.

Through this staging of the Coyolxauhqui myth, Moraga sets up a parallel between not only two brown sons, Huitzilopochtli and Chac-Mool, but also future brown male subjects who rule Aztlán. In the first act of the play, the audience learns women and queers were leaders in the revolution that resulted in the "balkanization" of the United States of America into smaller, independent nations, including Aztlán. The initial goal of the revolution was to secede from the United States "in order to put a halt to its relentless political and economic expansion, as well as the Euro-American cultural domination of all societal matters including language, religion, family and tribal structures, ethics, art-making, and more."<sup>22</sup> The revolution established egalitarian social relations amongst men and women of any race or sexuality and anyone was permitted to reside in the newly independent territories.<sup>23</sup> In this way, the revolution destabilized colonial sociopolitical structures including the categorial, dichotomous, hierarchical relationships between two-spirit people, women, and men. However, several years after the revolution, a coup reinstates heteropatriarchal social relations, forcing all women to enact traditional feminine roles and all queer people into exile.<sup>24</sup> No one is exempt from heteropatriarchal regulations, including leaders of the first revolt like Medea.

When Medea's husband, Jasón, discovers her affair with Luna, he exiles Medea along with her lover and son to Tamoanchan. Throughout the play, Medea disputes custody of Chac-Mool with Jasón, who is now her ex-husband. Although Jasón exiled Medea along with their son when the boy was only five, Jasón now needs custody of Chac-Mool because the boy's Indigenous blood quantum (through his mother) entitles Jasón, who is "not Indian enough," to Mechicano land.<sup>25</sup> Medea will only be readmitted to Aztlán if she ends her relationship with Luna, which she struggles to do. Yet she also refuses to allow her 13 year-old son to go alone to a homophobic and sexist country. Medea is thus forced to choose between her love for Luna, who, we learn in the second act, represents Coyolxauhqui and the feminine, and her love for Chac-Mool, who, in the second act, represents Huitzilopochtli and patriarchy.

Moraga does not align "patriarchy" with "masculinity," however. Huitzilopochtli indeed represents "patriarchy" instead of "the masculine," for it is not "the masculine" that is problematic. Indigenous and decolonial thought acknowledges the masculine and the feminine on a spectrum, and no part of the spectrum is more worthy than another.<sup>26</sup> Patriarchal tenets, however, maintain that masculinity is indeed superior to femininity. *The Hungry Woman* thoughtfully illustrates this relationship between "masculinity" and "patriarchy." For example, the fact that Chac-Mool is the only character played by a male actor draws attention to this

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 6.

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

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>26</sup> See Sylvia Marcos, *Taken From the Lips: Gender and Eros in Mesoamerican Religions* (Boston: Brill, 2006), especially Chapter 2.

character's significant role in the play.<sup>27</sup> In the first act, Chac-Mool signifies maleness untethered to patriarchal ideals of masculinity. Even his name suggests a rejection of ideological investments in rigid binaries. The boy's name pays homage to a Mayan god and messenger who carries sacrificed hearts to the gods between this world and the next.<sup>28</sup> When Chac-Mool wants to confirm that his namesake is a warrior, Medea uneasily reveals, "He's a fallen warrior, hijo."<sup>29</sup> Chac-Mool asks, "Well, why would you name me like that, for someone who didn't win?"<sup>30</sup> His mother responds, "Winning's not the point."<sup>31</sup> In her own analysis of this part of *The Hungry Woman*, critic Priscilla S. Ybarra makes sense of "the point" of Chac-Mool's name, writing, "[L]ife cannot exist without relinquishing control and allowing for death."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Moraga suggests her opposition to striving for or choosing extremes, especially those extremes based on oppressive binaries. Like the messenger god after whom he was named, Chac-Mool's life role is to work in between spaces, between two seemingly different worlds. The point is not to place more value on either the spirit world or the material world (or the femininity of Tamoanchan or hypermasculinity of Aztlán) but instead to understand how these worlds are necessarily complementary. That is, "the point" is not winning or losing but appreciating balance, for it is the annihilation of the balance between oppositions—as I explain in Chapter 1 of this dissertation—that contributes to and helps maintain oppressive systems that undergird trauma.

One of Medea's goals, as Chac-Mool's mother, is to raise a non-heterosexist son. She argues with Jasón:

My son needs no taste of that weakness you call manhood. He is still a boy, not a man and you will not make him one in your likeness! The man I wish my son to be does not exist, must be invented. He will invent himself if he must, but he will not grow up to learn betrayal from your example.<sup>33</sup>

Medea expects Chac-Mool to achieve a different kind of masculinity from the one performed by the heterosexist men of Aztlán. Medea equates Aztlán's version of masculinity—heteropatriarchal masculinity—with betrayal, for it is this type of masculinity that exploited women and queers for the revolution and exiled her from the land for which she fought during the civil war. Medea takes note, "Betrayal occurs when a boy grows into a man and sees his mother as a woman for the first time. A woman. A thing. A creature to be controlled."<sup>34</sup> Despite her decolonial, lesbian feminist rearing of her son, Medea is concerned that her boy will nevertheless experience this sociocultural phenomenon, especially as Chac-Mool decides he will go with his father to the heteropatriarchal Aztlán. The boy intends to teach the people of this

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<sup>27</sup> Jasón, the Guards, and the Tattoo Artist are all played by women actors who also make up the Cihuatateo. Although he appears in the play, Jasón is not included in the list of characters, suggesting that he is not integral to the Xicana's play. He instead simply serves a symbolic purpose, as he represents Chicano heteropatriarchy.

<sup>28</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Priscilla S. Ybarra, *Writing the Goodlife: Mexican American Literature and the Environment* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 163.

<sup>33</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 69.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 70.

Aztlán that “[t]hey’re the traitors to the real revolution,” he says.<sup>35</sup> Yet the seemingly inevitable happens in the second act of the play. Preparing to leave to Aztlán with his father, the boy recalls what his father once told him:

You are blessed, he told me. Open your nostrils and flare like a bull. I want you to smell this land. I remember the wings of my nostrils rising up to suck up his breath. It was a birthing of sorts. He penetrated and I was born of him. His land was his mother and mine and I was beholden only to it.<sup>36</sup>

In this moment, another form of heteropatriarchal betrayal occurs. Chac-Mool erases his mother from memory and recognizes his connection to only his father and land that they can legally conquer and control. Chac-Mool crosses over, literally and figuratively, into heteropatriarchy. Like Huitzilopochtli, Chac-Mool betrays the feminine and further cements Xicanas as subjects of trauma.

Given that patriarchy is not synonymous with masculinity, Moraga demonstrates how women are also complicit in the maintenance of heteropatriarchy, especially as they also betray one another. For example, Medea’s mother’s blindness to the fact that her son, a decorated war hero, raped Medea is yet another instance of “heteropatriarchal betrayal.”<sup>37</sup> Both Coatlicue and Medea’s mother enact patriarchal motherhood by allowing for the psychic and physical disintegration (traumatization) of their daughters by males who uphold patriarchal values. Coatlicue permits the physical dismemberment of Coyolxauhqui and thus helps to usher in heteropatriarchal social structures. Medea’s mother similarly allows for a patriarchal assault on Medea’s psychic and physical integrity, ensuring the maintenance of patriarchy. For the victim, these traumatizing assaults change her relationship not only to other people but also significantly to her self; her relationship with her very being may become destructive.<sup>38</sup> Medea’s brother’s and Huitzilopochtli’s psychic and physical assaults upon their sisters parallel the obliteration of egalitarian social relationships and their replacement with oppressive ones. Moraga identifies this destruction as *the wound* she writes for her audiences, noting,

In my own art, I am writing that wound. That moment when brother is born and sister is mutilated by his envy. He possesses the mother, holds her captive, because she cannot refuse any of her children, even her enemy son. Here, mother and daughter are pitted against each other and daughter must kill male-defined motherhood in order to save the culture from misogyny, war, and greed. But el hijo comes to the defense of patriarchal motherhood, kills la mujer rebelde, and female power is eclipsed by the rising light of the Sun/Son. The machista myth is enacted every day of our lives, every day that the Sun (Huitzilopochtli) rises up from the horizon and the moon (Coyolxauhqui) is obliterated by his light.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>38</sup> For a review of the literature on the relationship between trauma and self-harm, see Julian D. Ford and Jennifer M. Gómez, “The Relationship of Psychological Trauma and Dissociative and Posttraumatic Stress Disorders to Nonsuicidal Self-Injury and Suicidality: A Review,” *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* 16, no. 3 (2015): 232-71.

<sup>39</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 73-74.

Coyolxauhqui's plight corresponds with Chicanas' feelings of betrayal by mothers who cater to the boy-child. Moraga makes sense of this phenomenon among Chicana mothers in *Loving the War Years*, theorizing that the Chicana mother

wants to believe that through her mothering, she can develop the kind of man she would have liked to have married, or even have been. That through her son she can get a small taste of male privilege, since without race or class privilege that's all there is to be had. The daughter can never offer the mother such hope, straddled by the same forces that confine the mother.<sup>40</sup>

Chicana and Mexican heteropatriarchal motherhood is best exemplified through the mother's favoring of the son. Moraga identifies male-defined motherhood as a strategy used by Chicana mothers, who themselves are subjects of trauma, to develop a sense of power in a world that does not grant them power by virtue of their humanity. Yet this *sense of power* is just that—a semblance of control that falsely empowers the mother. Moraga continues, "As a result, the daughter must constantly earn the mother's love, prove her fidelity to her. The son—he gets her love for free."<sup>41</sup> The mother's false empowerment via her son's heteropatriarchal power leaves daughters powerless unless they too can gain access to power through their own sons.

Medea refuses the type of power granted to female figures like Coatlicue and her mother. Medea is unlike these mothers in her commitment to decolonial politics, and Medea therefore decides to choose Luna and poison Chac-Mool. Given the parallelism between the characters in *The Hungry Woman* and the figures in the Coyolxauhqui legend, it becomes clearer why Medea commits infanticide. To choose Chac-Mool after he has psychically crossed over into heteropatriarchy would be a reenactment of Coatlicue's decision to choose Huitzilopochtli, who, as Chicana feminist thinkers read the myth, brings with him patriarchy and destruction. To break with the destructive heteropatriarchal pattern, Medea thus chooses Luna. To prevent another Chicano from becoming part of and maintaining heteropatriarchy, Medea poisons Chac-Mool. In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga notes that the stories of infantidical mothers by writers like Rudolfo Anaya and Euripides are "lies." She explains,

*Who would kill their kid over some man dumping them? ... Well, if traición was the reason, could infanticide then be retaliation against misogyny, an act of vengeance not against one man, but man in general for a betrayal much graver than sexual infidelity: the enslavement and deformation of our sex?*<sup>42</sup>

Moraga rewrites the details preceding the infanticide in the Medea story. This revisioning makes explicit that Medea is betrayed not simply by Jasón, Chac-Mool, her brother, and her own mother but more significantly by a heteropatriarchal system within which these people function. Committed to decolonial praxis as a playwright, Moraga also tactfully rewrites the Coyolxauhqui legend so that the mother chooses woman over the patriarchal son. This bold revisioning makes more sense in the context of Moraga's words in *The Last Generation*:

And although I revere his [Huitzilopochtli's] mother, Coatlicue, Diosa de La Muerte y La Vida, I do not pray to her. I pray to the daughter, La Hija Rebelde. She who has been banished, the mutilated sister who transforms herself into the moon. She is la fuerza femenina, our attempt to pick up the fragments of our dismembered womanhood and reconstitute ourselves.

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<sup>40</sup> Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, 94.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 145; italics in original.

Moraga chooses to revere the psychically and physically fragmented daughter—a subject of trauma—who reassembles her self before praying to those figures who uphold patriarchy. Through Medea’s story, Moraga offers Chicana daughters—especially those deemed disposable—an alternate path aimed toward re-configuration and transformation. Medea makes this alternate choice explicit when she calls out to her mother Coatlicue after poisoning Chac-Mool: “What crime do I commit now, Mamá? / To choose the daughter over the son? / You betrayed us, Madre Coatlicue. / You anciana [old woman], you who birthed the God of War.”<sup>43</sup> The daughter’s questions point to Coatlicue’s betrayal of all of her daughters signified by Coyolxauhqui. Unlike her heteropatriarchal mother Coatlicue, Medea embraces her surrogate daughter, Luna, and kills the son, Chac-Mool, who will only contribute to the maintenance of homophobic and patriarchal paradigms that define a person’s worth.

Moraga’s inclusion of elements of ancient Greek and Mexican stories in what turns out to be a Chicana/o-specific tragedy highlights convergences between women subjects’ plights under heteropatriarchal rule. The exposition of figures like the Greek Medea, La Llorona, the Mexican Medea, Coyolxauhqui, and more subliminally, as I argue later, the Hungry Woman, becomes a decolonial tactic Moraga uses to incite us to consider the seeming timelessness of heteropatriarchal betrayal and to caution us about maintaining this pattern in the future as we strive for decoloniality and to assuage our traumatization.

### **The Setting: Locating Time-Place and the Decolonial Imaginary**

The playwright offers us these decolonial messages, these warnings about the future, through a “time-place” setting I identify as what historian Emma Pérez terms the “decolonial imaginary.” I argue decolonial and queer thought and praxis inform and shape the setting of *The Hungry Woman*. Take for instance the time of the play, which is “[t]he early part of the second decade of the twenty-first century.”<sup>44</sup> It is a “future imagined” by Moraga “based on a history at the turn of the century that never happened.”<sup>45</sup> Simultaneously, we can describe the play—both its message and its time setting—as “queer” in the sense of “an encompassing challenge to systems of domination and oppression, especially those normalizing processes embedded in heteronormativity.”<sup>46</sup> Cathy J. Cohen writes,

For many of us, the label ‘queer’ symbolizes an acknowledgment that through our existence and everyday survival we embody sustained and multisited resistance to systems (based on dominant constructions of race and gender) that seek to normalize our sexuality, exploit our labor, and constrain our visibility. At the intersection of oppression and resistance lies the radical potential of queerness to challenge and bring together all those deemed marginal and all those committed to liberatory politics.<sup>47</sup>

*The Hungry Woman* signifies this resistance to the perpetuation of heteronormativity and the categorical imperative overall. To be sure, Moraga suggests struggles that center queerness and decoloniality are interconnected in that the possibility of a decolonial future is reliant upon the subversion of methods that produce normative notions of gender, sexuality, race, and being in

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<sup>43</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 91.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?,” *GLQ* 3, no. 4 (1997): 440.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

general. Discussing queerness and futurity, José Esteban Muñoz theorizes, “The here and now is simply not enough. Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Judith Halberstam posits, “Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.”<sup>49</sup> As Muñoz reminds us, however, “The future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity.”<sup>50</sup> Racialized and queer youth’s futures are not guaranteed. Moraga’s *Hungry Woman* similarly contemplates possibilities of a utopian future that dispenses with trauma-inducing heteronormative imperatives, whilst complicating and interrogating the possibilities of a decolonial utopia by rethinking, or “queering,” time and place.

Moraga’s work insists upon the idea that various forces—social, political, and economic systems—shape both time and place. In her prose, she references Indigenous conceptualizations of time, observing, “As the Maya understood, a date is not a beginning, but the culmination of history in all its totality, what we are witnessing today took 500 years of conquest to create.”<sup>51</sup> Moraga as playwright incites her contemporary audience to imagine a future based on a past of 500-years worth of “damages done to us.”<sup>52</sup> Moraga’s insistence on the present (and future) as a culmination of history is also apparent throughout *The Hungry Woman*, yet most poignantly in her description of the play’s setting. The fictionalized “historical place”—as Moraga terms it in the “Playwright’s Note and Setting”—is a “balkanized” United States, which is the temporal and spatial aftermath of an ethnic civil war. Situating the setting as a “historical place,” Moraga suggests a significant connection between time (history) and place, which I understand as “time-place.” I emphasize this connection because the invocation of this concept functions as a decolonial tactic that has a basis in Nahua philosophy. James Maffie finds that Nahua time is “*locative* in the sense that it situates things within specific, concrete contexts (rather than in time generally).”<sup>53</sup> Maffie uses the term “time-place” to describe time and place as a “single seamless continuum.” He writes,

Time-place tells us the when-where of people, happenings, processes, and things ... As a consequence of their fusion, time and place become locative in the additional sense of being mutually locative. *All places are timed, and all times are placed. Time literally takes place and place literally takes time.*<sup>54</sup>

While time is locative, place is temporal. Maffie illuminates how day signs (time) take place in a specific cardinal direction (place). Seasons (time) also fuse with particular cardinal directions

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<sup>48</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 96.

<sup>49</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>50</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 95. Thank you to Sonia Y. Valencia for pointing out this passage to me, as it reminds us that the future of racialized and queer kids is not guaranteed.

<sup>51</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 185.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014), 420; emphasis in original.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.



(place). In Nahua thought, Spring, for instance, takes place in the East. Summer takes place in the South. Fall takes place in the West. Winter takes place in the North.<sup>55</sup>

Utilizing the notion of time-place can function as a decolonial tactic as the concept enables us to consider the future impact of “damages done to us.” Time-place constitutes *teotl*, or the cosmos. Maffie explains,

Time-place is an aspect of the becoming and unfolding of *teotl*. Time-place is how *teotl* moves. It is immanent within the unfolding patterns and rhythms in the becoming of the cosmos. It is embodied in the life~death rhythms of all things: humans, insects, trees, mountains, Suns, and Sun-Earth Eras. It is not a neutral frame of reference abstracted from cosmic processes.<sup>56</sup>

This rhythmic and patterned time-place is specific. Maffie also explains, “A *tonalli*-charged time-burden accompanies the unfolding, becoming, and processing of the cosmos.”<sup>57</sup> *Tonalli* is an inner-life force, vital energy, and animating power.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, because time-place is imbued with energy, events have particular energetic qualities. In this sense, I gather that each event has a certain “spirit” to it. The spirit of an event can manifest as embodied (audio, visual, olfactory, gustatory, sensory) memory. Integrated memories—whether elicited by pleasure or trauma, for instance—can have lasting impacts upon a person, especially her sense of self and her sense of the world around her.<sup>59</sup> In other words, all experiences are “an aspect of the becoming and unfolding of *teotl*.” A person’s experiences (situated in time-place) as a child, for instance, impact her experiences (situated in time-place) as an adult.

I unpack Moraga’s framing of the setting as “historical place” in order to highlight Moraga’s description as a nod toward the Indigenous concept of “time-place,” an arrangement imbued with energy and shaped by Chicana/os’ and Mexicana/os’ wounds. I ground the setting in the concept of time-place to underscore Moraga’s fictional futuristic setting as one that has been shaped by a nonfictional past and present. In *The Last Generation*, Moraga reflects on her journey as a writer and takes note:

The journey of this writing is as much a journey into the past as it is into the future, a resurrection of the ancient in order to construct the modern. It is that place where prophecy and past meet and speak to each other. Although I cannot pretend their wisdom, I see my task as that of the ancient Mesoamerican scribes: to speak to these cataclysmic times, to expose the “dream world” of individualism, profit, and consumerism.<sup>60</sup>

*The Hungry Woman* is one of Moraga’s prophecies. The playwright-cum-profeta takes stock of the damages done to us, subjects of trauma, and reveals what history and the future say when they speak to each other. Their words expose “individualism, profit, and consumerism” as

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 423.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 422.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 424.

<sup>59</sup> Psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk has done extensive research in this area. See, for instance, Van der Kolk, “The Body Keeps Score: Approaches to the Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” in *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, eds. Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisæth (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 214-241. I discuss the physiological impacts of trauma in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>60</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 4.

psychic distortions, which, like dreams, are products of the unconscious. The play assesses an interstitial and unconscious space between the past and the future by functioning within what Emma Pérez refers to as the “decolonial imaginary,” writing, “I think that the decolonial imaginary is that time lag between the colonial and postcolonial, that interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated.”<sup>61</sup> For me, the decolonial imaginary is where we enact anti-colonial politics, for we cannot claim “postcoloniality” before we even try to undo colonial imperatives. Pérez writes further, “This is precisely where Chicano/a history finds itself today, in a time lag between the colonial and the postcolonial.” Queering time and place serves as a decolonial tactic that prepares us to rethink this historical moment as the decolonial imaginary. This decolonial tactic also allows us to recognize liberatory possibilities for the future. Anzaldúa explains that Mexican Americans use the identity term “Chicano” “when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.”<sup>62</sup> As Chicana/os, which politics and social dilemmas make up our decolonial imaginary? Which power dynamics are we negotiating during our part in time-space?

Functioning within this decolonial imaginary, *The Hungry Woman* sheds light on sociopolitical issues that Chicana/os need to negotiate as we strive for decoloniality. Another decolonial tactic, Moraga teaches us, is allowing ourselves to see into a tenable future in order to work through the likely outcomes of efforts toward decolonialization. In the remainder of this chapter, I illuminate how Moraga creates an arena for reflection and dialogue about the imperative to think through Western principles of the relationship between *self* and *other* that help maintain the heteropatriarchal tenets that are the basis for Xicana and Chicana trauma and fragmentation. I posit that Moraga’s play invites us to reconsider our understandings of the self, (inter)subjectivity, and belonging as we imagine our tactics for decolonization.

### **The Mirror: Knowing the Self and (Inter)subjectivity**

*The Hungry Woman*’s decolonial imaginary incites us to interrogate Western notions of the self and subjectivity. Feminist philosopher Jane Flax identifies the two dominant views of “the self” in post-Enlightenment Western cultures. The first, she explains, is René Descartes’s notion of the self as “an ahistoric, solid, indwelling entity that grounds the possibility of rational thought.”<sup>63</sup> In this case, the subject—the “I,” the doer of action—must *think* (rationally) in order to *exist* and, conversely, must *exist* if she/he can *think* (rationally). (I return to the implications of “rationality” and “irrationality” in Chapter 3.) The second is David Hume’s conceptualization of the self, which relies on (logical positivistic) empirical experience derived from the senses. Flax highlights alternate ideas of subjectivity as proposed by psychoanalysis, which questions the Cartesian split between mind and body and offers a teleological narrative of subject formation; postmodernism, which focuses on the subject’s discursive formation; feminism, which considers how gender shapes subjectivity; and her own theorization of subjectivity, writing,

[I]t is possible to imagine subjectivities whose desires for multiplicity can impel them toward emancipatory action. These subjectivities would be fluid rather than solid,

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<sup>61</sup> Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>62</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 85.

<sup>63</sup> Jane Flax, “Multiples: On the Contemporary Politics of Subjectivity,” in *Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 96.

contextual rather than universal, and process oriented rather than topographical. Emancipatory theories and practices require mechanics of fluids in which subjectivity is conceived as processes rather than as a fixed temporal entity locatable in a homogenous, abstract time and space.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike typically Western notions of subjectivity, Flax's theory of subjectivity poignantly accommodates the subject positions of U.S. Third World feminists, like Moraga's protagonist, who are indeed "multiple" and "fluid" in the sense of constantly adapting to their socioeconomic and geopolitical environments across time and space. Chela Sandoval identifies women of color as "tactical" subjects who employ a type of "oppositional" consciousness that enables such "process[-]oriented" fluidity.<sup>65</sup> She terms this type of consciousness "differential consciousness."<sup>66</sup> Norma Alarcón similarly theorizes Chicanas as "subjects-in-process," a term she uses to describe subjects who develop "*provisional* identities" that "subsume a network of signifying practices and structural experiences."<sup>67</sup> Sandoval's and Alarcón's thinking departs from Flax's theory of subjectivity by considering specifically women of color. Alarcón takes note: "[T]he freedom of women of color to posit themselves as multiple-voiced subjects is constantly in peril of repression precisely at that point where our constituted contradictions put us at odds with women [who are in pursuit of a 'politics of unity'] different from ourselves."<sup>68</sup> The development of a theory of subjectivity that takes seriously women of color as subjects is significant, for hegemonic feminism—known today as mainstream or white feminism—fails to acknowledge the impacts of multiple and interlocking systems of oppression, including white supremacy, heterosexism, and capitalism, upon the development of women of color subjects.

These theories of subjectivity, which sometimes appear camouflaged throughout the canon of works by feminist thinkers and artists of color, are useful for an analysis of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in *The Hungry Woman*.<sup>69</sup> Audre Lorde, for instance, poignantly offers us an alternative way to think about subjectivity in "Poetry Is Not A Luxury," writing, "The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>65</sup> For a book-length discussion of "oppositional consciousness," see Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). Chapter 2, "US Third World Feminism: Differential Social Movement I," is especially relevant to my discussion. For Sandoval commentary on "tactical subjectivities," specifically, see page 59 in the same text.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Norma Alarcón, "Conjugating Subjects in the Age of Multiculturalism," in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 137; emphasis in original.

<sup>68</sup> Norma Alarcón, "The Theoretical Subjects of *This Bridge Called My Back* and Anglo-American Feminism," in *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1990), 364.

<sup>69</sup> At least two other instances include Akasha Gloria Hull and Gloria Anzaldúa, who entertain notions of a self that is markedly different from the Enlightenment period's theorizations of the self and subjectivity. See Akasha Gloria Hull, *Soul Talk: The New Spirituality of African American Women* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2001) and Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*.

in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free.”<sup>70</sup> Like Lorde who calls for Black women specifically to heal the thinking/feeling or mind/body split imposed by “the white fathers” through poetry and other creative work, Moraga offers a U.S. Third World feminist or decolonial feminist analysis of subjectivity that recognizes interconnection and permeability through her own creative work. More to the point, Moraga affirms women of color and decolonial theories of subjectivity through her protagonist Medea, a subject broken through trauma, and suggests these alternate theories of subjectivity capacitate such traumatized figures to recognize their potential for through interconnectivity, or for the purposes of my analysis, *intersubjectivity*.

One of the decolonial tactics Moraga uses to broach the topic of alternate ideas about subjectivity is repeated reference to mirrors throughout *The Hungry Woman*. The mirror is a symbol central to the Western psychoanalytic conceptualization of subject-formation termed the “mirror-stage” theory. Jacques Lacan identifies the mirror-stage as a genetic moment that sets up the child’s initial understanding of the ego-as-object. The psychoanalyst explains that in this moment, the child sees its reflection in a mirror, recognizes its self as an external image (ego-as-object), and responds psychically with a mental representation of an “I” (subject). Though the child identifies with the image in the mirror, the child can only *anticipate* mastery of its bodily unity because of the child’s underdevelopment between the ages during which the mirror stage takes place: six to eighteen months. The image in the mirror, thus, is established as an “ideal-I,” an unattainable form toward which the child/subject will always strive throughout life.<sup>71</sup>

In response to Lacan’s formulation of the mirror stage, feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray interrogates the philosophic construction of a subjectivity that is implicitly male. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray critiques Jacques Lacan’s theory of the imaginary and the role of the mirror in construction of subjectivity (though she does not identify the mirror as belonging to Lacan). She asks for a definition of women’s relationship to the “flat mirror” that “reflects the greater part of women’s sexual organs only as a hole.”<sup>72</sup> She adds, “[W]hatever works as a super-ego for women apparently has no love of women, and particularly of women’s sex/organs(s).”<sup>73</sup> That is, a woman’s reflection in a flat mirror does not make her sex apparent. Because Western philosophers take maleness as a universal, the subject in the Lacanian mirror is either male or a “castrated” male. Irigaray suggests that we instead use a speculum to see the woman’s “interior.”<sup>74</sup> Moraga seems to heed this recommendation in one particular scene in *The Hungry Woman*. The Border Guard announces, “Before the Fall. Mexican Pussy,” and hands Luna a mirror, instructing, “Ten. Take a look.”<sup>75</sup> Stage directions then indicate, “LUNA brings the mirror up between her legs, studies herself.”<sup>76</sup> Medea spies Luna, asking,

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<sup>70</sup> Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (1984; Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 38.

<sup>71</sup> Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 4.

<sup>72</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian C. Gill (1974 in French; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 89; emphasis in original.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>75</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 60.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

MEDEA: What were you doing?

LUNA: Seeing.

MEDEA: That's my mirror you're holding.

LUNA: I wanted to see through your reflection.<sup>77</sup>

Through these characters, Moraga brings to life Irigaray's *speculum*, a specialized mirror that allows for "the eye" to see woman "notably, with speculative intent."<sup>78</sup> (For the purposes of this analysis, I will take the liberty of renaming Medea's handheld mirror as "*speculum*," for it, as I am arguing, functions in a similar mode as Irigaray's instrument.) Irigaray explains that viewed through a *speculum*, woman "would now become the 'object' to be investigated, to be explicitly granted consideration, and thereby, by this deed of title, included in the theory [of subjectivity]."<sup>79</sup> Using Medea's mirror to see her self as Medea's eyes see her (with speculative intent), Luna grants herself "consideration," speculating upon herself as subject, albeit a fragmented subject who sees only one part of her self through this handheld device.

Still, Moraga develops Irigaray's theoretical *speculum* in a different direction. While Irigaray questions what "man's eye" will "make of the exploration of this mine" that is woman's center,<sup>80</sup> Moraga ignores "man's eye" and focuses instead on *women's* eyes seeing through one another's gazes. Luna and Medea discuss what Luna sees through the mirror/*speculum*:

LUNA: My private parts are a battleground. I see struggle there before I see beauty.

MEDEA: I see beauty.

LUNA: You have to dig for it. You have to be committed.

MEDEA: I'm committed.<sup>81</sup>

Medea then "grabs LUNA by the hips and goes down on her."<sup>82</sup> Describing her genitalia as "a battleground," Luna invokes the familiar language of the "battle of the sexes" and illuminates that part of her that marks her as different and thus Other from men. Moraga emphasizes a woman's genitals, a significant object of "categorical, dichotomous, hierarchal logic," are indeed a source of conflict in colonial and imperial cultures. The mirror's reflection fragments and highlights this part of Luna's body, reminding us that the categorical imperative focuses on only one part of a being for the purposes of categorization. Yet Medea contributes an alternative description of this part of Luna's body, which is a source of trauma: "beauty." A superficial reading of this scene might note simply that Medea finds her lover's body "beautiful," but alongside Irigaray's writings, this scene offers us a deeper understanding of the lovers' discussion and the object of Medea's commitment. Irigaray explains,

[T]he *speculum* is not necessarily a mirror. It may, quite simply, be an instrument to *dilate* the lips, the orifices, the walls, so that they eye can penetrate the *interior* ... And if this center, which fixed and immobilized metaphysics in its closure, had often in the past been traced back to some divinity or other transcendence invisible as such, in the future its ultimate meaning will perhaps be discovered by tracking down what there is to be *seen* of female sexuality.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum*, 144.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 144-45.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>81</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 62.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum*, 144-45; emphasis in original.

The speculum illuminates the interiority, the center, the essence of female sexuality. “Digging for it” through their lovemaking,<sup>84</sup> Medea sees and feels past the struggle of Luna’s genitalia—that is, she sees and feels past the sociopolitical and economic construction of women’s bodies—and “track[s] down what there is to be *seen* of female sexuality.”<sup>85</sup> In her own work, Irigaray challenges, “And when will they cease to equate women’s sexuality with her reproductive organs, to claim that her sexuality has value only insofar as it gathers the heritage of her maternity?”<sup>86</sup> Moraga brings attention to Luna’s reproductive organs specifically to highlight the necessary *commitment*, to use Medea’s word, feminists must make in order to imagine women’s sexuality different from how dominant culture understands it. In *The Last Generation*, Moraga similarly discusses the need for “a portrait of sexuality for men and women independent of motherhood and machismo.”<sup>87</sup> Moraga paints this portrait—one that decouples sexuality and motherhood—in this *Hungry Woman* scene, notably titled, “Before the Fall. Mexican Pussy” by the Border Guard, and simultaneously answers Irigaray’s call for “[a] new despecularization of the maternal and the female.”<sup>88</sup> In a moment of feminist consciousness, Medea and Luna commit to a distinction between a sexuality devoid of the goal of motherhood and a type of sexuality, stripped of pleasure, intended only for motherhood. This awareness occurs “before the Fall”—that is, when Jasón ostracizes Medea from Aztlán—reminding us that Aztlán will be a dystopia as long as its people uphold a colonial and imperial understanding of sexuality.

Besides this speculum, another mirror plays a significant role in Moraga’s play. Because Medea is incarcerated in the psychiatric ward of a prison, one of the main props in these scenes is a “one-way mirror though which all activities in the psychiatric ward can be observed.”<sup>89</sup> The one-way mirror simultaneously allows for Medea to see herself and for her to be seen, or surveilled, by someone behind the glass. I argue the mirror acts as a way for Medea not only to understand her subjectivity (per Lacan’s theory) but also to recognize her subjection—that is, that her subjectivity is constituted by and through someone else’s gaze, someone else’s objectification of her. Given that the prison psychiatric ward that holds Medea captive is an instrument of what Louis Althusser terms the Repressive State Apparatus, Medea’s subjectivity becomes object of the Prison Guard, representative of the State, who is watching over her and thus enforcing power.<sup>90</sup> At this point, Moraga’s one-way mirror facilitates at least two subject-object relations:

Relationship 1: Medea (subject) sees her reflection, or what Lacan refers to as the imago (object), and the imago cannot “see” Medea, thus maintaining the subject-object relation.

Relationship 2: The Prison Guard behind the one-way mirror (subject) sees Medea (object), and Medea cannot see the Guard, thus keeping the subject-object relation in order.

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<sup>84</sup> Moraga, *The Hungry Woman*, 62.

<sup>85</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum*, 145. I am not necessarily suggesting that Medea functions as a speculum herself but instead that this moment in which Luna inspects herself with a speculum-like mirror lends itself to the lovers’ discussion of female sexuality.

<sup>86</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum*, 146.

<sup>87</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 71.

<sup>88</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum*, 146.

<sup>89</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Toward an Investigation),” in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 85-126.

Emma Pérez's work is useful again for thinking through the complexities of these subject-object relations enabled by the Moraga's mirror, for Pérez links her theorization of the decolonial imaginary to Lacan's mirror stage in which subject ("I") becomes object ("that is me in the mirror"). She describes:

For my purpose, the imaginary is the mirrored identity where coloniality overshadows the image in the mirror. Ever-present, it is that which is between the subject and the object being reflected, splintering the object in a shattered mirror, where kaleidoscopic identities are burst open and where the colonial self and the colonized other both become elements of multiple, mobile categoric identities. The oppressed as colonial other becomes the liminal identity, partially seen yet unspoken, vibrant and in motion, overshadowed by the construction of coloniality, where the decolonial imaginary moves and lives.<sup>91</sup>

We might deduce that in the case of Moraga's mirror operation, the Prison-Guard-behind-the-glass functions as a representative of coloniality, whose interpretation of Medea, the prisoner, as well as Medea's gaze upon her reflection—her interpretation of herself— overshadows Medea's subject-object relation with the imago. Coloniality introduces a third subject-object relation that is necessarily unclear: while Medea cannot see the Guard behind the one-way mirror, she indeed "senses she is being watched."<sup>92</sup> In this case, who is subject and who is object?

Michel Foucault theorizes surveillance through an analysis of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, an architectural figure—most commonly reproduced by today's prison industrial complex—that spatially represents the arrangement of sociopolitical power dynamics. Foucault explains, "The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen."<sup>93</sup> The one-way mirror works in a similar way to the Panopticon. Indeed, Medea's sense that someone is watching her confirms an important mechanism of Bentham's Panopticon. Foucault formulates, "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles (enforcer of power *and* object of power); he becomes the

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<sup>91</sup> Pérez, *Decolonial Imaginary*, 6-7. Ranjana Khanna similarly explains, "The initial split in the Lacanian subject could be understood as the metanarrative of modernity and nationalism. [Frantz] Fanon's notion of alterity makes use of the structural analysis of Lacan, understanding it in his terms of Antillean pathology." She writes further, "Effectively, the mirror stage marks the colonial figures as constituted through the mirror-as-camera where its lens renders the biological *historically* and *economically* situated. As such, the modern becomes something quite different in the colonies than in the colonial metropole. The psychoanalytic ambiguities in the mirror stage are, in a sense, then, the flip side of the colonial machinery that renders the colonized subject split, and visible only when reflecting a certain form of light. The modern colonized subject has, then, a different ontological makeup than that of the colonizer rendered through the relationship of looking, and not seeing oneself as a mask, but rather, one's gestalt as a mask, and one's mask as self." See Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 187.

<sup>92</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 10.

<sup>93</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995), 201-02.

principle of his own subjection.”<sup>94</sup> Medea is caught up in this constructed and psychic relation in which she cannot be certain whether she is being surveilled at any one moment. She becomes both object (one being watched) and subject (one sensing someone watching). It is thus possible that the Prison Guard too becomes object—the object of Medea’s sensing. The *threat* of being monitored at any time and by anyone ensures order is maintained in the ward. The fact that this Panopticon (if you will) also functions as a mirror, a reflective surface, lends the prop to a more nuanced understanding of the character’s subjection and subjectivity.

The prop prompts us further to question the extent to which “feeling,” or nonocular sensing, helps the subject understand her self and her sociopolitical position. How and to what extent does feeling pave the way to freedom as Lorde’s “I feel, therefore I can be free” pronouncement indicates? Feeling paves the way to a conscious awareness of being watched. Becoming aware of feeling capacitates one to understand surveillance as a mechanism for maintaining order. Through sensing, we can become aware of unconscious self-monitoring. This kind of awareness forces one to consent to being watched or to resist it—or, to use Foucault’s language, “assume responsibility for the constraints of power.”<sup>95</sup> It forces us to become aware of the manufacture of consent.<sup>96</sup> Giving attention to these bodily sensations also allows for understanding how tools like the one-way mirror (or Panopticon) maintain ideologies that shape sociopolitical and economic relationships and, as Antonio Gramsci writes, “‘organize’ human masses . . . form the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.”<sup>97</sup> In the play, the one-way mirror functions to maintain hierarchies in which the male rules over female and heteronormativity is superior to queerness. Understanding—or allowing for the development of—subjectivity in this hierarchal way makes it possible for one categorial group to believe itself superior or inferior to another. Awareness of this hegemonic tactic can pave the way to conscious political struggle and contestation over sociopolitical and economic rules and laws so that we can articulate new political visions for intersubjective relationships.

Perhaps one of these new visions entails understanding subjectivity in a similar way to the Aztec conceptualization of subject-formation through obsidian mirrors. In the same stage directions that introduce the mirror in *The Hungry Woman*, Moraga describes Medea “looking directly into the one-way mirror”: “Her dark hair is disheveled and her eyes are shadowed from lack of sleep. Still, MEDEA possesses a dark and brooding allure, akin to obsidian: a razor-sharp edge with a deep lustrous sheen.”<sup>98</sup> Through this description, Moraga likens Medea’s reflection itself to obsidian’s sheen and thus suggests a connection between the one-way mirror and obsidian glass that was also used as a reflective device by the Nahuas. This reference to obsidian conjures up the spirit of Tezcatlipoca, or Lord of the Smoking Mirror, a Mexica Creator god who brings about both good and evil and, as a trickster figure, is “the very embodiment of change through conflict.”<sup>99</sup> In various codices, Tezcatlipoca is depicted as carrying or adorned with

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 202-03.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>96</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, edited by David Forgacs, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (1971; New York: New York University Press, 2000), 306-07.

<sup>97</sup> Gramsci, *Gramsci Reader*, 199.

<sup>98</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 10.

<sup>99</sup> Mark Cartwright, “Tezcatlipoca,” in *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, August 14, 2013, [www.ancient.eu/Tezcatlipoca](http://www.ancient.eu/Tezcatlipoca).



more than one obsidian *tezcātl* (mirror).<sup>100</sup> One of the specific mirrors he carries is called a “*tlachialoni*.”<sup>101</sup> Miguel León-Portilla describes it as “a type of scepter with a pierced mirror at one end.”<sup>102</sup> The *tlachialoni*, according to Guilhem Olivier, has a double function: “to make the deity manifest to the faithful and to uncover the acts of mortals for the benefit of the Lord of the Smoking Mirror.”<sup>103</sup> The *tlachialoni*, then, is a receiver and communicator of divine force, and, through it, *Tezcatlipoca* and the Mexica *see* and *are seen*.

Unlike the one-way mirror in *The Hungry Woman*, however, the *tlachialoni* is not a device that maintains hierarchical power dynamics. The dynamics of seeing and being seen through this obsidian mirror are best understood through a description of how *tlatamini* (plural form of “*tlatamini*”), Nahuatl philosophers who functioned as teachers and psychologists,<sup>104</sup> used the *tlachialoni* to divine the future and to help people develop self-knowledge. In *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España*, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and his native informants describe “[a] perforated mirror, a mirror pierced on both sides” and explain that the *tlatamini* “puts [this] mirror before others; he [sic] makes them prudent and cautious; he [sic] causes a face (a personality) to appear in them.”<sup>105</sup> As the student gazes at her/his reflection in the perforated mirror, the *tlatamini* looks at the student through the hole in the mirror. In this way, the *tlatamini* guides the student toward “making face,” which León-Portilla interprets as helping the student develop a personality, or “that which most intimately characterized the intrinsic nature of each individual.”<sup>106</sup> The *tlatamini* guides people toward knowing themselves “so that self-knowledge might cause each individual to be prudent and careful.”<sup>107</sup> “Knowing (*tlatamiliztli*),” explains Maffie, “is performative, creative, and participatory, not discursive, passive or theoretical. It is concrete, not abstract; a knowing how,

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<sup>100</sup> Guilhem Olivier, *Mockeries and Metamorphoses of an Aztec God: Tezcatlipoca, “Lord of the Smoking Mirror,”* translated by Michel Besson (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2003), 53, 262.

<sup>101</sup> An alternative spelling is *tlachieloni* as in Olivier, *Mockeries*.

<sup>102</sup> Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, translated by Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 11.

<sup>103</sup> Olivier, *Mockeries*, 267.

<sup>104</sup> León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 13.

<sup>105</sup> León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 10. While “wise man” is the usual translation of “*tlatamini*,” “wise person” or “one who knows” might be a better translation. It is useful to know gender is not a grammatical category in Nahuatl. León-Portilla explains the Nahuatl word is derived from the verb “*mati*,” which means, “to know.” “*Tla*” indicates that “things” or “something” is the direct object. The Nahuatl suffix “-*ni*,” like the English suffix “-*er*,” is substantive, meaning that it describes one who does the action preceding the suffix. Nahuatl grammar books do not assign a gender to this suffix. In other words, it is quite possible that the gender-neutral terms “wise person” or “one who knows” can suffice as translations of “*tlatamini*.” For a discussion of gender in Nahuatl grammar and how the suffix “-*ni*” is used, see, for instance, James Lockhart, *Nahuatl as Written: Lessons in Older Written Nahuatl, with Copious Examples and Texts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1 and 71.

<sup>106</sup> León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 13 and 114.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

not a knowing that.”<sup>108</sup> León-Portilla notes that an ancient document specifically states the tlamatini teaches students “how they should live,” emphasizing the “ethical content of education” and of helping the student to make face.<sup>109</sup> This concern with the *knowing how* of living points to the centrality of *relationality* or *intersubjectivity* as opposed to *individuality* among the Nahuas. In fact, one of the Nahuas’ main concerns was to “integrat[e] the individual from the very beginning, into the life of the group of which he [sic] would always be a significant part.”<sup>110</sup> That is, unlike Western philosophers who focus on mirrors to explain the development of an individualistic self or subjectivity separate from its environment, these Nahua philosophers were more interested in the development of a self that is intrinsically tied to a collective.

Even the moment of recognition of the self as an external image (“ego-as-object” in Lacanian terms) is a collective event; unlike Lacan’s exemplary child who looks into the mirror on her own, the Nahua student simultaneously sees her reflection and is guided by the tlamatini to respond to this the reflection, the imago, with a mental representation of an intersubjective “we” (collective subject) instead of an “I” (individual subject). The tlamatini helps students to shape their “personalities,” or their “faces and hearts.”<sup>111</sup> León-Portilla writes, “The face reflected the internal physiognomy of man [sic], and the beating of heart symbolized the source of dynamism in human will.”<sup>112</sup> Still, the tlamatini guided these *individuals* toward “continuous work in things beneficial to the state.”<sup>113</sup> That is to say, these teachers expected people to “make” their faces and hearts, or “make self,” by assimilating into the collective.<sup>114</sup> Unlike the one-way mirror in *The Hungry Woman* in which Medea can see herself but not the Prison Guard who may be watching her, the tlachialoni allows for the tlamatini and student to see each other, for the tlamatini does not hide behind the mirror. Instead, the making of a person’s self, her face and heart, is a communal and intersubjective endeavor. In *The Last Generation*, Moraga suggests a similar understanding of subjectivity, asserting, “In the process [of organizing for her community], the Mexicana becomes a Chicana (or at least a Mechicana); that is, she becomes a citizen of this country, not by virtue of a green card, but by virtue of the *collective* voice she assumes in staking her claim to this land and its resources.”<sup>115</sup> Moraga’s protagonist Medea indeed becomes herself through collective action. She explains, “After the War . . . before Chac-Mool, I felt completely naked in the world. No child to clothe me in his thoughtless need, to clothe the invading lack of purpose in my life.”<sup>116</sup> Performing the roles of *revolutionary leader* who fights for her community and *mother* who attends to her child’s needs connects Medea with others outside of her self and gives her a sense of purpose.

How might other subjects of trauma reclaim the tlachialoni as a symbol for the development of a new type of subjectivity, given the possibilities of making and re-making the

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<sup>108</sup> James Maffie, “Aztec Philosophy,” in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed February 11, 2016, [www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/](http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/).

<sup>109</sup> León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 145.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-15.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>115</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 156; my emphasis.

<sup>116</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 54.

self through this obsidian mirror? Anzaldúa specifically refers to the obsidian mirror, writing, “Not only does it [the mirror] reproduce images (the twins that stand for thesis and antithesis); it contains and absorbs them. In ancient times the Mexican Indians made mirrors of volcanic glass known as obsidian. Seers would gaze into a mirror until they fell into a trance.”<sup>117</sup> For this Chicana philosopher, any mirror “absorbs” us in our interaction with it. Yet being taken in by the mirror is not necessarily a negative consequence of looking into it. We can either be “held immobilized by a glance” or “see through an experience,” Anzaldúa explains.<sup>118</sup> The Nahuas’ black, obsidian mirror enables a reflection that can be seen from distinct angles simultaneously. The mirror, in this way, justly reflects the very real (i.e., non-virtual) multiplicity of one’s many identities. Furthermore, Anzaldúa’s reading of the mirror suggests that while it is coloniality (to follow Pérez’s formulation) that splinters these identities, the splintering itself—refracting the light/self-hood at various and incongruent angles—allows for awareness and decolonial possibilities.

One of these possibilities is the opportunity for understanding all life as permeable and interconnected. Moraga emphasizes intersubjectivity as an alternative to individual subjectivity through the words of a seemingly mad Medea. The playwright stresses human connection to all life forms including the environment itself. For instance, in a moment of apparently senseless thought, Medea expresses to her psychiatric nurse, “I only want to be an Indian, a Woman, an Animal in the Divine Ecosystem. The jaguar, the bear, the eagle.”<sup>119</sup> The nurse does not respond, and Medea does not elaborate. The statement is left up to interpretation. While some might regard Medea’s words as merely nonsensical, I argue that through these words, Medea articulates her desire to purge the constructed division between her self and her environment. She recognizes that *what is animal is the self*. If we are to achieve a new, liberatory awareness, Moraga suggests, we must redefine who and what we are. We must recognize ourselves, as she does through her relationship with Chac-Mool, as “primordial” beings, possessing “pure animal need.”<sup>120</sup> We must recognize our *selves* as part of a Divine Ecosystem.

Medea reinforces this aspiration toward recognizing her self as part of a divine and cosmic order throughout the play. A case in point occurs later in the play when Medea reminds Luna of their once passionate love, and especially Luna’s worship of Medea, saying, “In the beginning all was me.”<sup>121</sup> This remark echoes Biblical language that refers to the existence of a Judeo-Christian god and His Word “in the beginning.”<sup>122</sup> Medea’s assertion significantly precedes Luna’s retelling of the titular Aztec creation myth, “The Hungry Woman,” in which a woman, who has hungry and wailing mouths all over her body, becomes the earth itself.<sup>123</sup> We learn her body is split into two: one part becomes the sky and the other the earth.<sup>124</sup> The “dirt-brown of her skin” becomes grass and flowers. Her hair becomes forests. Her black eyes turn into the earth’s pools and springs, and the slopes of her shoulders and breasts its mountains and

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<sup>117</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 64.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 12.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>122</sup> Gen. 1:1 and John 1:1.

<sup>123</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 44.

<sup>124</sup> John Bierhorst, ed., *The Hungry Woman: Myths and Legends of the Aztecs* (New York: Quill, 1984), 23-25.

valleys.<sup>125</sup> Given that the play's title equates Medea with this hungry woman, the title also implies Medea's role as Mother Earth.<sup>126</sup> The retelling of the tale confirms this role. Medea is sky, earth, grass, flowers, forests, pools, springs, mountains, and valleys. She is in everything. The ancient Nahuas believed the human body to be permeable and connected with the rest of the universe, for everything is animated with energy.<sup>127</sup> Alfredo López Austin writes, "In the time of myth, gods, plants, animals, and minerals had been similar to men [sic]. In the time of man, the original nature of these beings was hidden; but it was there, for good or for evil."<sup>128</sup> In other words, the Nahuas acknowledged the presence of energy in hidden, invisible beings. Medea similarly recognizes Divinity in the ecosystem. She is god-like in the sense that she is in everything. Therefore, it is appropriate for her to express that like the Judeo-Christian God, "in the beginning all was [she]."<sup>129</sup>

We might consider this notion that god/the Hungry Woman/Medea is in everything as a decolonial idea, for if Medea is everything, it follows that everything is interconnected, which is an idea that certainly provides an alternative to Western philosophy's treatment of the subject as separate from her/his environment. We can point to the notion that the self and other are separate as the idea that forms the basis of "categorical, dichotomous, and hierarchal logic," logic that has facilitated and maintained heteropatriarchy under colonialism and imperialism. For if the colonizers and imperialists grasped a different conceptualization of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, one that recognizes the interconnection of everything, including teachers and students, the seers and the seen, the earth and women—such as the one I argue Moraga suggests through her references to obsidian mirrors—perhaps they may have been less likely to pursue their destructive goals.

### **The Hunger: Seeking Home and Belonging through "the Erotic"**

Though the ancient Nahua's worldview promoted ontological similarity amongst all parts of the cosmos, it is significant, as Maffie stresses, that the Nahuas' ontology referred to cosmic energy (teotl) that permeates everything not as *being* but as *becoming*. He theorizes,

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<sup>125</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 44-45.

<sup>126</sup> The hungry woman's Nahuatl name is Tlalteotl (alternative spelling: Tlateotl). Note that Medea takes on the roles various earth goddesses including Tlalteotl and Coatlicue. For more on Tlalteotl see Grisel Gómez-Cano, *The Return to Coatlicue: Goddesses and Warladies in Mexican Folklore* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010), 170; and Olivier, *Mockeries*, 111-13. Olivier questions suggests the splitting of Tlalteotl by two male gods is rape, an instance of heteropatriarchal betrayal, which further connects the creation story's protagonist to not only the Mexican Medea but also the Greek Medea, La Llorona, and Coyolxauhqui.

<sup>127</sup> Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, vol. 1, trans. Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1988), 346.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Euripides' protagonist, Medea, similarly becomes god-like. Robert E. Meagher argues, "The clearest indication of how Euripides finally regards Medea is given by the fact that he stages her final appearance above the orchestra in the machine, the apparatus reserved for gods. She has, through her excessive, unrelenting savagery, deified herself, as it were, won a place among the gods." Meagher, *The Essential Euripides: Dancing in the Dark* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers Times, 2002), 122.

Becoming and transforming are nothing other than the continuous self-becoming and self-transforming of teotl. The cosmos and all its inhabitants are defined by continuous becoming and transformation. As a consequence, reality contains no immutable or permanent entities, structures, or arrangements. Everything that teotl generates out of itself is by nature dynamic, unstable, and transient.<sup>130</sup>

Maffie's explication of Nahua ontology may help us understand why the earth-woman and Medea are always hungry, always yearning for more. Their cosmic condition, like everything else in the universe, is one of dynamism, instability, and transience. León-Portilla indicates that this instability caused great anxiety for the ancient Nahuas. Philosophers thus "became deeply involved in an attempt to discover a foundation—a true basic principle—for man [sic] and the universe" and asked the questions "Does man [sic] possess any truth?"<sup>131</sup> León-Portilla explains that given its etymology, this question should be construed as "Does he [sic] have firm roots?"<sup>132</sup>

Exiled to Phoenix though she fought for the Mechicano Nation, Medea, like the ancient Nahuas, struggles with rootedness. She expresses to Chac-Mool, "I'm almost fifty. I'm tired of fighting. I wanna go home."<sup>133</sup> Although she is standing in her kitchen, Medea still does not feel at home in Phoenix, a "wasteland of counter-revolutionary degenerates."<sup>134</sup> She is torn between Phoenix, where her lesbian relationship with Luna is permissible, and the Mechicano Nation, the motherland for which she fought. At one point she tells Luna that she will go to the Mechicano Nation, saying, "I'm building a bridge back" in hopes of reconciling the two territories so that she can be both lesbian lover and daughter of the motherland.<sup>135</sup> Importantly, Mama Sal and Chac-Mool illuminate they call Phoenix by another name, "Tamoanchán," which means, "We seek our home." Mama Sal reflects, "And the seeking itself became home," indicating that the people in Tamoanchán are constantly seeking and always hungry.<sup>136</sup> Though this constant seeking may be part of our cosmic condition as Maffie argues the Nahuas believed, colonialism and imperialism certainly exacerbate our sense of a lack of rootedness. Moraga elucidates, "Imperialism makes traitors of us all, makes us weak and tired and hungry."<sup>137</sup> The playwright demonstrates through *The Hungry Woman* how colonialism and imperialism promote differentiation between self and other, notably through heteropatriarchal dichotomies and hierarchies, and thus promote what I have termed heteropatriarchal betrayal. These psychic divisions amongst people, Moraga acknowledges, are a source for the discomfort we feel. Of course, imperialism also physically separates people; it separated Mexicans in the North from Mexicans in the South. This separation from our "Southern relatives," Moraga writes, is "[o]ne of the deepest wounds Chicanos suffer."<sup>138</sup> Just as Medea is hungry for home, Chicana/os, who are subjects of trauma, are hungry for psychic and physical connections that would make us feel like we belong somewhere—anywhere. It is useful to recognize how Moraga uses the word

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<sup>130</sup> James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2014), 165.

<sup>131</sup> León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 8.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 67.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>137</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 53.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 61.

“hunger” throughout her work. She offers a definition of the word in *The Last Generation* whilst commenting on writing. She attests, “All writing is confession ... All is hunger. The longing to be known fully and still loved.”<sup>139</sup> Medea and Chicana/os as a whole are hungry; they long to be recognized fully as people who, by virtue of simply being, are treated respectfully and, *despite difference*, still loved. This hunger, or longing, is certainly one experienced by humans altogether—no matter their race, class, sex, gender, nationality, and/or religion. Still, as people whose ancestors had their homes and worldviews destroyed by colonialism and imperialism, Chicana/os—like other peoples targeted by colonialism and imperialism—experience this hunger differently. This hunger is one of the wounds Moraga draws for her audience “in order to build a stronger pueblo.”<sup>140</sup>

Medea suggests the specificity of this condition at various points throughout the play. For instance, she refers to herself as a “huérfana abandonada,” an abandoned orphan, and elaborates, “I have no *motherland*.”<sup>141</sup> Moraga’s other writings translate this feeling of loneliness into “not knowing who you are.” In a poem, Moraga’s speaker observes, “In indian [sic] tongue, the word for lonely / is not knowing who you are,”<sup>142</sup> suggesting that interconnection makes you who you are. The subject, the playwright stresses, is developed through interconnection and intersubjectivity. Medea further points to the particularity of a Chicana/o condition in a soliloquy during which she thinks about Luna. The preceding scene ends with Luna and her girlfriend, Savannah, talking about Medea as “crazy.”<sup>143</sup> As if she has overheard this conversation, Medea acknowledges Luna may think her “cruel” but offers a different interpretation of this darkness, describing it as “the cry of the dead seeping through the floorboards, all my angry ancestors incensed by something you [Luna] haven’t figured out yet: your seamless face, the natural blush on your peach-down cheeks, a mamá who loved you, if only too much.”<sup>144</sup> Moraga likely describes Luna’s face using the adjective “seamless” in order to juxtapose the adjective with the “fractured” face of Coyolxauhqui, who Luna will later represent. At this point in the play, however, Luna is whole, and she is not yet fragmented like her double, Coyolxauhqui. Medea’s ancestors are angered that Luna does not recognize Medea’s psychic condition as an effect of the psychic fragmentation they too endured, for Luna has not yet experienced this fracturing, and thus can only see Medea as “crazy.” In the epilogue, however, Luna finally realizes Medea is “a woman fractured and defiant” and “Coyolxauhqui’s unnamed star sister.”<sup>145</sup> That is, Luna/Coyolxauhqui learns to acknowledge Medea’s condition as congruent with her own. The specificity of Chicana/os’ socioeconomic, geopolitical, and historical condition that has been met with the rupture of physical and psychic spaces precipitates a unique kind of longing for stability and rootedness.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Chicano/a Movement attempted to satiate this longing through the concept of Aztlán. Chicanas and Chicanos reclaimed Aztlán, the mythical homeland of the Aztec peoples, as a “a collective symbol by which to recover the past that had been

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>141</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 15.

<sup>142</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 50.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>144</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 41.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 93.

wrestled away from the inhabitants of Aztlán through the multiple conquests of the era.”<sup>146</sup> Moraga makes this point clear in her prose, declaring, “*Aztlán* gave language to a nameless anhelo [longing/desire] inside me.”<sup>147</sup> The writer suggests that until she learned about Aztlán, she could not identify the object of her longing. Aztlán enabled her to realize she longed for belonging. The ancient Nahua *tlamatinime*, who were charged with “orienting the people morally and juridically,” were quite aware of the need to satiate such desire for belonging through identification with a specific history.<sup>148</sup> León-Portilla explains that the *tlamatinime* taught people knowledge of their history, “enabling the Nahuas to feel themselves an integral part of their world.” He writes, “They were no longer strangers, but creators of and heirs to a culture symbolized by the word *Toltecáyotl*—‘the summing up of ancient wisdom and art.’”<sup>149</sup> In this way, the *tlamatinime* taught the Nahuas how to make face and heart on a social level, for “the *tlamatinime* realized that men could best know themselves as a group through the mirror of history.”<sup>150</sup> By communicating “experience of the past and intellectual heritage,” these teachers helped the Nahuas recognize themselves as belonging to a collective. The conceptualization of Aztlán was to function in a similar way as it gave Chicana/os a sense of being “creators of” and “heirs to” a Mechicano culture. Still, for the *tlamatinime*, the point of developing face was to “[eliminate] human anonymity, graphically expressed as man’s ‘lack of face.’”<sup>151</sup> That is to say, within the collective, the individual was not erased.<sup>152</sup> Unlike the *tlamatinime*, however, some leaders of the Chicano/a Movement did expect unanimity in the name of unity. Chicana critiques of El Movimiento serve as evidence for this point.<sup>153</sup> Instead of recognizing difference and different axes of oppression for individual Chicana/os, Movement leaders stressed only race and class and ignored gender and sexuality. In this way, leaders—like the counterrevolutionaries in *The Hungry Woman*—subsumed women and queer men under the umbrella term, “Chicano,” which was de facto heterosexual and male.

Moraga poignantly emphasizes, “To me, [Aztlán] was never a masculine notion.”<sup>154</sup> It seems that for Medea and Mama Sal, Aztlán is not a masculine notion either. Through these Mexican/Chicana characters, Moraga emphasizes a Chicana/o condition that includes longing for rootedness. This longing is first evident in the fact that Medea indeed fought to reclaim the lands stolen from the Indigenous Mexicans, which the revolutionaries appropriately rename as the Mechicano Nation of Aztlán. Because of her role in the revolution, Medea desperately wants to return this motherland. Yet she will not do so “on [her] knees,” indicating that she will not

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<sup>146</sup> Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco A. Lomelí, eds., *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), ii.

<sup>147</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 150; emphasis in original.

<sup>148</sup> León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture*, 154.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>152</sup> As I explain later, Audre Lorde expresses a similar sentiment as she distinguishes between “unity” and “unanimity.” See Lorde, “Learning from the 60s,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (1984; Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 136. [134-144]

<sup>153</sup> For these critiques, see, for instance, the first two sections of Alma M. García, ed., *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>154</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 150.

condone the heteropatriarchal practices maintained there.<sup>155</sup> Mama Sal, who despite being exiled by the homophobic leaders of Aztlán, nonetheless wants her ashes to be spread there.<sup>156</sup> For both of them, Aztlán is not synonymous with machismo, and they still consider it home. In *The Last Generation*, however, Moraga identifies Aztlán as “more *metaphysical* than physical territory.”<sup>157</sup> For this poet, writer, and playwright, Aztlán is a concept that is tied more to a spiritual realm than to a perceptible geographical space. In other words, in the scope of Moraga’s work, longing for Aztlán becomes a longing for a sense of psychospiritual belonging. Still, she explains, “I cling to the word ‘nation’ because without the specific naming of the nation, the nation will be lost (as when feminism is reduced to humanism, the woman is subsumed). Let us retain our radical naming but expand it to meet a broader and wiser revolution.”<sup>158</sup> The nation here is, as Benedict Anderson describes it, “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”<sup>159</sup> For Moraga, the Mechicano Nation is limited only for the purposes of acknowledging a specific history of colonialism, imperialism, and oppression. Through *The Hungry Woman*, the playwright warns us about the consequences of envisioning Aztlán as solely a geopolitical space and redirects our attention to Aztlán as the appreciation and cultivation of interconnection and intersubjectivity.

I argue that “a broader and wiser revolution” includes differentiating between “unity” and “unanimity” amongst its participants. In her discussion of movements for Black liberation, Audre Lorde expresses,

A small vocal part of the Black community lost sight of the fact that unity does not mean unanimity ... In order to work together we do not have to become a mix of indistinguishable particles resembling a vat of homogenized chocolate milk. Unity implies the coming together of elements which are, to begin with, varied and diverse in their particular natures.<sup>160</sup>

Similarly, the Mechicana/o Nation must respect the differences in each of our faces and hearts and recognize the Divine in all of us. A “wiser revolution,” *The Hungry Woman* demonstrates, must honor not only cultural difference but also gender and sexual difference. Moraga is attentive to these particular differences, upholding, “But it is historically evident that the female body, like the Chicano people, has been colonized. Any movement to decolonize them must be culturally and sexually specific.”<sup>161</sup> The erotic, especially as Audre Lorde theorizes it, facilitates a culturally- and sexually-specific coming-to-consciousness, for the erotic allows participants to “make connection with our similarities and our differences.”<sup>162</sup> Lorde elaborates on her theory of the erotic, explaining, “When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 68.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>157</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 153.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>159</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (1983; repr., London: Verso, 1991), 6.

<sup>160</sup> Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s,” in *Sister Outsider*, 136.

<sup>161</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 149.

<sup>162</sup> Audre Lorde, “Uses the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” in *Sister Outsider*, 59.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.



The erotic allows for people to share in emotions such as joy, and it “forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.”<sup>164</sup> That is to say that the erotic facilitates a unique form of relationality between people. Although an erotic relationship is not necessarily a sexual relationship, it certainly can include sexuality, for sex can also be a creative exchange. However, the erotic is not to be confused with the pornographic, which is “a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling.”<sup>165</sup> The erotic bridges the spiritual and political, as it allows “those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us” to be shared.<sup>166</sup>

In *The Hungry Woman*, Medea makes use of the erotic, thus tapping into a longed-for spiritual connection, in her relationship with Luna. Medea discloses to her lover that after the revolution, “It was the most natural evolution in the world to move from love of country to love of you.”<sup>167</sup> Through this statement, Medea suggests that both Aztlán and Luna quell her anhelos, that craving for recognition and love. Medea remembers, “When I met Luna I imagined every touch was a gesture toward [the ghost of her own pathetic childhood].”<sup>168</sup> Like Aztlán, Luna ameliorates Medea’s need to belong, to feel a sense of historical rootedness, and to be a part of something bigger than her. Again, throughout her work, Moraga characterizes this need as hunger. Moraga takes note in *The Last Generation*: “But I am always hungry and always shamed by my hunger for the Mexican woman I miss in myself.”<sup>169</sup> In the case of Moraga who is a White and Mexican mixed race woman, this statement underscores the privileging of her White identity and the eclipse of her Mexican identity throughout her life. Yet, in the case of Medea, who is not biracial, this statement can more generally point to the hunger for the role of the woman missing inside of her. Luna fills this role. The missing woman may be a metaphor for the repressed ancient and creative feminine energy in all of us. Audre Lorde refers to this creative force as “the erotic” Given her occupation as a stonemason, Luna appropriately relieves Medea’s hunger for this creative life-force.<sup>170</sup> Mama Sal points out to Luna, “You learn how to tear down walls and put them up again. Hasta tu propia casa, you build with your own hands. Still, you can’t forget your mother, even when you try to.”<sup>171</sup> This stonemason, who has literally and figuratively built her home with her own hands, utilizes the creative life-force in her everyday life. Medea recognizes the curative properties of Luna’s creative energy, taking note, “And the stonemason’s voice entered me like medicine. Medicine for my brokenness.”<sup>172</sup> Nevertheless, Mama Sal maintains Luna still longs for the mother, whom Luna “can’t forget.” Luna makes clear about Medea, “She’s the mother, not me,” thus situating Medea as the archetypal mother in Luna’s life.<sup>173</sup> Through this conversation between Mama-Sal and Luna, we might gather that Luna needs Medea as much as Medea needs her.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>167</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 80.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>169</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 121.

<sup>170</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 50.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 50.

Medea and Luna satisfy this mutual need through their erotic relationship. Poignantly, Moraga defines lesbianism itself as intense hunger. She describes her first Chicana lover, who “was the smoothness of the clay pots she dragged from home to home, making home out of anything,” writing, “[S]he had a wide open mouth, ready to devour everything surrounding her. This was lesbian, I discovered.”<sup>174</sup> Lesbianism, Moraga implies, reflects the intense craving for home. In *The Hungry Woman*, Medea notes that her love affair with Luna “*did* satiate.”<sup>175</sup> She found home in Luna. I argue that the eroticism of their relationship enables Medea to meditate on interconnection. Moraga indeed acknowledges Lorde’s erotic without naming it, asserting,

When we are moved sexually toward someone, there is a profound opportunity to observe the microcosm of all human relations, to understand power dynamics both obvious and subtle, and to meditate on the core creative impulse of all desire. Desire is never politically correct. In sex, gender roles, race relations, and our collective histories of oppression and human connection are enacted.<sup>176</sup>

The erotic enables Medea, a subject of trauma, to sense rootedness, a collective history, and interconnection. This sensation requires no borders. In fact, it facilitates “the dissolution of self, the dissolution of borders.”<sup>177</sup> A permeable and interconnected subject needs no enemies or the need to be “right” against others who are “wrong.” This new subject realizes borders are yet another manifestation of “categorical, dichotomous, hierarchal logic [that is] central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking.”<sup>178</sup> Until she realizes the borders she erects in the name of decolonization are made of the same stuff that maintains the “mexicanaprison,”<sup>179</sup> she cannot be free.

In the next chapter, I focus on the psychic and physical development of interconnection and intersubjectivity through affect in the space of the theater. Adelina Anthony’s *Las Hociconas: Three Locas with Big Mouths and even Bigger Brains*, also highlights (lesbian) desire as a tool for emancipation and more directly illuminates trauma and offers us therapeutic methods to assuage psychic pain.

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<sup>174</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 119.

<sup>175</sup> Moraga, *Hungry Woman*, 31.

<sup>176</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 160.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>178</sup> María Lugones, “Toward a Decolonial Feminism”: 742.

<sup>179</sup> Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, 150.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**Public Acts of Desiring Affect(ion):**  
**Anger, Sadness, and Chisme in Adelina Anthony's *Las Hociconas***

*"Because it's true, underneath the anger is just a lot of pain, and underneath the sadness ... is a really good joke."*<sup>1</sup>

As a teatrista and solo performance artist dedicated to her craft for the past 20 years, Adelina Anthony has certainly garnered the attention of theater professionals as evidenced by her numerous awards and nominations. Anthony has more recently gained a wider audience through Kórima Press's publication of her works including, *Tragic Bitches: An Experiment in Queer Xicana and Xicano Performance Poetry* (2013), *Las Hociconas: Three Locas with Big Mouths and Even Bigger Brains* (2013), and *The Beast of Times* (2014). Anthony is "a self-identified Xicana-lesbian multi-disciplinary artista" whose works address many of the themes pertinent to my discussion of memory, trauma, colonization, and the racist, heteropatriarchal, and hierarchical organization of Indigenous Mexican physical and psychic space.<sup>2</sup> Given her direct engagement with such political themes, Anthony's public performances draw in audiences that are typically composed of university students coming to consciousness (because she tours the university circuit) and queer people of color, specifically queer Xican@s and Chican@s (because she centers their experiences in her work).<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, I focus on Anthony's *Las Hociconas*, a set of three comedic performances that I argue create a decolonial, restorative setting for subjects of trauma through tactics that affect us unconsciously through the use of humor to guide us through a series of affects including anger, grief, and desire. These affects, I emphasize, echo not only the stages of recovery prescribed by trauma scholars but also Gloria Anzaldúa's description of "the path of *conocimiento*," or one's path toward psycho-political-spiritual awareness and healing. Drawing significant connections between the seven "spaces" in the path of *conocimiento* and leading trauma scholars' discussions about necessary stages toward trauma recovery as well as recognizing this therapeutic methodology in *Las Hociconas*, I explore Anthony's role as a

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<sup>1</sup> Adelina Anthony, *Las Hociconas: Three Locas with Big Mouths and Even Bigger Brains* (San Francisco: Kórima Press, 2013), 45; my italics.

<sup>2</sup> Adelina Anthony, biography in *Las Hociconas*, cxxxix.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this chapter, I use "Xican@" to refer to a group of consciously politicized Mexican Americans, who identify strongly with their Indigenous roots. I use "Chican@" to refer to consciously politicized Mexican Americans who acknowledge their Indigenous and Spanish roots. Because the slash in both "Xicana/o" and "Chicana/o" reinforces a gender binary, I instead follow Anthony's use of the "@" in both terms. Jennie Marie Luna writes the "@" functions collapse the "a" and "o" into one. See Luna, "Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance" (PhD diss, San Jose State University, 2011), 307. More recently, Latina/os and Latin@s have begun to replace "a/o" and "@" with an "x" as in "Latinx" or "Chicanx" to signal inclusivity of various genders including those of gender-nonconforming people. For more on the use of "x" to illuminate gender fluidity and intersectionality, see María R. Scharrón-del Río and Alan A. Aja, "The Case for 'Latinx': Why Intersectionality is Not a Choice," *Latino Rebels*, December 5, 2015, <http://www.latinorebels.com/2015/12/05/the-case-for-latinx-why-intersectionality-is-not-a-choice/>.

trauma healer. In this work, the playwright explicitly draws attention to her performances as “therapeutic” and what she terms “political puteando,” a form of community work. I thus argue she, like Cherríe Moraga through *The Hungry Woman*, implicitly invites us to consider the decolonial power of desire, or what Audre Lorde calls “the erotic,” as a way of counteracting heteronormative, patriarchal, racist, and capitalist desires for power. Through its form and content, *Las Hociconas* strategically enables its mostly queer of color audience members and allies to think through the complexity of issues like anger, depression, low self-esteem, and suicide that disproportionately affect subjects of trauma—people whose subject positions as social “Others” have been shaped by the traumatizing circumstances of the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. In this way, *Las Hociconas* can perhaps function as a type of medicine that does not, of course, cure trauma, but instead alleviates the hurt by allowing us to see we are not alone in our pain so that we can begin to make sense of our selves.

*Las Hociconas* premiered as a three-night solo show originally titled, *La Hociconas Series: An Original X-X-Xicana Comedic Triptych* in November 2010 at the McCadden Theater in Los Angeles, California. The first installment of the triptych showcased *La Angry Xicana?!?* followed by *La Sad Girl...* on the second night, and *La Chismosa!!!* on the final night of the performance series. As I will argue, the triptych includes a fourth persona named “Adelina” also known as “Linita,” who embodies the three characters, but is not directly apparent on stage.<sup>4</sup> In initial drafts of the show, Anthony described the *Series* as Stand-Up Performance Art (SUPA), infusing her stand-up comedy with an overt political mission and her performance art with critical humor. Humor can ease us into difficult discussions that otherwise often elicit anger or sadness, affects that are therefore commonly denied and repressed in some measure, both socially and politically.<sup>5</sup> Such denial and repression keep us from wholly articulating painful topics such as the decimation of Indigenous peoples and languages, the devaluation of girls’ and women’s bodies, and the dysfunction we may endure in our families.

In my reading of *Las Hociconas*, I follow Eric Shouse’s argument for “an affect-centered conception of humor,” which “alerts us to full complexity of our embodied experiences of humor.”<sup>6</sup> Shouse explains that during a live humorous performance like a stand-up comedy show, few of us take note of performative details like the performer’s outfit or costume, her subtle facial expressions, or the shifting intensity of stage lights. Affect is the sum of these sensations grasped at an unconscious level.<sup>7</sup> Giving significant attention to these sensations, especially in the decolonial stand-up work of Adelina Anthony, brings us closer to understanding how performance and the arts overall can help us to reinvent ourselves, and to reset the neural pathways negatively impacted by the effects of colonization, imperialism, and trauma.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I will refer to this persona as “Adelina” and the playwright, after whom she is likely modeled, as “Anthony.”

<sup>5</sup> Conversely, humor can also be a way of avoiding these feelings and awareness.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Shouse, “The Role of Affect in the Performance of Stand-Up Comedy: Theorizing the Mind-Body Connection in Humor Studies,” *Journal of the Northwest Communication Association* 36 (2007): 35.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The circuitry of the brain has the ability to change in response to experience. This adaptability is called “neuroplasticity.” The neural pathways that have been disturbed during traumatic events can be rehabilitated through a process called “neurogenesis.” Neurogenesis refers to the production of new brain cells that are involved in learning, memory, and our ability to adapt to

## Affecting Atmosphere, Affecting Bodies

Before launching into a discussion of affect, it is necessary to differentiate between affect and feeling, two distinct bodily responses that are effects of sensation.<sup>9</sup> Teresa Brennan indicates feelings are our rapid interpretation of sensory information via language. Feelings are “sensations that have found the right match in words.”<sup>10</sup> That is, feelings are expressed. Affects have a different energetic dimension. Affects and psychological drives are intimately related, as they are both carriers of energy. Drives make up and mobilize affect.<sup>11</sup> Functioning at an unconscious and material level, an affect is “the physiological shift accompanying a judgment.”<sup>12</sup> To be clear, this judgment is unconscious, and there is no verbalization involved. Repression and fixation, for instance, are forms of judgment, which are “based on images, memories, and fantasies about how to avoid pain and increase pleasure.”<sup>13</sup> Unlike feelings, affects and their accompanying judgments—because of their material, physiological qualities—can transmit outside of the seeming boundaries of our bodies, across space, and into other bodies. The psychoanalytic concept of projection, an operation whereby one expels and externalizes uncomfortable tendencies and desires and locates them in another person or thing,<sup>14</sup> suggests this transmission. One can project a judgment onto someone else, and one can also be projected upon. Brennan explains further:

The person projecting the judgment is freed from its depressing effects on him or herself. However, he or she is dependent on the other carrying that projected affect, just as the master depends on the slave. For the one who is projected upon, the drive becomes an affect, *a passionate judgment directed inward*, a judgment that constitutes a kind of hook

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changing circumstances. As I argued in Chapter 1, the genetic and social effects of trauma can be passed down. Here, I am suggesting that these genetic effects impact neural pathways that can be “re-circuited” through healthy and healing experiences with the arts. See Edward Taub, ed., *Frontiers Research Topics, “Neuroplasticity and Neurorehabilitation,”* *Frontiers in Neuroscience* (2015); Dasuni S. Alwis and Ramesh Rajan, “Environmental Enrichment and the Sensory Brain: The Role of Enrichment in Remediating Brain Injury,” *Frontiers in Systems Neuroscience* 8 (2014): 1-20. <http://www.frontiersin.org>; Lin Lu et al., “Modification of Hippocampal Neurogenesis and Neuroplasticity by Social Environments,” *Experimental Neurology* 183, no. 2 (2003): 600-09.

<sup>9</sup> For more thorough discussions of theories of affect, see Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005); Patricia Ticineto Clough with Jean Halley, eds. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>14</sup> Jean LaPlanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, s.v.

“projection,” trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: WW Norton Company, 1973), 349-56.

on which the other's negative affect can fix.<sup>15</sup>

Brennan's work on the transmission of affect helps me engage the ways in which we internalize anger and aggression communicated through capitalism's pursuits along with its sexist, racist, and heteronormative stratifications. People who are objects of aggression are disposed to developing anxiety and then depression, which are the effects of aggression turned inward.<sup>16</sup> Mestiz@ subjects of trauma have literally internalized—that is, we have directed in toward our physiological and psychic bodies—colonialism's and imperialism's "passionate judgments." We sense the negative affects projected onto us by those in power and turn them in on our selves. These negative affects, not surprisingly, are associated with the death drive,<sup>17</sup> a shadowed impetus that propels us to destroy our selves—and not in the sense of deconstructing our selves—in line with the destruction that is already the aim of the people directing the oppressive affect.

Brennan emphasizes the transmission of affect captures "a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect."<sup>18</sup> In other words, considering the transmission of affect enables us to understand how affect originates outside of our bodies as "the social," but physiologically impacts our internal bodies. Empirical evidence supports the idea that social interactions change our biology. Hormones, explains Brennan, are "a general class of affects or affect-related drives."<sup>19</sup> While these chemical messengers are not the only components for the transmission of affect, they are significant because they affect all of the processes of our bodies, including growth, metabolism, moods, sexual function, and reproduction.<sup>20</sup> Hormones are ubiquitous and quantifiable and, thus, are the most useful component of this transmission to help us measure and understand affect. When one's endocrine (hormonal) and nervous (neuronal/electrical) systems align with those of another person, our positions in relation to a common affective thread—whether it is positive or negative—will align, and both people's affects become "alike." In other words, if my bodily systems align with those of a person experiencing joy, I too will sense happiness. On the other hand, if our systems do not align, we take up opposing affective positions. For instance, if a person or group exudes anger and directs it at another person or group, the second person or group may turn it inward and become depressed. Yet, misalignment need not connote negativity, for even in the case of lovers, bodies take up opposing positions: one must love in order for the other to feel loved. So how does feel another's affect? One answer is pheromones. Our systems can communicate chemical information through this special class of hormones that float through air. We receive these messages through unconscious olfaction, or smell, of pheromones. This information communicates one's affective composition to another. In other words, we "take in" one another's chemical information.<sup>21</sup>

Brennan's theory of the transmission of affect is significant to my discussion of the decolonization of the self, as it calls into question colonialism's and imperialism's principles of subject/object dualism and individualism. To accept the transmission of an other's affect through

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<sup>15</sup> Brennan, *Transmission of Affect*, 111; my emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, 112.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Brennan describes moods and sentiments as "longer-lasting affective constellations." *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

chemical and electrical messengers is to accept the permeability of our bodies. Acknowledging our interconnectedness may cause discomfort among those most influenced by Eurocentric thought, especially because admitting that we are not self-contained leads us to question where the boundaries of the self/subject and non-self/object end and begin. If we are not self-contained, if we do not know where I end and you begin because of the “personal” molecules floating between us, how do we define ourselves as individuals? What does this mean for the West’s foundational tenet of individualism? We are also forced to reconsider cognition, especially the Cartesian splitting of thought and affect. While our thoughts affect our senses, our senses too can subconsciously change what we think. The West privileges one sense in its quest for objectivity: sight. The study of the transmission of affect moderates this ocularcentrism, drawing attention to all of our senses as reliable tools for gathering information. We are neither wholly mind nor wholly body but both because we sense our material world, evaluate using our bodies, interpret through our thoughts that are energetic parts of our bodies, and express via language.

Adelina Anthony’s *Las Hociconas* exemplifies the decolonial, healing potential of the transmission of affect, for it subliminally creates a unique embodied experience for her queer of color audiences. The playwright emphasizes the therapeutic aims of her work, noting that the triptych is “meant to be performed and witnessed in community.”<sup>22</sup> Community heightens the transmission of affect. The more people there are emitting affective currents through their bodies, the more intense the affective environment becomes. Further, while a particular community makes up the audience, the performance itself creates community; audience members must return to the same venue at the same time over the course of three nights. Eventually, people in the theater will develop spontaneous or affective *communitas*, or “the sense of sharing and intimacy that develops among persons who experience liminality as a group.”<sup>23</sup> The theater is a deliberate atmosphere for the spontaneous transmission of affect and the subsequent creation of an “us” at one moment in time. *Communitas* holds “the promise and risk of both individual and social transformation, aided and abetted by the consciousness participants share and the spaces they inhabit.”<sup>24</sup> The theater is a premeditated space for bodies to exchange chemical and electric messages, to share sensation. Exchanges happen between performer and the audience as well as between the audience members themselves. Humor and laughter are particularly important in this setting because humor, as Gilbert J. Rose puts it, “is like some love [that] touches the truth lightly to avert madness.”<sup>25</sup> Alessandra Lemma refers to the development of humor in a child’s life with the mother, indicating,

A sense of fun or amusement—the earliest manifestations of a sense of humour [sic]—is a “we” phenomenon (i.e., a self-other phenomenon) ... created by mother and baby

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<sup>22</sup> Anthony, afterword to *Las Hociconas: Three Locas with Big Mouths and Even Bigger Brains* (San Francisco: Kórima Press, 2013), xcvi.

<sup>23</sup> *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “communitas,” accessed July 8, 2015, <http://dictionary.reference.com>.

<sup>24</sup> D. Robert DeChaine, “Affect and Embodied Understanding in Musical Experience,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2002): 81-82.

<sup>25</sup> Gilbert J. Rose, “King Lear and the Use of Humour in Treatment,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 17 (1963): 927-40, quoted in Alessandra Lemma, “Commentary on ‘Humour,’” in *Good Feelings: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Positive Emotions and Attitudes*, ed. Salman Akhtar (London: Karnac Books, 2009), 301

together as the mother uses fun and humour [sic] to help her baby regulate affective states.<sup>26</sup>

Like the parent who can help regulate an infant's affective states using play and humor, Anthony's comedy presents us with humorous moments that are "imbued with creative potential, facilitating entry into a qualitatively different kind of psychic space, which can result in greater emotional and cognitive flexibility."<sup>27</sup> In other words, Anthony's use of humor encourages audience members to stretch and condition their affective bodies. Further, while different parts of the work can stand alone—and they have<sup>28</sup>—the consecutive triptych arrangement of *Las Hociconas* strengthens affective connections amongst those who attend all three nights; this arrangement enables the performer, audience members, and everyone else in the theater space to repeat and practice these affective exchanges multiple times. Significantly, this community experience is anchored by the performer's expression of shared stories, particularly memories of trauma.

### **The Psychobiology of Subjects of Trauma**

This performative triptych arrangement lends itself to a more nuanced analysis of Adelina as a subject of trauma. While the script does not call for a character named Adelina, this figure emerges as an actor each time an Hociconas [big-mouth] recounts her past interactions with others. These allusions to an "Adelina" suggest the Hociconas are three different parts of a person whom we come to know by this name through the Hociconas' memories. I argue that these Hociconas represent the dissociated parts of Adelina, a subject of trauma. Again, I consider trauma to mean "a state of disruption caused by stressors severe enough to threaten life or make one believe that one is about to die."<sup>29</sup> Subjects of trauma are both the people who directly experienced and were shaped by colonialism as well as their descendants who today experience the psychosocial and economic effects of a traumatizing, heteropatriarchal, white supremacist, imperialist regime and continuous threat to their survival. I use the term "subjects of trauma" to describe people who experience an intergenerational psychic condition that is an effect of the legacy of historical and colonial trauma. The condition (or "disorder" or "syndrome") is passed down intergenerationally, and, like other psychic conditions, it manifests in different ways and in different degrees of intensity because of one person's social, political, economic, and physiological situation. That is, the descendants of a slave do not experience and respond in exact ways because they cannot experience the exact same trauma. However, while these descendants may not be formally enslaved, they still experience the threat of death or serious bodily harm—albeit to a different degree.

Subjects of trauma carry their ancestors' traumatic memories as well as their own unintegrated (or dysfunctionally integrated) memories of traumatic events.<sup>30</sup> To be clear, a

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<sup>26</sup> Alessandra Lemma, "Commentary on 'Humour,'" 299.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>28</sup> Parts of *Las Hociconas* debuted as stand-alone performances between 2007 and 2010. See "Production History," in Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, xvii.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Valent, "Definitions of Trauma," in *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide*, ed. Charles R. Figley (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2013), 678.

<sup>30</sup> Dorthé Berntsen et al. argue that PTSD is a result of not lack of integration into the life story but instead a "dysfunctional integration," meaning "an integration of the trauma into the life narrative, which gives way to over-inclusive classifications of non-traumatic personal memories



trauma may be the result of one extremely stressful event—as in the case of being raped once—or the more complex result of experiencing a series of stressful events repeatedly over a longer period time—as in the case of experiencing the atrocities of war on one’s people, which can also include rape. Scholars of trauma agree memories of traumatic events are not processed the same way as memories of non-traumatic, highly stressful events.<sup>31</sup> Memories of ordinary events are easily assimilated into existing mental schemata. The clarity of an ordinary memory disintegrates over time because once integrated into one’s mental schemes, the memory “will no longer be available as a separate, immutable entity, but will be distorted by both associated experiences and by the person’s emotional state at the time of recall.”<sup>32</sup> Traumatic memories, conversely, are not integrated; they appear to be “fixed in the mind, unaltered by the passage of time or by the intervention of subsequent experience.”<sup>33</sup> The ability to vividly recollect these memories is matched by instinctive efforts to avoid conscious (frightening) recollections of them. Judith Herman refers to this oscillation between the “intrusion,” or involuntary recall, of traumatic memories and the “constriction,” or numbing qualities, of these memories as “the dialectic of trauma.”<sup>34</sup>

Psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk’s psychobiological explanation for the distinctive encoding of traumatic memories can help us understand more about effective forms of treatment for subjects of trauma. Several parts of the brain—the thalamus, amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex—are involved in the stepwise integration and interpretation of incoming sensory information like visual, auditory, olfactory, kinesthetic, and gustatory cues that enter the

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as being similar or thematically related to the trauma.” That is to say, a dysfunctional integration is characterized by integrating traumatic or negative memories to such a degree that the trauma becomes a reference point for interpreting all new experiences and future expectations. Neither Van der Kolk or Judith Herman (whose work I use later in this chapter) address this “dysfunctional integration” specifically, but they do explain that integration is one of the steps one must go through in order recover from trauma. It is likely that as one integrates memories, the integration will pass through a dysfunctional stage like the Coatlicue State I describe later. For Van der Kolk and Herman, the point of integrating trauma is not to identify solely with trauma and to have it shape our life stories negatively—as Berntsen et al. find students with PTSD do. Rather, one must integrate the traumatic memories to help one make sense of the trauma and *to empower oneself in the process*. This empowerment, I will explain, comes from building connections with like-minded people who want liberation from trauma and trauma-inducing occurrences. See Dorthe Berntsen et al., “Splintered Memories of Vivid Landmarks? Qualities and Organization of Traumatic Memories With and Without PTSD,” *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 17 (2003): 690.

<sup>31</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Mardi J. Horowitz, *Stress Response Syndromes* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1986); Lars Weisæth, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Bessel A. van der Kolk, eds., *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Bessel van der Kolk, “Trauma and Memory,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 281.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>34</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 47.

central nervous system through the eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue.<sup>35</sup> This raw sensory information first reaches the thalamus, which passes it on to the amygdala. The amygdala turns this information into “emotional and hormonal signals, thereby initiating and controlling emotional responses.”<sup>36</sup> Van der Kolk explains extreme levels of emotional arousal interfere with the transfer of this information to the hippocampus, the part of the brain that categorizes experience, creates a spatial map, stores simple memories, and creates a summary index of memories.<sup>37</sup> Because the hippocampus does not play its usual role of integrating incoming information during moments of high arousal, memories are left to be stored as affective states or somatic sensations and visual images.<sup>38</sup>

This biological processing of memories parallels the development of a child’s psychological understanding of their environment. Van der Kolk describes the basics of developmental psychology: “Over the course of development of the child, there is a shift from sensorimotor (motoric action), to perceptual representations (iconic), to symbolic and linguistic modes of organization of mental experience.”<sup>39</sup> He describes that during periods of extreme stress, people revert to the earlier modes of representation, which are the sensorimotor or iconic modes of organizing experience. He writes further,

The essence of the trauma experience is that it leaves people in a state of “unspeakable terror.” The experience does not fit into existing conceptual schemata: it overwhelms. This precludes accommodation and assimilation of experience [in the hypothalamus]; leaving the experience to be organized on a sensorimotor or iconic level—as horrific images, visceral sensations, or a fight/flight/freeze reactions. Under ordinary circumstances, memories for these experiences are often difficult to retrieve, but they can be reactivated by affective, auditory, or visual cues.<sup>40</sup>

Because this type of stress prevents the traumatic experience from becoming fully integrated into the last stage of memory processing, traumatic memories are not encoded verbally.<sup>41</sup> When somatosensory elements overpower linguistic representation, the stored, traumatic memories may be expressed as anxiety attacks and panic disorders.<sup>42</sup> Such cognitive disintegration was first termed “dissociation” by the French, 19<sup>th</sup>-century psychiatrist Pierre Janet, who used the term “to describe the splitting off and isolation of memory imprints that he saw in his patients.”<sup>43</sup> Van der Kolk explains, “Dissociation prevents the trauma from becoming integrated within the conglomerated, ever-shifting stores of autobiographical memory, in essence creating a dual

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<sup>35</sup> For a thorough and accessible description of the psychobiology of trauma, see Bessel van der Kolk, “The Body Keeps Score: Approaches to the Psychobiology of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 214-41.

<sup>36</sup> Van der Kolk, “Trauma and Memory,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 294.

<sup>37</sup> Van der Kolk, “The Body Keeps Score,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 231.

<sup>38</sup> Van der Kolk, “Trauma and Memory,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 294.

<sup>39</sup> Van der Kolk, “The Trauma Spectrum: The Interaction of Biological and Social Events in the Genesis of the Trauma Response,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 1, no. 3 (1988): 282.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Van der Kolk reiterates his 1988 theories in the 2007 version of “The Body Keep the Score,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 214-241.

<sup>42</sup> Van der Kolk, “Trauma Spectrum,” 283.

<sup>43</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking, 2014), 180.

memory system.”<sup>44</sup> As a subject of trauma, the allusive figure named Adelina in *Las Hociconas*, I propose, has been “split” in this way into three “imprints” she identifies as La Angry Xicana, La Sad Girl, and La Chismosa.<sup>45</sup>

Treatment for traumatized people, whose bodies react to conditioned stimuli and recurrently experience the return of the trauma in the form of “unspeakable terror,” necessitates *naming* the triggers and *attaching words* to somatic experiences.<sup>46</sup> For Van der Kolk,

“[T]he task of therapy is both to create the capacity to be mindful of current experience, and to create symbolic representations of past traumatic experiences, with the goals of taming the associated terror and of desomatizing the memories.”<sup>47</sup>

Treatment must help the traumatized person to make sense of “the sensations and actions that have become stuck, so that people can regain a sense of familiarity and efficacy in their ‘organism.’”<sup>48</sup> However, it is not sufficient to verbalize traumatic experiences and to develop an autobiographical, symbolic narrative about the trauma in order to decrease psychosomatic symptoms.<sup>49</sup> Instead, it is vital—as Van der Kolk has learned from the work of body therapists—to give significant attention to core physiological states (e.g., a disrupted stress-hormone system, a damaged nervous system) before the mind starts to change.<sup>50</sup> That is to say, attention should be given to regulating a person’s physiological state to a manageable state that is capable of integrating trauma. To heal from trauma a person must rearrange her relationship to both her physical self (i.e., her physiological body) and the outside world.<sup>51</sup>

### **Anthony as a Healer of Trauma**

Practicing these therapeutic tactics in and through *Las Hociconas*, Anthony positions herself as a healer of trauma. She facilitates a treatment called for by trauma scholars. She fosters both the development of what Gloria Anzaldúa refers to as “autohistoria-teoría” as well as the affective/kinesthetic “rearrangement of the relationship to the physical self.”<sup>52</sup> Anthony

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Given Chican@s’ ubiquitous use of these three names as nicknames as epithets, the three concepts/figures function as archetypes that a bilingual, Chican@ audience can easily recognize.

<sup>46</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk, “The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma: Self-Regulation, Stimulus Discrimination, and Characterological Development,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 205.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Mary Sykes Wylie, “The Limits of Talk: Bessel van der Kolk Wants to Transform the Treatment of Trauma,” *Psychotherapy Networker* (online newsletter), July 16, 2015, <http://www.psychonetwarker.org/daily/article/485-the-limits-of-talk/>.

<sup>49</sup> Van der Kolk, “The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma,” 194-195; Van der Kolk, “Trauma and Memory,” 289; Van der Kolk et al., “A General Approach to Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 429.

<sup>50</sup> Wylie, “The Limits of Talk”; Van der Kolk, “Trauma and Memory,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 289.

<sup>51</sup> Wylie, “The Limits of Talk.”

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. AnaLouise Keating explains that Anzaldúa coined the terms “autohistoria” and “autohistoria-teoría” “to describe women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional western autobiographical forms.” Keating indicates, “Deeply infused with the search for personal and cultural meaning, or what Anzaldúa describes in her post-*Borderlands* writings as ‘putting Coyolxauhqui together,’ both autohistoria and autohistoria-teoría are informed by

intuitively expands upon this form of treatment by integrating culturally-appropriate language and symbols for subjects of trauma descended from the violent mestizaje of Spanish, African, and Nahuatl-speaking Indigenous peoples. Curiously, the characterization of the three, separate but related figures in Anthony's triptych reflects the various and simultaneous "stage-spaces" in what Anzaldúa has termed "the path of *conocimiento*," a process toward self-transformation and political and spiritual awareness. In her essay, "now let us shift ... the path of *conocimiento* ... inner work, public acts," Anzaldúa critiques "a disintegrating social order that possesses little heart and functions to oppress people by organizing them in hierarchies of commerce and power."<sup>53</sup> She argues,

This system and its hierarchies impact people's lives in concrete and devastating ways and justify a sliding scale of human worth used to keep humankind divided. It condones the mind theft, spirit murder, exploitation, and genocide de los otros.<sup>54</sup>

A heteropatriarchal, white supremacist, and capitalist system has inflicted not only physical but also ideological violence upon people of color and poor, White people. Isuch as genocide, rape, and leaving people to die of hunger are manifestations of an ideological system that deems one group of people more worthy than another. The *spirit murder* to which Anzaldúa refers, I posit, is similar to what Native American psychologist Eduardo Duran has described as a "soul wound."<sup>55</sup> Aware of our sociopolitical and economic traumas due to colonization and imperialism, Anzaldúa guides us, those who have inherited trauma and who have been directly subjected to such psychic attacks, through a series of seven stage-spaces that can help us transform and heal. These stage-spaces are 1) "el arrebato," 2) "nepantla," 3) "the Coatlicue state," 4) "the call," 5) "putting Coyolxauhqui together," 6) "the blow-up," and 7) "shifting realities."<sup>56</sup>

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reflective self awareness employed in the service of social-justice work." See Keating, ed. *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 319.

<sup>53</sup> Gloria E. Anzaldúa, "now let us shift ... the path of *conocimiento* ... inner work, public acts," in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, eds. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 541.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Psychologist Eduardo Duran underlines the significance of the soul in *psychology*, a word that literally translates into "study of the soul." Duran attributes present-day psychology's digression from the soul—that is, from the etymological root of the word—to the Cartesian split of being into mind and body. Through his research, he learns that elders in the indigenous community describe their present problems as a result of "spiritual injury, soul sickness, soul wounding, and ancestral hurt" that has been passed down through generations. Duran's study of Native American mental health through an Indigenous research methodology takes care to honor these voices in his community as well as non-Western modes of thinking. He thus shifts from "psychologizing to spiritualizing," two functions linked with soul-work, in order to engage "spirit" metaphors that are useful to the indigenous community with whom he works. The elders understand intergenerational trauma as "ancestral wounding" that came about as a result of the systematic extermination of native peoples. See Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native Peoples* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2006), 16.

<sup>56</sup> While Anzaldúa uses the terms "stage" and "space" interchangeably throughout the essay, she explains that the different phases of the path of *conocimiento* may "occur concurrently, chronologically or not," so that a person may be in two "stages" at once. See Anzaldúa, "now let

Norma Alarcón also recognizes Anzaldúa's "life-long project to heal the inner wounds and the sociopolitical and economic wounds of colonization," explaining, "...I think that her project's *telos* was a quest for personal and political decolonization, a project that begins with processes entailed in a self-reconstruction of a damaged self due to trauma suffered."<sup>57</sup> The path of *conocimiento* is a path toward decolonization of the self and subsequently our "other selves"—those beings who make up the world outside of us.<sup>58</sup> To re-create the self, Anzaldúa writes,

Tu camino de *conocimiento* requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you've programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid (*desconocer*), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your *facultades*.<sup>59</sup>

Following Jung, Anzaldúa describes the shadow as "the unwanted aspects of the self."<sup>60</sup> She likewise stresses braving an encounter with what she calls the "Shadow-Beast" in other texts.<sup>61</sup> Scholars of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) similarly advocate,

The key element in the psychotherapy of people with PTSD is the integration of the alien, the unacceptable, the terrifying, and the incomprehensible, the trauma must come to be 'personalized' as an integrated aspect of one's personal history.<sup>62</sup>

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us shift," 545. To honor this complexity, I follow Norma Alarcón's use of "stage-space" in Alarcón, "Anzaldúan Textualities: A Hermeneutic of the Self and the Coyolxauhqui Imperative," in *El Mundo Zurdo 3: Selected Works from the 2012 Meeting of the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa*, ed. Larissa M. Mercado-López, Sonia Saldivar-Hull, and Antonia Castañeda (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 2013), 189-208.

The number seven is significant for many Mesoamerican groups. Roberto Cintli Rodríguez *explains* that various Mesoamerican cosmologies point to their peoples' emergence or migration from a place called the Seven Caves. He notes that the Seven Caves may refer to seven peoples, lineages, or clans. Caves are commonly believed to be "a source of power, often identified with places of creation/emergence." This theme of creation/emergence is significant for Anzaldúa's path, which is one stressing a re-creation of self and one's emergence from *desconocimiento* (ignorance) into *conocimiento* (awareness). See Rodríguez, *Our Sacred Maíz Is Our Mother: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 90-91.

<sup>57</sup> Alarcón, "Anzaldúan Textualities," in Mercado-López et al., *El Mundo Zurdo 3*, 189.

<sup>58</sup> Here, I am invoking the Mayan concept, *In 'Lakech*, which translates as "You are my other self" or "I am another you."

<sup>59</sup> Anzaldúa, "now let us shift," 540-41.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 545. See also Carl Jung, *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell, trans. RFC Hull (New York: Penguin, 1971), 144-48.

<sup>61</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); Anzaldúa, "Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—La Sombra y el Sueño," in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 303-17.

<sup>62</sup> Lars Weisæth, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Bessel A. van der Kolk, "Preface to the Paperback Edition," in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, xvi; Judith Herman also discusses therapeutic integration. See Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 45, for instance; In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, psychiatrist Pierre Janet developed a therapeutic model with attention to the integration of

The consistency between Anzaldúa's and trauma scholars' prescriptions is significant because the similarities validate the treatment efforts of psycho/spiritual healers. Making sense of that which is "incomprehensible" enables us to begin the process of understanding our selves and our relationship to the world. Anzaldúa describes an impetus for self-reconstruction: "Éste [sic] quehacer—internal work coupled with commitment to struggle for social transformation—changes your relationship to your body, and, in turn, to other bodies and to the world. And when that happens, you change the world."<sup>63</sup> This idea is important given that oppressed people, especially women, have internalized self-sacrifice as a way of being in the world. Even those who struggle for communal sociopolitical change often forget the self in the process. Through colonization, imperialism, neocolonization, and capitalism, people of color and the White poor have been taught to labor for others and never for our selves. Through heteropatriarchy, women of all colors have been taught to sacrifice the self for el bienestar de otros (the well-being of others), especially la familia (the family). If we do not follow these standards, we are admonished and made to feel unworthy of belonging. Religions similarly teach us to show kindness to others but fail to inculcate in us how to be kind to ourselves. It is this love for the self and our other selves—this internal work *coupled with* collective work—that enables us to work effectively toward decolonization.

In the next four major sections that follow, I delineate the ways in which the characters in *Las Hociconas* embody and perform the stage-spaces of conocimiento and thus spotlight the urgent need for internal work simultaneous with public work. The three-night performance begins in medias res. Adelina has already experienced the trauma, el arrebato, the first stage-space of conocimiento. She has already become dissociated, split in nepantla, the second stage-space. The damage to her self/psychosocial development has already been done. We meet her through her dissociated fragments, La Angry Xicana, La Sad Girl, and La Chismosa, who together act out the processes of integration and self-reconstruction, prescribed by psychiatrists like Judith Herman and spiritual activists like Anzaldúa. In the first major section that follows, I analyze the first two performances of the triptych, which comically exaggerate anger and sadness—affects experienced as symptoms of what psychiatrists term PTSD or what Anzaldúa calls the Coatlicue State, the third stage-space of conocimiento.<sup>64</sup> Like Anzaldúa, the Hociconas pointedly expose sadness and anger as affects that are symptoms of traumatic structural oppression that can be equated with "the desire for power." Philosopher Michel Foucault and historian Emma Pérez elucidate the workings of systemic oppression by illuminating the complex relationship between desire and power. Foucault maintains a disciplining society exerts

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traumatic memories, for patients with for post-traumatic stress. See Onno van der Hart et al., "Pierre Janet's Treatment of Post-traumatic Stress," *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 2, no. 4 (1989): 1-11.

<sup>63</sup> Anzaldúa, "now let us shift," 574.

<sup>64</sup> Curanderas recognize these symptoms as "susto"—a spiritual disease that results from the loss of one's soul. See Elena Avila with Joy Parker, *Woman Who Glows in the Dark: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 64. Laura E. Pérez describes our colonial, cultural inheritance as "cultural susto," or "the 'frightening' of spirit from one's body-mind in the colonial and neocolonial ordeals, the result of which is the 'in-between' state of nepantla, the postconquest condition of cultural fragmentation and social indeterminacy." See Pérez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 21.

“power *over* desire, a power to police desire, to remake the deviant into the ‘normal.’”<sup>65</sup> Pérez presses Foucault’s discourse, asking, “[W]hat do we do when the desire for power overwhelms and polices the power of desire?”<sup>66</sup> Pérez’s question is pertinent in my analysis of *Las Hociconas*, especially as the themes of the *desire for power* (as a form of traumatizing corruption) and the *power of desire* (as a therapeutic affect) figure prominently throughout the triptych.

While the first section focuses on the desire for power, the second section conceptualizes the power of desire through what La Sad Girl terms “political puteando,” a form of “community work”—recalling the fourth stage-space—that helps La Sad Girl out of her depression. The third section discusses the role of La Chismosa as one who, in the fifth and sixth space-stages, assembles the different parts of Adelina and publicly tests her story. Finally, in the fourth major section that follows, I analyze La Chismosa’s “Tlazolteotl moment” as evidence of her experiencing the seventh space-stage in the path of *conocimiento*. Before she can see any of the light on the path, however, our “sacred-clown” must descend into the darks depths of Coatlicue.<sup>67</sup>

### Anger and Sadness in the Coatlicue State

Together, the “three locas with big mouths and even bigger brains” critique the *desire for power* that resulted in EuroAmerican colonialism and settler-colonialism and that presently maintains imperialism. Each of las Hociconas recalls these quests for power, taken at the expense of feminized bodies, Indigenous peoples, queer folk, Mexican@s, Chican@s, and their forebears. La Angry Xicana and La Sad Girl<sup>68</sup> in particular, however, embody the traumatic effects of this desire for power that drive spirits into the Coatlicue state. For Anzaldúa, the monstrous goddess, known as Coatlicue in the Mexica mythographic pantheon, is “the consuming whirlwind, the symbol of the underground aspects of the psyche,” which we need “to slow us up so that the psyche can assimilate previous experiences and process the changes.”<sup>69</sup> Anzaldúa explains, “When overwhelmed by the chaos caused by living between stories, you break down, descend into the third space, the Coatlicue depths of despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness.”<sup>70</sup> In this state, a person sees the different parts of her self, laid out before her. She beholds the darkest (angered, mournful, and melancholic) parts of her self as she comes to terms with who she is.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 123; emphasis in original.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> La Chismosa refers to herself as a “sacred clown.” See Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 63. Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz explains that as a “sacred clown,” the protagonist “is in charge of destabilizing, inverting and challenging heteronormativity as well as queerness.” See Urquijo-Ruiz, “Part(iend)o el alma: Rebirthing the Self,” in Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, cv.

<sup>68</sup> Throughout this chapter, I use the Spanish article “la” which translates as “the” each time I discuss the characters. *La*, I would argue, is part of each name, emphasizing that the character on stage is a feminine archetype.

<sup>69</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 68.

<sup>70</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 545.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 550-54. Alarcón reads the Coatlicue state as one in which the self confronts internalized otherness. See Alarcón, “Anzaldúan Textualities,” 191.

Anzaldúa's characterization of this state relates to Herman's description of a stage of trauma and recovery she refers to as "remembrance and mourning." Herman explains that during this stage,

[P]atient and therapist slowly reassemble an organized, detailed, verbal account [of the traumatic event(s)], oriented in time and historical context. The narrative includes not only the event itself but also the survivor's response to it and the responses of the important people in her life.<sup>72</sup>

In both the Coatlicue state and the stage of remembrance and mourning, the subject of trauma is encouraged to uncover and make sense of her psyche's darkest parts. In neither case does darkness originate within the person; instead, it and the negativity associated with another's desire for power—whether a desire for sexual domination (as in the instance of molestation or rape) or cultural domination (as in the instance of the eradication of Mesoamerican codes of conduct)—has been imposed. Because trauma brings loss of the self as we knew it, "[t]he descent into mourning is at once the most necessary and the most dreaded task of this stage of recovery," explains Herman.<sup>73</sup> The subject of trauma responds affectively to her attempts to understand her loss, but she resists mourning, and this resistance frequently becomes disguised as anger.<sup>74</sup> After a trauma, a survivor "is left with a burden of unexpressed rage against all those who remained indifferent to her fate and who failed to help her."<sup>75</sup> She thus steeps in this anger and cannot mourn. Herman explains this anger is not effective until it becomes "a more powerful and satisfying form of anger: righteous indignation." In this way, the survivor is freed from a revenge fantasy, and this freedom "offers her a way to regain a sense of power by joining with others to hold the perpetrator accountable for his crimes."<sup>76</sup>

*"O que la ...": La Angry Xicana Interrogates Desire for Power*

In her own anger, La Angry Xicana pieces together all of the indignities people of color, especially queer Xican@s have had to experience. Wearing "an elegant black dress, black heels, and a black cowboy hat," she calls out all those who have remained indifferent to her Xican@ trauma.<sup>77</sup> She is especially concerned with questioning those in power. She interrogates how hegemony infiltrates the everyday lives of Xican@s.<sup>78</sup> For instance, she addresses how one aspect of systemic oppression, patriarchy, holds power over the way Xicanas see our bodies and our selves. She recalls a common formative experience that some of us may think is unique to our own families:

Now honestly, I don't even know why men mess with womyn, because all men—ALL MEN—really love and obsess over anyway is dick. Desde niños, allí estan... all in love with their nakedness and pipis [...] And there go our Latina mothers encouraging that shit, "¿A ver, mi'jo? ¿Qué traes allí? ¡Ay, qué chulo! ¡Ay, qué chulo! [...] Not us, not us.

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<sup>72</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 177.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>77</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Even the punctuation in title of the performance, *La Angry Xicana?!*, emphasizes this questioning (via the question mark) and unrelenting re-visioning (via the exclamation point).



Imagine if we had that kind of universal endorsement? No wonder men believe dick is the center of the universe.<sup>79</sup>

La Angry Xicana encourages us to think through seemingly small and everyday acts that perpetuate phallogentrism. Our families instill in us patriarchal values that, as Anthony suggests, are pervasive in Latino culture. The performance destabilizes our understanding of the phallus as solely a psychoanalytic *symbol* of supreme masculine power in what La Angry Xicana describes as a “dicky-dick world,”<sup>80</sup> for it challenges us to acknowledge Latino culture’s obsession with the *physical* organ itself, too. While it is common for feminists to blame males’ desire for power for sustaining patriarchal tactics that disempower feminized bodies, it is less likely that we acknowledge how feminized bodies too maintain these tactics.

La Angry Xicana reminds us that women, like doting mothers, are complicit in imbuing male bodies with power. Gloria Anzaldúa explains, “Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them.”<sup>81</sup> Cherríe Moraga theorizes that Mexican mothers favor their sons over their daughters because “through her son she can get a small taste of male privilege, since without race or class privilege that’s all to be had.”<sup>82</sup> Daughters, however, cannot provide this access to power. We, who, in our woman-ness, are like her, remind her of her self. She projects the shame of her woman-ness onto us. La Angry Xicana contrasts Xicana experiences from Xicano ones, as she discusses Xicanas’ shame of our bodies:

You ever seen a Xicana teenager changing in the gym dressing room? We are the original Houdinis! Because in a record 5 seconds we can take off our bras, change our sanitary napkins—because according to our Mexican mothers only putas use tampons—and slip into our gym chorres [shorts] without ever removing a single layer of outer clothing.<sup>83</sup>

Illuminating this common experience for Xicana teenagers in locker rooms, La Angry Xicana reveals the deep entrenchment of bodily shame in our psyches, which is unlike that of our male counterparts. Even when our mothers are not watching, we heed their patriarchal teachings. Mexican, Chicano, and Xicano patriarchy disciplines us through its “threat” to label us *putas* (whores) and lesbians if we do not abide by its rules. Its obsession with the hymen—a symbol of a woman’s purity—is unlike its obsession with penises. Patriarchy focuses on the state of this symbol, neatly divided into two categories—virgins and putas—to decide a woman’s worth. If the hymen is intact, she is considered a virgin, and if it is torn by tampons, fingers, penises, or any other objects, then she is deemed a puta. As La Angry Xicana points out, “[W]e’re not encouraged to think about or even look ‘down there’ for our own benefit and pleasure.”<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, people assigned male at birth (because of any semblance of a penis) are born

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 14; My translation: “Now honestly, I don’t even know why men mess with womyn, because all men—ALL MEN—really love and obsess over anyway is dick. Since childhood, there they are...all in love with their nakedness and pee-pees [...] And there go our Latina mothers encouraging that shit, ‘Let’s see, son? What do you have there? Oh, how cute! Oh, how cute!’”

<sup>80</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 13.

<sup>81</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 38.

<sup>82</sup> Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1983; Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 94.

<sup>83</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 15; my translation.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

powerful. Patriarchy honors and upholds the phallus as an unwavering status of power simply because it exists. Its value—as long as it simply exists—does not change.

La Angry Xicana reflects on this patriarchal power that is relentless in its desire for more power and takes note of the different ways it historically has tried to keep women of color apart. For this reason, she is brought to the brink of tears when she recounts the silent pause she shared with another woman of color during an intimate moment. Immediately after La Angry Xicana shares this memory, however, we hear loud music. Akon's "Smack That" (featuring Eminem) and Pit Bull's "Ay Chico (Lengua Afuera)" come through the theater speakers. The audience bursts into laughter. When this unmistakably misogynistic music fades out, La Angry Xicana challenges the audience, "I hope you deconstruct that in your feminist circles tomorrow."<sup>85</sup> More laughter ensues. This critical moment in the performance is telling of the audience's composition as well as the everyday contradictions we live. On the one hand, our laughter demonstrates that we recognize Akon's lyrical assaults on a stripper whom he invites to his place to "possibly bend [her] over, look back, and watch [him]" and Pit Bull's command to another woman to "bend over, girl, show me what you working with." On the other hand, we realize we are sharing this hilarity—this affective moment, if you will—with fellow feminists, who are outwardly opposed to misogynist rappers like Akon, Eminem, and Pit Bull, who help maintain the "dicky-dick world" that so infuriates La Angry Xicana.

So how do we feminists deconstruct this part of the performance? Perhaps we honor the "Ten Crunk Commandments for Re-Invigorating Hip Hop Feminist Studies," written by the Crunk Feminist Collective (CFC), a group of feminist bloggers of color. The sixth commandment is "Embrace ambivalence. Reject false binaries."<sup>86</sup> This dictate is particularly important for those attempting to deconstruct Anthony's choice of music to background La Angry Xicana's sexual memories, for while we may not condone the songs' misogynist lyrics, we may very well enjoy the songs' sexual themes. We must remember the fourth Crunk commandment, "Contextualize and Situate,"<sup>87</sup> and acknowledge that Mexicano, Chicano, and Xicano patriarchy keeps us from embracing our sexuality. Getting lost in this kind of hypersexual music can be an escape from our more prominent negative affects, allowing us—like Cleo Levin, author of "Confessions of a Rap-Loving Feminist"—"to take on another persona. Someone who is bold, confident, sexy. Who is most likely offensive, but also unafraid of being offensive."<sup>88</sup> Our attraction to these songs (in addition to many more that are less/not misogynist) and the idea that we can become "someone else" illuminates not how unbold, unconfident, unsexy we may feel outside of the music as "ourselves" (while this may be true), but instead the kind of power we can feel when we tap into our own erotics. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa notes that for the new mestiza, "nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned."<sup>89</sup> This subject has "discovered she can't hold concepts or

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>86</sup> The Crunk Feminist Collective, "Ten Crunk Commandments for Re-Invigorating Hip Hop Feminist Studies," *The Crunk Feminist Collective* (blog), March 9, 2011, <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/>.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Cleo Levin, "Confessions of a Rap-Loving Feminist," *The Daily Beast*, June 1, 2013. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/witw/articles/2013/07/01/confessions-of-a-rap-loving-feminist.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 101.

ideas in rigid boundaries.”<sup>90</sup> Anzaldúa writes further, “Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically.”<sup>91</sup> As we “sustain contradictions” like Anzaldúa expresses, or “embrace ambivalence” like the CFC pronounces, ambiguity becomes “a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts.”<sup>92</sup> According to Anzaldúa, “That third element is a new consciousness.”<sup>93</sup> In our “feminist circles,” we might recognize that *consciously* honoring ambivalence and ambiguity as part of a new consciousness is a decolonial act, especially when we make conscious efforts to relinquish oppressive binaries in the face of Euro-American heteropatriarchal desire for power.

For centuries the Euro-American sense of entitlement to power has impacted all parts of our lives and has kept us in check. Spanish conquistadores, military, and missionaries’ desire for power over the land and souls of the Indigenous peoples of México enabled the Spaniards to destroy many parts of Indigenous life, including—the Hociconas remind us—Indigenous languages. Even though Anthony uses Spanish throughout the performance as a tool perhaps to make White audience members feel the discomfort of being the minority in a space, La Angry Xicana still acknowledges Spanish as “just the first colonizer’s tool.”<sup>94</sup> She adds, “Ya ven, you decimate our indigenous languages, we return the favor... and fuck yours up...yes, más worster.”<sup>95</sup> Instead of avoiding/belittling what may be a sore topic for a lot of Spanish speakers learning English as a second language, La Angry Xicana jokingly offers us a way to interpret what our school teachers taught us was “bad English,” especially in a resurgent epoch of English-only laws. The character invites us to reassess the way we think about our use of the English language and, ultimately, our selves. The audience of color learns that there is nothing wrong with us but instead with the traumatizing language situation into which our ancestors and we have been forced. Anthony’s critique is reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s commentary on US-México border language:

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who lives in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language?<sup>96</sup>

Our language itself—through its mixture and emphases—tells the story of a unique people caught between worlds. According to La Angry Xicana, it also communicates our vengeful anger about the violent circumstances under which our ancestors learned new languages and new ways of being. When we finally emerge from the Coatlicue state, we can recognize that we have created our own language, which reminds us of the power we have to create new selves in the aftermath of trauma.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 101-102

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>94</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 17.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 77.

“*Qué Sad*”: *La Sad Girl* Recounts Why She Considers Suicide

Still, Anzaldúa explains, the Coatlicue state is “the hellish third phase of your journey.” Herman similarly emphasizes this pain when she explains the remembrance and mourning stage of recovery from trauma:

Trauma inevitably brings loss ... The telling of the trauma story thus inevitably plunges the survivor into profound grief. Since so many of the losses are invisible or unrecognized, the customary rituals of mourning provide little consolation.<sup>97</sup>

In the retelling of her autohistoria, Adelina becomes La Sad Girl, the second character in the triptych, who brings further attention to the devastating losses of Indigenous and mestiz@ peoples. Of course, European peoples’ desire for power over the natives and mestiz@s did not subside when México won its independence from Spain in 1821. Their US-born descendants, especially Anglos, expressed their own desire for such power through more Indigenous and Mexican land grabs in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulting in more Indigenous and mestiz@ trauma. One can focus on such loss in the Coatlicue State. Anzaldúa writes:

You listen to the wind howling like la Llorona on a moonless night. Mourning the loss, you sink like a stone into a deep depression, brooding darkly in the lunar landscape of your inner world. In the night mind of the night world, abandoned to a maelstrom of chaos, you dream of your own darkness, a surrealist sueño of disintegration.”<sup>98</sup>

In their own ways, both Anzaldúa and Herman acknowledge, “The descent into mourning is at once the most necessary and the most dreaded task of this stage of recovery.”<sup>99</sup> La Sad Girl’s performance encourages a discussion about depression. Dressed as an S&M dominatrix-goth pseudo-vampire,<sup>100</sup> La Sad Girl reports a therapist has diagnosed her as clinically depressed because she has been, as the character describes, “sleeping and drinking, sleeping and drinking, sleeping and drinking all of the time.” She recounts, “Like according to her, Ms. Yo-Sé-Todo, I was la sad girl to the 10<sup>th</sup> power.”<sup>101</sup>

At one point, La Sad Girl notes that she “finally understand[s] why we Xicanas feel a profound need to re-emphasize the feeling that drags us into the abyss,” and explains, “Yes, I was feeling SADDDED.”<sup>102</sup> While *saddded* may indeed be a differently-enunciated form of the word *saddened*, La Sad Girl’s situation may help us recognize why she develops the new verb altogether. The *-ed* ending certainly emphasizes the *d*-sound in the word, causing the tongue to sluggishly push on the roof of one’s mouth more than once to pronounce the word. This repetition highlights her persistent depression, the dizzying spiraling into the abyss of Coatlicue.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, this ending also transforms an adjective, *sad*, into a verb, and then offers the past tense of this new verb. The creation of the past tense of *sad* cleverly brings attention to the past—and in the case of La Sad Girl, a traumatic past, a history of sadness—while simultaneously underscoring that past. By using the new verb in the passive voice, she also

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<sup>97</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 188.

<sup>98</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 551.

<sup>99</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 188

<sup>100</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 31.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>103</sup> Like the punctuation in the title of *La Angry Xicana?!*, the ellipsis in the title *La Sad Girl...* is also appropriate, for it suggests a feeling of never-ending melancholia.

grammatically signals that a subject—unnamed in the sentence as it happens when we use the passive voice—has acted upon “I” (her), causing her to feel sad.

Toward the end of installment, she reveals some of these unnamed culprits, remarking, “I know ... we Xicanas have some deep historical traumas to work through with white folk, the Roman Catholic Church, and, then there’s that other pinche cabrón, fucking ... Santa Claus.”<sup>104</sup> La Sad Girl explains, “I mean, is it my fault there were no chimneys in the fucking projects? And though I prayed for it every Christmas, no, I never did get my Hot Wheels or Tonka truck.”<sup>105</sup> In addition to being comedic, these lines implicitly point to how one group’s desire for power has seriously affected Xicanas. The fabrication of Santa Claus has very real affective effects for children who do or do not receive gifts during the Christmas holiday. For this reason, La Sad Girl’s list that includes Santa along with White supremacy and the Roman Catholic Church hints at the deliberate social construction of White supremacy and Catholicism, which also have had very real affective effects upon the peoples of the Americas. Additionally, just as racism and religion function to discipline subjects, the Santa Claus narrative disciplines children in “the logic of capitalist consumerism.”<sup>106</sup> Children, like the young Adelina in La Sad Girl’s memory, are “disciplined to participate fully in the commodification of the Christmas holiday and to become ‘good’ consumers in late capitalist culture.”<sup>107</sup>

Given the socioeconomic contextualization of Santa Claus, it is no wonder that we briefly witness La Sad Girl “deep in her trauma.”<sup>108</sup> Santa Claus is a figure that is purported to be available to all “good” children, but La Sad Girl takes notice that he only visits homes with chimneys (read: middle-class homes). The Santa Claus story teaches children a binary between good and bad. What stories are in place to keep poor children whose guardians cannot afford gifts from believing that they are bad? The young Adelina’s prayers for Hot Wheels cars and Tonka trucks, toys that are gendered masculine, are also ignored yet not just because her family is poor but also because the only permissible toys for her are gendered feminine, which apparently do not interest her. The child who does not fit the role of the capitalism’s “good girl,” we learn, becomes La Sad Girl.<sup>109</sup>

Thus, our historical relationship with colonization, settler-colonialism, and imperialism has had great impacts on our psychosocial health. We have learned to survive in this tortuous, intolerant, White supremacist, heteropatriarchal, and capitalist climate directly and indirectly through our caretakers, who, in turn, learned survival mechanisms from their elders. Some of these behaviors, such as addictions, have helped to quell our psychic pain to the detriment of our physical health. At other times, these learned behaviors have ensured our physical survival at the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Richard Hancuff and Noreen O’Connor, “Making a List, Checking it Twice: The Santa Claus Surveillance System,” in *Christmas – Philosophy for Everyone: Better Than a Lump of Coal*, ed. Scott C. Lowe (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 111.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 51.

<sup>109</sup> I recognize that the poor child is but one person psychically and physiologically affected by corporate greed, which is but one of the manifestations of one group’s desire for power. The adults who surround her and are supposed to maintain the Santa myth too experience the distress of not being able to provide gifts during the national holiday because they are making minimum wage or lower.

expense of our psychic health. Through La Sad Girl, Anthony calls attention to some of the unhealthy psychosocial patterns many of us have developed including desensitization to verbal abuse. For instance, she recounts “a lone therapy session” during which her wife reveals she is having an affair. As La Sad Girl recalls her own response, she calmly prefaces: “I reached deep into my core and expressed all the wisdom, love, and tenderness I had learnt up to this point in my life.” This preface is important because the statement that follows will demonstrate to the audience what La Sad Girl understands as love and tenderness. We likely expect a non-violent communication tactic, but instead we hear, “¡Hija de tu chingada ...! You fucking bitch!”<sup>110</sup> With this violent response, we become aware that La Sad Girl has not learned any love and tenderness “up to this point in [her] life.” This character encourages us to acknowledge and reflect on the behaviors we understand as love in Xican@ culture. Through her, Anthony underscores our need to take seriously our *everyday* interactions with one another, for in this way, we can come closer to grappling with why we carelessly continue to use violent language against each other.

La Sad Girl further underscores how we have become so accustomed to these abusive behaviors that we turn them on ourselves. Take for instance, her assertion:

Yes, it can be a real challenge to love a Xicana. We’re like the only womyn who don’t do well with compliments. (Enacts.) “Ay, baby, you look so beautiful.” (Responding as the girlfriend.) “Whatever, stupid.”<sup>111</sup>

Xicanas in the audience typically respond with laughter, acknowledging their experience with this familiar scenario. The idea that *all* Xicanas can be a challenge to love or that Xicanas are the *only* women who do not do well with compliments is obviously a generalization. However, it is a strategic generalization that enables Anthony to point to a significant phenomenon amongst Xicanas. Most Xicanas I know do hesitate to accept compliments for reasons that may not be true for non-Xicanas. At a young age, we learn that we must fit in with peers, who, in most cases, are not like us. For those of us living in the sticks, many of our peers are not brown. We are not White. Even if we can indeed pass for White, our accents or Spanish surnames or the contents in our lunch bags betray us. They are not children of Mexican immigrants who do not speak English. We are not children of people who feel entitled to take up space for many reasons including their citizenship status and their ability to speak English. One of the ways to blend in, then, is to not stand out—or at least, try to stand out less.

Accepting a compliment such as “You’re beautiful” or “You’re smart” or “You did a great job on that essay,” especially in front of peers, brings even more attention to us. Because our hierarchicalizing cultures teach us that there is not room for everyone to be beautiful, smart, efficient, and ultimately, worthy, our peers likely interpret our “Thank you” (i.e., our polite appreciation for the compliment) as an “I accept that I am better than my peers” (i.e., self-aggrandizing). We Xican@s learn that only arrogant people stand out, so we refuse the compliment, using self-deprecation or emphasizing our flaws: “No, I’m not” or “You’re just saying that” or “You should see my math scores.” In this way, we demonstrate our humility—as a way of adhering to characteristics of not only the feminine gender role assigned to us at birth but also the traditional values of Chican@ culture—and increase our chances of fitting in with the dominant group. Additionally, since we are also continually found lacking by Eurocentric

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<sup>110</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 40.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-39.

patriarchal standards, we learn to focus on the negative to improve ourselves in order to survive within the dominant group.

Alternatively, we direct our negative affect toward the person complimenting us. We, like La Sad Girl's girlfriend, might respond to admiration, saying, "Whatever, stupid" in hopes that our admirer will return the insult that matches the "wrongness" we feel about ourselves. We eventually practice these exchanges so many times that we come to believe—it becomes inculcated in us—that we really are not any of the good compliments we receive. And when we try to believe in our inherent goodness, we find ourselves in the company of other Xican@s who will want to put us into our socially-acceptable, proportionate or subordinate place, for they too have learned that standing out is dangerous. La Sad Girl's commentary on giving Xicanas compliments illuminates the Xicana audience's familiarity with these self-critical behaviors and can incite meaningful discussions about self-love.

La Sad Girl uses humor to broach other serious topics like suicide. After La Sad Girl finds out her wife has been having an affair, she considers several ways to kill herself and her partner, including driving recklessly down a highway on the couple's way home from therapy. She additionally considers splurging on all her credit cards then travelling to Europe to "off" herself as a way of saying "fuck you to Corporate America."<sup>112</sup> She then flirts with a "Mexica style" suicide in Tenochtitlán (outside present-day Mexico City), which consists of cutting her chest open and extracting her heart. She sticks to her original plan, however, and opts to overdose on sleeping pills, saying to herself, "Yes, time for mimis, bitch."<sup>113</sup> Judith Herman takes note that a survivor of trauma may direct the rage and hatred that she feels for her abuser against herself, which may result in suicidality.<sup>114</sup> In Adelina's case, she considers turning the rage she feels about her wife's betrayal and Corporate America's greed against herself. Suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and suicide are not topics that we typically find humorous. These are issues we usually discuss in private if we discuss them at all. However, Anthony's humorous presentation of suicidal ideation encourages us to take notice that it is a prevalent occurrence amongst Latinas and Chicanas. Most of the Xican@ audience laughs during this part of La Sad Girl's installment, signaling that they recognize this dramatic scenario of romantic betrayal and contemplating suicide. Some in the audience may laugh because they find suicide to be an overall nonsensical solution to life's problems. Others may recognize themselves in La Sad Girl, who reminds them they are not alone in considering suicide. Those of us who laugh may have a common understanding that though suicidal ideation can be quite dramatic, it is a moment that shall pass. In fact, La Sad Girl underscores the drama of suicide by referring to it as a "final performance,"<sup>115</sup> which elicits laughter from the audience, but also draws attention to suicide as an ephemeral, public moment with powerful, affective consequences. When asked about humor in the context of serious topics in *Las Hociconas* during the Q&A at the Berkeley performance in 2011, Anthony referenced writer Langston Hughes, who believed that most of the time, we laugh to keep from crying.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>114</sup> Suicidality, Herman observes, "which sometimes serves as a form of resistance during imprisonment, may persist long after release, when it no longer serves any adaptive purpose." See Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 95.

<sup>115</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 42.

<sup>116</sup> From my personal notes dated January 30, 2011.

La Sad Girl acknowledges other reasons she has considered suicide besides the betrayal by her ex-wife:

And, yes, of course, I had thought about suicide maybe once or twice before in my life when things were super fucked up. Like when I was 17 and I didn't find the right shoes for my prom.<sup>117</sup>

Curiously, La Sad Girl uses “of course” to point out that it should be no surprise to us and that it should be expected by us that she has experienced suicidal ideation. She represents extreme depression after all. On the surface, it sounds like these first suicide attempts were due to seemingly meaningless teenage problems like not being able to find the perfect outfit for a party. Yet we soon discover her connection to shoes cloaks a more serious problem, for collecting shoes is her way of dealing with her discovery “that the scary rapist we're all taught to fear as girls and womyn can be your own father, uncle, abuelo, brother, or primo...”<sup>118</sup> Suggesting that she has been sexually abused and consequently feels numb, La Sad Girl explains that sexy but painful shoes remind her that she is “alive.”<sup>119</sup> This type of “self-mutilation” or self-harm is not unusual for traumatized people, especially for those who, at an early age, experienced painful encounters with elders and had to dissociate during this trauma. Bessel van der Kolk et al. explain, “Traumatized people employ a variety of methods to regain control over their problems with affect regulation.”<sup>120</sup> Her obsession with torturous, dominatrix-style high heels is fitting for La Sad Girl who emphasizes:

Trauma...and then we wonder why some queers of color participate in BDSM culture bondage, domination, and sadomasochism—that's not radical sexuality, that's some old traumatic shit.<sup>121</sup>

Pairing this statement along with the work of Van der Kolk, we can recognize how BDSM is one method for us to regulate our emotions in light of our traumas. While some pleasure theorists argue that BDSM can be a healthy economy of bodies and pleasures,<sup>122</sup> other theorists argue that BDSM unhealthily eroticizes social inequality.<sup>123</sup> Out of context, La Sad Girl's statement above positions her as part of the latter group of thinkers who oppose BDSM as radical sexuality. Given her dedication to her “political puta career,”<sup>124</sup> however, I argue that La Sad Girl's stance on sex and sexuality, particularly in the lives of people of color, is more complex than simply saying BDSM is or is not radical sexuality.

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<sup>117</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 41.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk, “The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma,” 188-189.

<sup>121</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 51.

<sup>122</sup> Patrick Califia, “A Secret Side of Lesbian Sexuality,” in *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*, ed. Patrick Califia (San Francisco: Cleis, 2000), 158-67; Sarah Smith, “Unleashing Gender: Dependency, Subjectivity, and Recognition in Dominant/Submissive Relationships,” *Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review* 6, no. 3 (2005): 177-88; Robin Bauer, *Queer BDSM Intimacies: Critical Consent and Pushing Boundaries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>123</sup> Margot Weiss, *Techniques of Pleasure: BDSM and the Circuits of Sexuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

<sup>124</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 38.



### Political Puteando and the Power of Desire

More than the other two characters, La Sad Girl professes sex positivity, or the idea that all sex is positive as long as it is consensual and healthy. She refers to her stand-up performance art as “political puteando”<sup>125</sup> and herself a “political puta.”<sup>126</sup> The Spanish word *puta* is a vulgar stand-in for prostitute, whore, or bitch.<sup>127</sup> *Puteando*—“whoring” or “bitching”—is the gerund form of *putear*, which can mean 1) to prostitute oneself, 2) to insult, 3) to aggravate or bother.<sup>128</sup> These latter three meanings add complexity to Anthony’s perception of her work when she is in the character of the depressed, La Sad Girl. She explains that “after minutes of intense healing and meditation,” she discovered that her “purpose” is “political puteando.”<sup>129</sup> Addressing the queer audience and community, she explains, “Jotería, when I decided to take control of my healing process, and because Xicanas are essentially community oriented, I decided I would find a way to help others work through their pain and pay my rent.”<sup>130</sup> While this statement implies that political puteando involves selling herself to pay her rent, the second and third definitions of *putear* above suggest that political puteando can have yet another meaning: political agitation through insult. In this sense, La Sad Girl becomes an “agent provocateur” of queer, Xican@ feminism. For Anthony, political agitation, like sexual pleasure, can be a mode of healing the psyche of self and others. In fact, reconnection with self and others is another necessary step in the process toward recovery from trauma. Herman points out, “Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery.”<sup>131</sup> Herman encourages survivors to make meaning of their personal tragedies by understanding the trauma as a basis for social action. She writes,

Social action offers the survivor a source of power that draws upon her own initiative, energy, and resourcefulness but that magnifies these qualities far beyond her own capacities. It offers her an alliance with others based on cooperation and shared purpose. Participation in organized, demanding social efforts calls upon the survivor’s most mature and adaptive coping strategies of patience, anticipation, altruism, and humor.”<sup>132</sup>

This echoes what happens in the fourth stage-space of the path of *conocimiento*. Anzaldúa explains that in this stage-space, “a call to action pulls you out of your depression.”<sup>133</sup> She too agrees that meaningful community work can indeed be healing.<sup>134</sup>

Political puteando emphasizes bodily connection—connection to other bodies as well as one’s own body. In the case of political puteando as prostitution, this is obvious. Political

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<sup>125</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 44.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>127</sup> Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. “puta.,” accessed April 20, 2010, [www.rae.es](http://www.rae.es); The word carries the same pejorative power as the American English word *bitch*.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. “putear.”

<sup>129</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 44.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>131</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 197.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>133</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 545.

<sup>134</sup> Anzaldúa writes that in this stage-space, your inner voice “prompts you to take responsibility for consciously creating your life and becoming a full functioning human being, a contributing member of all your communities, one worthy of self-respect and love.” See Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 557.

puteando as political agitation via insults fired during a SUPA act similarly, nonetheless, requires Anthony's body to be on display, to perform, to entertain. But, as Anzaldúa explains, during the stage-space in which you are called to action, "It dawns on you that *you're not contained by your skin*—you exist outside your body, and outside your dreambody as well. If the body is energy is spirit—it doesn't have boundaries."<sup>135</sup> That is, Adelina/La Sad Girl is more than her body; she is the intersubjective connection she makes with her audience. She implicitly teaches us how the desire for power and the power of desire are intertwined; to transform the damage wrought upon us, who have been shaped by a history of conquest and hatred, history must be re-membered for the silenced stories of both *the desire for power* and *the power of desire*. We must piece together the stories of the dark underbelly of history as well as stories of emancipatory love that helped our ancestors survive the darkness. While the desire for power (e.g., as manifested through colonialism and imperialism) justifies the racialization, gendering and overall, classification of bodies, the power of desire helps us imagine what is possible when we move beyond the perceivable boundaries of the body and feel the interconnectedness enabled by desire.

As a political puta, La Sad Girl demonstrates the healing potential of desire. La Sad Girl sexualizes the performance by likening it to cunnilingus, telling the audience, "[L]et me take care of you . . . . [I]t's like oral sex, you just gotta enjoy yourselves, because I'm gonna be all up in your faces."<sup>136</sup> Soon she designates the performance as a "group orgy," then recants, stating "...uh, therapy."<sup>137</sup> Drawing this parallel between sex and therapy is provocative because non-normative sexual practices, when publicly disclosed, precipitate heteropatriarchal discourses of hatred that are anything but therapeutic for the sexual actors. It is also provocative because it points out the bodily, affective connection between La Sad Girl and the audience. This performance thus enables a quintessentially queer relationship between performer and audience to emerge. I use queer in a similar sense as Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, who theorizes African slaves' relationships as queer. She explains her use of "queer":

*Queer* in the sense of marking disruption to the violence of normative order and powerfully so: connecting in ways that commodified flesh was never supposed to, loving your own kind when your kind was supposed to cease to exist, forging interpersonal connections that counteract imperial desires for Africans' living deaths."<sup>138</sup>

In this sense, "queer" desire is a form of resistance to coloniality.<sup>139</sup> Anthony's triptych, I argue, is queer not only because the Hociconas [big-mouths] discuss topics relevant to same-sex relationships but also because they offer the power of desire amongst (queer) people of color as a way to counteract the Empire's desire for power.

This power of desire has the same capabilities as Audre Lorde's "erotic," which she defines as a source of "feeling"<sup>140</sup> and "creative power and harmony."<sup>141</sup> Like the erotic, desire

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 555; Anzaldúa's emphasis.

<sup>136</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 34.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>138</sup> Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 14, nos. 2 & 3 (2008): 199.

<sup>139</sup> For more on queer desire as a form of resistance to coloniality, see Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic."

<sup>140</sup> Audre Lorde, "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 54.

has become “suspect,” “vilified, abused, and devalued within western society.”<sup>142</sup> While Anthony’s erotic centers sexual pleasure, it is not “the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, [or] the plasticized sensation” that Lorde critiques as a misnaming of the erotic.<sup>143</sup> It is not “the pornographic” that “emphasizes sensation without feeling.” Lorde writes,

The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference.<sup>144</sup>

Through the erotic, *Las Hociconas* creates a desirous and pleasurable affect in the performance space. Anthony’s political puteando is one example of the erotic that can make space for people to sense their interconnectedness in a deeper way. The erotic reminds us of the power for us to share “deeply any pursuit with another person.”<sup>145</sup> To understand the self as deeply connected to other selves is to reconceptualize one’s power for effecting change.<sup>146</sup> Lorde underscores the value of feeling:

For the erotic is not a question of only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing. Once we know the extent to which we are capable of feeling that sense of satisfaction and completion, we can then observe which of our various life endeavors bring us closest to that fullness.<sup>147</sup>

*Las Hociconas* makes space for us to become aware of our capacity to feel joy or pleasure with others. It enables us to sense the power of desire and to recognize our collective potential for fulfilling our desires, including our longing to transcend a traumatic history.

### **La Chismosa Puts Coyolxauhqui Together and Tests Her Story**

La Chismosa brings Adelina closer to integrating her trauma, as this last character in the triptych performs the fifth, sixth, and seventh stage-spaces of *conocimiento*. Anzaldúa illustrates the action of the fifth stage-space called “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together ... New Personal and Collective ‘Stories,’” writing,

You scrutinize and question dominant and ethnic ideologies and the mind-set their cultures induce in others. And, putting all the pieces together, you reenvision the map of the known world, creating a new description of reality and scripting a new story.<sup>148</sup>

Like Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec pantheon’s moon goddess who was beheaded and dismembered by her brother, the sun god, Adelina recognizes her “desire for order and meaning.”<sup>149</sup> Because the path of *conocimiento* does not adhere to a teleological, stepwise narrative but instead to one

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Of course, this emphasis on the materiality of spirituality is not a novel concept. Judeo-Christian dogma and romantics throughout the ages, for instance, have considered sacred the material union of “man and woman” becoming “one flesh” during sex.

<sup>147</sup> Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” 54-55.

<sup>148</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 545.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

that envisions the stage-spaces as circular and simultaneous, it is possible for La Chismosa to be in the fifth and sixth stage-spaces of *conocimiento* simultaneously. “In the sixth stage-space,” Anzaldúa states, “[Y]ou take your story out into the world, testing it.”<sup>150</sup> La Chismosa takes what she has learned through her anger and sadness onto the stage and tests it before an audience. Her costume—which calls for the character to be “a bandana wearing, chancuda, pregnant queer, tattooed mujer, wearing necklaces, flaunting one silver hoop earring and a feathered one, and strapped with her pink dildo”—curiously honors Coyolxauhqui in its assemblage of seemingly disparate accessories.<sup>151</sup> Assembling her new knowledge as *chisme* (gossip), she tests her theories about the desire for power and the power of desire in front a live group of queer people of color and their allies. She additionally pieces together the different fragments she identifies in her roles as La Angry Xicana and La Sad Girl, characters who, I argue above, are in the depths of the Coatlicue State. She is, as Anzaldúa would say, “a modern-day Coyolxauhqui,” who puts her self together. Anzaldúa indicates,

Coyolxauhqui personifies the wish to repair and heal, as well as rewrite the stories of loss and recovery, exile and homecoming, disinheritance and recuperation, stories that lead out of passivity and into agency, out of devalued into valued lives.<sup>152</sup>

Throughout the triptych, all of Adelina’s different parts—including those we see represented on stage—make efforts to rewrite and thus “repair” the kinds of stories that have led subjects of trauma into loss, exile, disinheritance, passivity, and devaluation of our worth.<sup>153</sup> Adelina’s story recalls Coyolxauhqui’s trajectory from dismembered sister to a full moon that wanes and waxes, reminding us of her cyclical brokenness and restoration. This cyclical process recalls Norma Alarcón’s discussion of the subject-in-process. The subject, Alarcón theorizes, is always already in process because her subjectivity is contingent upon the world and others who “traverse her through and through.”<sup>154</sup> Because we are physiological and social beings, constantly changing and moving, meeting other subjects-in-process (i.e. “testing our stories”), any newfound sense of wholeness—a sense of a fully integrated Coyolxauhqui—is bound to “break,” and we are bound to have to reassemble the different parts of our selves to heal again.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 55.

<sup>152</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 563.

<sup>153</sup> The subtitle of the triptych, “Three Locas with Big Mouths and Even Bigger Brains,” also invokes Coyolxauhqui by calling attention to the three characters as “locas,” or “crazy women.” These figures, we can extrapolate, are thus “lunatics”—people whose moods are believed to be influenced by the cycles of the moon, or Coyolxauhqui.

<sup>154</sup> Alarcón’s focus is on a *critical* subject-in-process whose subject positions are bound by “the difference from the perceived hegemony and the identity with a specific auto-history.” The subject’s recognition of her paradoxical and contradictory subject positions motivates her to “reorganize, reconstruct, and exploit difference through political resistance and cultural productions in order to reflect the subject-in-process.” In this process, the subject realizes and retains her irreducible differences, so she bids for a new discourse of formation. See Norma Alarcón, “Conjugating Subjects: The Heteroglossia of Essence and Resistance,” in *An Other Tongue: Nation and Ethnicity in the Linguistic Borderlands*, ed. Alfred Arteaga (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 136; expanded and reprinted as “Conjugating Subjects in the Age of Multiculturalism,” in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery F. Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 127-48.

La Chismosa, which translates as “The Gossip,” is appropriately named, for, like the figure in the contemporaneous fifth and sixth spaces, this character is prone to scrutinizing and rewriting stories like the neighborhood gossip who is always testing her “new knowledge.” In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa writes,

*Hociconas, repelona, chismosa*, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada* [ill-bred]. In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women—I’ve never heard them applied to men.<sup>155</sup>

Because Xicano and Chicano culture damns those who speak against its heterosexist patriarchy, Anthony reclaims the epithet, *chismosa*, which works to tame the wild tongues of Xicana-Indígena activist scholars. Chisme is forbidden, proscribed, out-of-order speech, and often probing hearsay. But, for La Chismosa, chisme is a form of circulating knowledge. She speaks explicitly to the construction of so-called truths, stating,

Ah, my beautiful se creen post-colonized Raza [Xican@ race]. Yes, the chisme you’ve been hearing tonight is too good to be true, but that does not matter, cuz fiction is stronger than truth, and what is truth, but just the survival of the fittest lies spread from mouth to mouth in our community faster than any herpes, or that other bland euphemism, cold sores...<sup>156</sup>

Through this statement, Anthony draws her audience’s attention to the power of fiction or the power of myth-making by dominant cultural producers. Myths make up—that is, they *constitute* and *fictionalize*—hegemonic culture. At the same time, she utilizes “fiction,” or dramatic characters like La Chismosa, to communicate her own “truths.” Appropriating Darwinian rhetoric (“survival of the fittest”), she destabilizes the meaning of “truth” and underscores how hegemony works; it pretends objectivity through “scientific” or “empirical” evidence to perpetuate lies that spread as if through contagion. Both lies and “cold sores,” she recalls, originate at the mouth. La Chismosa’s comparison, by extension, illuminates the various ways in which the “mouth” can spread “viruses”—things or ideas that can cause one physical and psychical harm—even when there is no intention of doing so.

Exposing the fiction of “truth,” La Chismosa is empowered to “revise the scripts of [her] various identities, and use these new narratives to intervene in [her] culture’s existing dehumanizing stories.”<sup>157</sup> Her role in the triptych also helps attentive audience members piece together and understand the complexity of the first two parts of the triptych. For example, these audience members may grasp that political *puteando* is overall a subversive tactic that resists the epithet, “Hija de la Chingada.” La Chismosa reveals her understanding of the phrase, “Hija de tu chingada madre,” as directed toward her by her own mother. La Chismosa explains,

I thought she was just pointing out the obvious. I mean, cuz, her life was pretty fucked up. You know...no vacation, no paid overtime, no health insurance, and, for sure, a hostile work environment. Qué crazy. No wonder most of our impoverished mothers go locas.<sup>158</sup>

La Chismosa’s interpretation of her mother’s use of the common expression is apt. This *Hociconas* draws a parallel between not having access to basic needs such as adequate rest, healthcare, and safety and what it means to be La Chingada, the quintessential “fucked one.”

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<sup>155</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 76.

<sup>156</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 67.

<sup>157</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 559.

<sup>158</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 72-73.

Like the figure known as La Chingada (also known as La Malinche or Malintzín Tenepal), who—through one interpretation—is understood as a sexual victim of the Spanish Conquest of the Americas, La Chismosa’s mother has been “fucked over” by an imperial order. That is, the U.S. government’s labor and healthcare lawmakers have taken advantage of this single mother who cannot protest the injustices she experiences at work lest she lose her job and not be able to take care of her children.<sup>159</sup> La Chingada is one who has been disempowered. Her daughter, an “Hija de la Chingada,” is one who will likely fall victim to the same injustices.

Notably, by this point, La Angry Xicana has already invoked La Chingada during the first installment of the triptych. Throughout her performance, La Angry Xicana repeats the phrase, “O que la,” which is equivalent to the English phrase, “What the...?” to express one’s annoyance or disbelief. In both the Spanish and English cases, the phrase is abridged. The first phrase is missing “Chingada” (or the tamer, “fregada”), which translates into “fucked one,” (or screwed one”) and the second is missing “fuck,” as in “O que la Chingada” and “What the fuck?” respectively. La Sad Girl also invokes La Chingada but in a different way. In her own version of Descartes’s infamous philosophical proposition, she proclaims to the audience:

So, my new victims, uh, fans, I guess all you really need to know about me, as a very well respected scientist and philosopher once said, “I fuck, therefore, I am.”<sup>160</sup>

Through this philosophical proof, I argue, La Sad Girl resists the “Chingada” or “Hija de la Chingada” appellation, for she inverts the victimizer/victim power relation and designates herself the active participant—the one who “fucks” instead of the one who “is fucked”—in the relationship. La Sad Girl’s “real purpose in life” is, after all, political puteando.<sup>161</sup> She bases her existence on her ability to experience pleasure, on her ability to feel. She also knows she exists, as a political puta, because she is capable of political agitation through her work. She adds,

Sometimes, it puts my celibate self in a huge quandary, because if I’m not fucking—then who the fuck am I?!<sup>162</sup>

Who is she if she is neither resisting the State nor experiencing pleasure? She is La Chingada, the archetypal figure of whom those in power take advantage. Thus, her existence relies on her capability to satiate desire with love and pleasure. However, it is not until we meet La

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<sup>159</sup> Marquita R. Walker points to a study of 4,287 low-wage workers in Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City, and discusses how despite experiencing various workplace violations, only 20% of the workers complained, 43% of the workers experienced employer retaliation, and 20% reported to afraid to complain because of employer retaliation. See Walker, *The Daily Grind: How Workers Navigate the Employment Relationship* (Lanham, MI: Lexington Books, 2015), 169. Kim Bobo explains that because of unemployment rates, workers are reluctant to complain about their jobs because they are anxious about losing theirs and not being able to find another. Employers take advantage of these unemployment rates, know there will be more people willing to take jobs. The employers thus feel no pressure to improve work wages and standards. Further, lawsuits take up time and take the workers from their jobs. See Bobo, *Wage Theft in America: Why Millions of Working Americans are Not Getting Paid and What We Can Do About It* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 61. For a discussion of the problems with current labor regulations and enforcement, see Fran Quigley, *If We Can Win Here: The New Front Lines of the Labor Movement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), Chapter 6.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 35.

Chismosa—who reveals how Adelina understands the epithet “Chingada”—that we can really grasp La Sad Girl’s political puteando in this way.

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval describes “decolonial love” as “a hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement.”<sup>163</sup> Decolonial love is a way to resist the desire for power (over others) and to experience pleasure of desire. Decolonial love is radical in that it fulfills desire, bringing together subject and object, the lover and the loved. Even in the case of self-love, one (subject) loves the self (object). Decolonial love is the erotic, or, to use Lorde’s words, “the sensual—those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us.”<sup>164</sup> This love, the erotic, the sensual bridges the spiritual (the soul-self) and the political (public self). It becomes a form of bodily consciousness.

Sandoval maintains further, “Revolutionary love occurs outside ideology.”<sup>165</sup> Referencing Roland Barthes, she clarifies, “[W]hen the [love] relation enters the realm of the abyss—of the ‘original’—then stereotypes are shaken, ‘transcended, evacuated.’ And jealousy, abandonment, and frustration, for instance, ‘have no more room in this relation without a site,’ without topos, ‘without discourse.’”<sup>166</sup> The power of desire—that is, the power of decolonial love or the love relation (as a way of knowing) of which Sandoval and Barthes write—can help heal the psychic wounds of historical traumas, especially because this love exists outside of our perceptible socioeconomic and political realms. Before we can come to know the power of desire, however, we must come to know our “excess and madness” as “[our] truth, [our] strength.”<sup>167</sup> While Xicanas like Anthony intentionally work toward healing the wounds inflicted by colonial and imperial trauma, these efforts remain affected by our existence in a White heteropatriarchal society that is relentless in its desire for power over non-White peoples. La Chismosa suggests European desires for power in the New World and their descendants’ desires for power in the West have left lasting impressions upon their descendants’ relationships with non-White peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Because it is these descendants who are in power, the relationship has become a severely unequal one between the US nation-state and non-White groups within it. In other words, the nation-state is not an abstract entity; it is composed of people in power who benefit from the perpetuation of White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant values.<sup>168</sup> The nation-state’s actions like the construction of a massive wall along the US-México border and the upholding of Arizona’s SB1070—a brown-profiling, Senate bill that “requires police to determine the immigration status of someone arrested or detained when there is

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<sup>163</sup> Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 140.

<sup>164</sup> Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” 56.

<sup>165</sup> Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 142.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> This is exemplified in Samuel P. Huntington’s essay, “The Hispanic Challenge,” in which he argues that Hispanic immigration undermines the political and cultural integrity of the nation’s “core Anglo-Protestant culture.” See Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Policy*, (March/April 2004), [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2004/03/01/the\\_hispanic\\_challenge](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2004/03/01/the_hispanic_challenge), accessed April 20, 2014.

‘reasonable suspicion’ they are not in the US legally”<sup>169</sup>—target Latin@ immigrants in particular. La Chismosa responds:

Yeah, so go ahead, pinche Arizona... try, try to gentrify the whole goddamn state. SB 1070 .... SB for stupid bolillos. Go ahead, USA nation-state, try, try to build your massive border wall. You’ll always have to deal with immigrants. Cuz you’re living in Aztlan, our migratory peoples are just doing business as usual, following thousand year-old trade routes up and down Aztlan.<sup>170</sup>

La Chismosa “talks back”—thus living up to her “hocicona” name—to the nation-state whose desire for power incites it to keep out non-White immigrants. In its desire for power, the nation-state limits the number of non-White people in the country at any one time. For to have non-White people outnumber White people would mean a different kind of power—a power that may or may not change the political landscape of the country. This is a risk the nation-state is not willing to take. La Chismosa offers the audience of Mexican descent a legacy of migration. She offers us a sense of belonging to a line of people whose constant movement is instinctive because they and we are determined to survive.<sup>171</sup>

The nation-state’s anti-immigration actions are thus efforts to change centuries-old patterns that are integral to our lives. This desire for power, we learn, attempts to modify all natural patterns including the growth of our foods like corn. La Chismosa lets the audience in on some information the nation-state has been withholding:

Corn’s all fucked up. Even organic corn is some genetic hybrid and our people’s original yellow maize... does not even exist anymore. And worstest, industrialized-militarized corporatized U.S. corn is like some freaky processed monster: They should just call it Lady Gaga corn. ¡Qué crazy!<sup>172</sup>

La Chismosa uses humor to reveal this important chisme that U.S. Americans may only apathetically accept if told in a less creative way. She calls attention to the genetic modification of maíz, a main staple in the Mexican@ and Xican@ diet to demonstrate the very basic and physiological level at which the corporatized nation-state infiltrates our lives.

After poking fun at the audience for not getting a high-brow joke about post-colonial theorist Gayatri Spivak’s work on subalterneity, La Chismosa remarks, “[W]e can tell who made it to college ... to get more colonized ... and who did not.”<sup>173</sup> In this moment, she draws attention to yet another subtle way in which those in power maintain their power: the U.S. education system. She critiques U.S. academia, more specifically, as a whole. For example, she makes plain the power dynamics between White female professors and Xicana students, explaining the hegemon-subaltern relationship between professor and student, respectively. She

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<sup>169</sup> “Arizona’s SB 1070,” *American Civil Liberties Union*, n.d. [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org), accessed July 15, 2015.

<sup>170</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 61.

<sup>171</sup> Ironically, White people are immigrants too, but since their “legality” is not questioned, there is no need to labor over stories that give them a sense of national belonging.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* 70. The joke is about La Chismosa’s relationship with an astute Latina academic. La Chismosa explains, “I had already consented to being her subaltern, subalternita, or just La Subi, when I was being good, which was rare, cuz as a some semi-respected post colonial theorist did not ever really say: the subaltern speaks, bitch.”



also draws attention to academic research methods, commenting that “Xicana-Indígena scholars are a different breed altogether.” She criticizes further:

Like white academics, so do not get our research methods. You know, they politically, fundamentally, economically don’t understand that when I delve into a topic—I want to go to the primary source. Which you’d think would be a boon in the academy, right? But, no, these rational fuckers they just get all colonial on your ass when they review your bibliography. Oh, yeah they get all Salem Witch Trial cuz your footnote states: Interview with the artist, May 11, 2009, Ouija board.<sup>174</sup>

In this case, *La Chismosa* depicts one of the many ways hegemon-subaltern power dynamics play out amongst white scholars (hegemon) and scholars of color (subaltern) in academia. In her discussion of the U.S. university system, Sandoval draws attention to what she terms “the apartheid of theoretical domains.”<sup>175</sup> This apartheid, she notes, insists on the differences between White male poststructuralist theory, White feminist theory, Ethnic Studies, U.S. Third World feminist theory and method, and queer theory. Such differentiation and division highlight the ways in which power and knowledge are intertwined and maintain an “intellectual colonialism.”<sup>176</sup> Under this theoretical apartheid, the contributions of people of color and White women—like those made by *La Chismosa*—are relegated to an “appropriate category and there go submerged and underutilized.”<sup>177</sup> To put it another way, our research contributions are not taken seriously and thus eventually disappear.

Furthermore, I posit academic research methods are divided into two clear categories: rational and irrational. Rational methods include anything that can be observed using any of the five senses but sight is the sense that is upheld as the most “objective.” Irrational methods are those that allow for the researcher to utilize her subjectivity and thus are not objective. While *La Chismosa*’s example of a Ouija board as research method may be an exaggerated form of Xicana-Indígenas’ “irrational” research strategies, it is true that most of our non-Western research methods (e.g., participant observation, testimonio, oral history) are deemed irrational because they do not distance the researcher from the researched. The binary between rationality and irrationality has been used for centuries to delegitimize the ideas of subaltern peoples. Spanish colonizers, for example, suppressed Indigenous cosmologies and hence epistemologies by not only prohibiting the work and voices of the *tlamatime*, wise people who decoded the world, but also destroying most of their codices so that their (threatening) ways of knowing would not survive. In this sense, the U.S. education system and academia are examples of the nation-state’s centuries-long desire for power over—manifested as the *erasure of*—Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

In an early draft of *Las Hociconas*, *La Chismosa* calls attention to the kind of work mainstream scholars perform. After explaining why she believes Cherrie Moraga is a “sell-out,” she asks, “Mira [Look], do I have any academics here? Okay, make sure you cite me, footnote me, chisme me!” Using the verbs “cite,” “footnote,” and “chisme” as synonyms, *La Chismosa* draws attention to footnotes *as* chisme. That is, she understands footnotes as a method of talking about the affairs of others. More generally, however, she juxtaposes footnotes and chisme to equate the work of scholars to that of chismosas, as they both generate and circulate knowledge.

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 67-68.

<sup>175</sup> Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 67-72.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 71.

While traditional scholars' research is applauded, chismosas' practices—like research projects that emerge from embodied experiences—are “submerged and underutilized.”<sup>178</sup>

In the midst of situating herself as an expert in the field of chisme, La Chismosa suddenly embodies what Anzaldúa describes as “charting the various shifts of consciousness as they play out in your daily activities.”<sup>179</sup> La Chismosa's voice changes, her eyes cross, and we hear radio static, as she uses catch phrases that characterize La Angry Xicana (“O que la”), La Sad Girl (Qué sad) and her persona (Qué crazy). This is the moment when we learn the name of the “whole” person whose memories we have listened to over the course of three nights. As La Chismosa discusses the idea of sharing her self with others, she quibbles:

I'm like, (as La Sad Girl) “Adelina, what the fuck? What are you doing with her? What? Don't you think I see you?” And, of course I respond to myself, (as La Angry Xicana) “O que la, Adelina, we agreed that post-therapy, we would do a beautiful, healthy, loving relationship.” And then I re-respond (as La Sad Girl) “Whatever, bitch, you're mine.”<sup>180</sup>

Here, Adelina begins to exhibit characteristics of moving toward or being in the seventh stage of the path of *conocimiento*, as she must learn to “negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others.”<sup>181</sup> Her different selves begin to come together, acknowledging each other—albeit in an initially tumultuous way. As she easily shifts through these three characters, Adelina begins to engage and love each “character” and/or part of her self, including both the dark parts (La Angry Xicana and La Sad Girl) and the light part (La Chismosa) of her self that illuminates the dark parts to make sense of them and their traumatic sources. This scene enacting “a plural personality” operating in “a pluralistic mode” also recalls Anzaldúa's theory of “mestiza consciousness” as espoused in *Borderlands*.<sup>182</sup> Like the new mestiza and the figure in the seventh stage-space of *conocimiento*, Adelina synthesizes her multiple, fragmented parts.

She soon welcomes these “personalities” or “shifts in consciousness,” explaining, “[W]hat I need is a womyn like Sybil, you know, all multiple-personality and shit. “The people, the people ...” One body, ten different personas—now that's a fucking safe-sex orgiastic experience, right?”<sup>183</sup>

Interestingly, Anthony invokes one of pop culture's most known locas, Sybil Dorsett (a.k.a. Shirley Ardell Mason), a young, working-class white woman diagnosed as having 16 different personalities and made famous by a book and an NBC television miniseries starring Sally Field in 1976.<sup>184</sup> The cause of Sybil's multiple personalities is attributed to childhood abuse at the hands of her schizophrenic mother. The young woman has learned to cope with trauma by disassociating from her primary, traumatized self, and taking on other personalities. The infamous line, “The people, people,” repeated by Anthony, refers to one of Sybil's many fears:

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>179</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 559.

<sup>180</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 74.

<sup>181</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 545.

<sup>182</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 101.

<sup>183</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 75; in a previous draft of *La Chismosa?!* (shared with me by the playwright), La Chismosa directly divulges that she has “multiple personalities.”

<sup>184</sup> See *Sybil*, directed by Daniel Petrie (Culver City, CA: MGM/UA Home Entertainment, 1976), VHS; Note the 2006 edition of the television miniseries omits more than an hour of the original 1976 version produced by the National Broadcasting Company; Floreta Schreiber, *Sybil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973).

the people who abuse her. While this pop culture reference elicits laughter from Anthony's audience, it nonetheless serves to highlight how our psychic bodies react to trauma. Specifically referring to "multiple personality syndrome," Elizabeth Grosz notes, "Our ideas and attitude seep into the functioning of the body itself, making up the realm of its possibilities or impossibilities."<sup>185</sup> Fear of abuse manifests itself intensely in the psyche of Sybil as it does upon the bodies of many traumatized subjects. This fear makes her ability to interact with others impossible and also motivates the emergence of different selves that can indeed interact with others. We might understand Adelina's dissociated parts in a similar way, for these various "characters" ensure her psychic survival, as Sybil's personalities do for her. La Angry Xicana, La Sad Girl, and La Chismosa each play different and significant roles in the process of Adelina's path toward *conocimiento*. It is through this political and spiritual awareness that she is able to survive in a world in which "the people, the people" continue to oppress the poor and people of color. After Adelina has learned to embrace these different parts of her self, she understands that realities or dominant narratives of normalcy can be shifted and/or discarded. If the erotic or decolonial love indeed signifies a method for psychic healing, as Anthony suggests throughout the triptych, then sex/connection—a type of intersubjectivity—with one of her multiple personalities (or herself) symbolizes self-healing—a healing that is "safe," carefully treating each aspect of the self.

### **A Tlazolteotl Moment, Acting Out the Vision**

As she heals, Adelina continues into the seventh stage-space of *conocimiento*, which calls for her to "[shift] realities and [act] out the vision."<sup>186</sup> In the last scene of the triptych, the pregnant Chismosa "gets a sharp pain," and pants, "Excuse me, raza, I think I'm about to have a Tlazolteotl moment."<sup>187</sup> Tlazolteotl is the Nahuatl "goddess of sexual pleasure and sensuality associated with fertility."<sup>188</sup> She protects women during pregnancy and the moment of birth and reigns over medicinal herbs and healers "who provide herbs for abortion."<sup>189</sup> Unlike the other Aztec goddesses associated with childbirth, Tlazolteotl notably has the power to cleanse the hearts of, grant peace to, and bestow forgiveness upon sexual transgressors.<sup>190</sup> These capabilities were especially important to the Aztecs who believed that the heart was the source of mental illness.<sup>191</sup> The heart was not a mere symbolic site of love and other emotions but instead an organ that housed the psyche—much in the same way Western medicine believes the psyche is located

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<sup>185</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 190.

<sup>186</sup> Anzaldúa, "now let us shift," 568.

<sup>187</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 76.

<sup>188</sup> Sylvia Marcos, "Indigenous Eroticism and Colonial Morality in Mexico: The Confession Manuals of New Spain," *Numen* 39, no. 2 (1992): 167.

<sup>189</sup> Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* (Mexico: Porrúa, 1982), quoted in Marcos, "Indigenous Eroticism," 167.

<sup>190</sup> Pete Sigal, "The Cuiloni, the Patlache, and the Abominable Sin: Homosexualities in Early Colonial Nahua Society," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (2005): 570; J.J. Cabada-Izquierdo, "Tlazolteotl: Una Divinidad del Panteón Azteca," *Revista Española de Antropología Americana* 22 (1992): 123-138.

<sup>191</sup> Patricia Landa Durán, "Las Enfermedades Mentales Son Enfermedades del Corazón," *Mexicolore*, accessed 21 October 2012, <http://www.mexicolore.co.uk>.

in the brain—and psychic illness like trauma was addressed by healing the heart. In the case of Adelina, a Xicana whose people have been subjected to traumas resultant of the corrupt desire for power, and whose own subsequent desire for love is blatant throughout the triptych, her choice of the Tlazolteotl figure is fitting, for this goddess subtly illuminates how desire and trauma are linked. Without a significant and deep connection to one’s self and other selves (i.e., intersubjectivity), we are left desiring affection. Desire, like Tlazolteotl, who both entices sexual acts and forgives them, is double-edged; it can both inflict and heal psychic pain.

In her “Tlazolteotl moment,” La Chismosa begins to give birth and “lots and lots of corn kernels pour out of her belly.”<sup>192</sup> La Chismosa has previously indicated, “[T]he only sensible use for corn nowadays” is masturbation and warns the audience to put a condom on the corn to avoid getting “a kernel stuck in your cuchie.”<sup>193</sup> The proliferation of corn kernels pouring out of her, Anthony suggests, is the product of “self-love.” Soon “an image of her own head [appears] hanging upside down between her legs,” implying that her self-love has led to birthing her self anew. She experiences another birthing pain, and stage directions make clear, “This time the birthing is very intense. No element of comedy in it. These are warrior-birth llantos, the kind any midwife or mother would recognize.”<sup>194</sup> Like the Aztec women who were honored as warriors for giving birth, La Chismosa becomes a warrior during this birthing process. This theme of birth and beginnings is recurrent throughout *Las Hociconas*. For instance, in the script, the first two installments conclude not with “End” but instead with “The beginning” and “Shall we begin again?” respectively, highlighting the constant remaking of self. The stage lights go out and only a backlight illuminates the woman’s silhouette in the form of Tlazolteotl.

Before this point, stage directions call for “La Angry Xicana,” “La Sad Girl,” “La Chismosa” or a general “she” to do something. Thus, it is significant that in these final moments, stage directions instruct, “In the pitch darkness and silence *Adelina* leaves the stage,”<sup>195</sup> making clear that a person named Adelina has been born before the audience. Then, “she speaks into the mic offstage.”<sup>196</sup> In this way, Anthony communicates that Adelina is whole at this particular moment in time. She is no longer just one part of her self (i.e., only La Angry Xicana, La Sad Girl, or La Chismosa) but all three and more. If the insertion of “Adelina” in the stage directions is not telling enough, then consider also that the final stage directions indicate, “*Adelina Anthony* returns for her final bow of the series,” suggesting the playwright and not the character named Adelina is the one who takes her bow.<sup>197</sup> Because the path to *conocimiento* is never “finished”—for Adelina, Anthony, or any of us in the theater—and is instead always in process, the script indicates this is “the beginning of the end.”<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Anthony, *Las Hociconas*, 76.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 77; my emphasis.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*; my emphasis.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

## Theater for, by, and about the Oppressed

Augusto Boal teaches, “[T]heater can . . . be a weapon for liberation. For that it is necessary to create appropriate theatrical forms.”<sup>199</sup> He also explains the need for catharsis through theater, or what he conceptualizes as the purging of impurity “that threatens the individual’s equilibrium, and consequently that of society.”<sup>200</sup> *Las Hociconas* works within this paradigm of liberation, forging intersubjective connections with the audience through its allusions and situations that are part of a queer, Xican@ working-class audience’s cultural repertoire, allowing us to see our selves on stage. So that our memories do not “continue to intrude as terrifying perceptions, obsessional preoccupations, and somatic experiences,”<sup>201</sup> the triptych encourages queer Xican@s to re-narrativize histories, to name theft, oppression, and loss, and to find our power through self-definition. Through the hilarious, *La Angry Xicana*, *La Sad Girl*, and *La Chismosa*, Anthony helps us integrate the feelings of an entire community as she moves us to purge toxic anger and harmful sadness and to feel our desire. The power of desire makes space for imaginings of what José Esteban Muñoz writes about as “concrete utopias” based on “educated hope.”<sup>202</sup> Like hope—“spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naive but, instead, profoundly resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present”—desire is an affective structure that can be described as “anticipatory.”<sup>203</sup> It makes space for a future “marked by an enduring indeterminacy,” in which we can recognize philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s “potentiality.”<sup>204</sup> It lets us imagine transformation and liberation. Through desire, self and other long to meet. To connect. To permeate, collapsing the boundaries between subject and object. Even rehearsing the feelings associated with this much anticipated meeting—an encounter with decolonial love—can alleviate the pain of trauma. Liberating our selves from the trauma our ancestors and we have experienced, I argue Anthony teaches us and trauma scholars confirm, is possible through theater and performance that makes us feel, that enables us—as both performers and witnesses—to acknowledge our desire for affect(ion), for decolonial love.

In the next chapter, I explore how Virginia Grise’s *blu* sheds light on this desire to belong, which culminates in *la vida loca* of barrio life. Like Moraga and Anthony, Grises uses the theme of fragmentation to tactfully narrativize Xicana/os’ collective pain. She also offers audiences a glimpse into our radical potential for transformation, yet she does so by transforming Coyolxauhqui, the Chicana emblem for transformation, herself.

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<sup>199</sup> Augusto Boal, “Foreword,” *Theater of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theater Communications Group, Inc., 1979), ix.

<sup>200</sup> Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theater Communications Group, Inc., 1979), 32.

<sup>201</sup> Van der Kolk et. al, “Dissociation and Information Processing in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” in Weisæth et al., *Traumatic Stress*, 309.

<sup>202</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press), 3.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 12.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

**CHAPTER 4**  
**“Cut Limb by Limb”:**  
**Memories of Chicano/a Violence in Virginia Grise’s *blu***

“*why do we always end up killing each other and our own dreams?*”<sup>1</sup>

I first learned about Virginia Grise’s *blu* in San Antonio, Texas, in March 2013. Grise had organized a concert reading of the award-winning play for an audience of NACCS (National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies) conference-goers and community members. During the Question & Answer portion of the event, one audience member expressed distress with having “no warning” about the violent scenes in the play. Grise diplomatically acknowledged the woman’s comment, but—as later private conversations evidenced—most attendees were unsettled by the woman’s complaint.

My own confusion with the woman’s need for a trigger-warning stemmed from not recognizing that she perhaps knew little about Chicana and Xicana cultural productions. It is possible that she was *acquainted with* “Hispanic” or “Latino” drama. However, it is evident to me that she was not attentive to the sociopolitical and historical context of the label “Chicana/o” that refers to the politicized subject and is reflected through the works of creative writers like Adelina Anthony, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Cherrie L. Moraga, Emma Pérez, Ire’ne Lara Silva, and Helena María Viramontes, for example. She perhaps did not recognize that “Chicana/o” inherently points to a *violent* history of struggle. Its painful connotations are not new. They are not inventions of overly-emotional millennial Chicana/os entering activist academia. The term is described similarly as early as 1969 in *El Plan de Santa Barbara* in which the authors explain, “Culturally, the word Chicano, in the past a pejorative and class-bound adjective, has now become the root idea of a new cultural identity for our people.”<sup>2</sup> They remind us this cultural identity is steeped in history:

For all people, as with individuals, the time comes when they must reckon with their history. For the Chicano the present time is a time of renaissance, of renacimiento. Our people and our community, el barrio and la colonia, are expressing a new consciousness and a new resolve. Recognizing the historical tasks confronting our people and fully aware of the cost of human progress, we pledge our will to move ... We will move against those forces which have denied us freedom of expression and human dignity.

Throughout history the quest for cultural expression and freedom has taken the form of a struggle. Our struggle, tempered by the lessons of the American past, is an historical reality.<sup>3</sup>

Claims to Chicanidad or Chicanismo are claims to both a historical memory and experience of social, political, and economic oppression. Despite its patriarchal use of the masculine term “Chicano” as a general term to refer to Chicanas (female subjects) and Chicanos (male subjects) as a group, *El Plan* proves useful as a starting point for a discussion about Chicanismo as a concept that refers to a type of political consciousness, an awareness of Mexicans’ historical

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Grise, *blu* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 47; my italics.

<sup>2</sup> Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education (CCCHE), *El Plan de Santa Barbara: A Chicano Plan for Higher Education* (Oakland, CA: La Causa Publications, 1969), 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

struggles to be recognized as fully human in a world of violent colonialism and imperialism.<sup>4</sup> *El Plan* suggests “Chicana/o” is a political identity that has emerged from an ideology critical of colonial and imperial systems that have decimated Indigenous Mexican peoples and their ways of being and have influenced how power flows in and through “barrios and colonias,” or what Mario Barrera, Carlos Muñoz, and Charles Ornelas identify as “internal colonies.”<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I point to Virginia Grise’s *blu* as a play that is notably Chicana/o—or, more precisely, “Xican@”—in its theatricalization of different registers of war as well as its political commentary on barrio life and what Rosa Linda Fregoso calls *la vida dura*, or “the hard life,” as effects of colonialism and imperialism.<sup>6</sup> I argue Grise demonstrates how *la vida dura*, which manifests in instances of intergenerational trauma, creates war-like conditions that threaten not only the livelihoods but significantly the very lives of people of color. *La vida dura* is cultivated by socioeconomic circumstances that are created by the State’s capitalist, racist, and heteropatriarchal imperatives that leave at stake specifically the lives of people of color. *La vida dura* prompts *la vida loca*, which is yet another phase of war upon subjects of trauma, yet in this war, subjects of trauma kill each other and themselves. Grise illuminates these war-like conditions by drawing our attention to one quintessential story of intrafamilial war—the mythical war between Huitzilopochtli and his sister, Coyolxauhqui. The playwright utilizes this narrative as a memory for this play set in an inner-city barrio and highlights connections between the war fought between sun and moon and the war being fought against and by Chicana/o youth. I underscore Grise’s deft utilization of the Coyolxauhqui myth, which illustrates what Gloria Anzaldúa terms the “Coyolxauhqui imperative,” the imperative to piece together the broken parts of our lives. I conclude by highlighting the playwright’s integration of a different deity that offers subjects of trauma the radical potential for transformation.

### **La Vida Loca in “The Barrio”**

Grise describes the play’s setting as, “The barrio. The United States of America.”<sup>7</sup> Using the article “the” to modify “barrio,” the playwright points to the setting as a quintessential barrio,

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<sup>4</sup> This is one of documents that cements the machista and nationalist ideology refuted by Chicana feminists such as the ones I discuss in this dissertation. What I find useful in this document, however, is its definition of Chicana/os and Chicanismo. The authors indicate, “Chicanismo involves a crucial distinction in political consciousness between a Mexican American and a Chicano mentality.” See CCCHE, *El Plan*, 50. The spelling of the term “Chicano” eventually morphed into “Xicano” as Jennie Marie Luna explains. She writes, “An offshoot of the Chicano Movement produced a renewed spelling of the term Chicano, using an ‘X’—Xicano—instead of ‘Ch.’ The ‘X’ challenged Spanish constructions of language and pronunciation. It represented a return to the Nahuatl usage and pronunciation of the ‘X’ and thus was an act of Indigenous reclamation.” This latter spelling, I would argue, more directly underscores a type of political consciousness attached to Indigenous modes of thinking. See Luna, “Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance” (PhD diss, San Jose State University, 2011), 305.

<sup>5</sup> Mario Barrera, Carlos Muñoz, Jr., and Charles Ornelas, “The Barrio as Internal Colony,” in Harlan Hahn, ed., *People and Politics in Urban Society* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1972), 465-98.

<sup>6</sup> I say “Xican@” is a more precise term to describe *blu* because Grise incorporates Indigenous concepts of being, becoming, and gender fluidity into the play.

<sup>7</sup> Grise, *blu*, 4.

ghetto, or, as Barrera, Muñoz, and Ornelas might recognize it, an “internal colony.” The glossary in the published play, nonetheless, translates “barrio” as “neighborhood,”<sup>8</sup> further suggesting the *normalcy* of this type of site. “The barrio,” however, is not simply “the neighborhood,” the latter of which evokes images of middle-class houses bordered by green lawns, tall trees, and white-picket fences.<sup>9</sup> By U.S. American standards, the barrio is *not* normal. Surrounded by “mission walls still standing,” it sits on concrete.<sup>10</sup> Its inhabitants are not the heteronormative families who reside in “neighborhoods.” Instead, they are people like Soledad, a young mother who is “tired of the hard life” and is partnered with Hailstorm, a two-spirited woman who is “ruff around the edges.”<sup>11</sup> They are people like Blu, Soledad’s son, an 18 year-old man who leaves gangster life for the military, only to be killed in Iraq. These are children like his 14 year-old sister, Gemini, who wants to remember the world is bigger than her street, and their 13 year-old brother, Lunatico, who has already been pegged as a “gang member” at school.<sup>12</sup> The barrio is run by people like their father, Eme, an “old skool” convict who is in prison for violating the three-strike sentencing law.<sup>13</sup>

Grise sets up a quintessential barrio that demonstrates the effects of colonialism and imperialism upon its inhabitants. For instance, in a scene that is set up as a memory, Soledad and her children’s father, Eme, discuss the violent reality of life in the barrio. After hearing a single gunshot and then helicopters overhead, Eme instructs Soledad, “you need to put the kid’s [sic] mattresses on the floor.”<sup>14</sup> Soledad initially refuses because she is “not gonna teach [her] children to be scared in they own house.”<sup>15</sup> Eme reminds her, “being brave ain’t no bulletproof vest. bullets don’t got, don’t got, names on them, soledad.”<sup>16</sup> Soledad then reconsiders, acknowledging the bullets “ricochet off walls and can, and can, land anywhere, even if it ain’t you they gunnin for.”<sup>17</sup> Through this dialogue, Grise makes plain the gang violence mothers, fathers, and caretakers in the barrio have learned to expect and endure. Soledad and Eme must take daily precautions against increasing daily threats to their children’s lives: “drive-by’s,” “shooting into houses,” “shooting at anyone even if they’s wit they family.”<sup>18</sup> Grise illuminates how life in the barrio is a hazard to life itself. Even those who are not the intended targets of violence are susceptible to harm given that these unintended targets are nonetheless constrained by political and socioeconomic conditions, such as housing segregation and poverty, which keep them in the barrio.<sup>19</sup> These violent conditions are effects of what Nelson Maldonado-Torres

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>9</sup> A simple Google image search for “neighborhood” proves this point.

<sup>10</sup> Grise, *blu*, 54.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 and 24.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 and 26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18. In order to maintain the creativity and visual and sound aesthetics of the written and performed play, all quotations will reflect the playwrights’ unconventional English spellings and nonstandard punctuation.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> For more on residential segregation based on race and ethnicity, see Camille Z. Charles, “The Dynamics of Racial Residential Segregation,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 167-207;



might term the “naturalization of war,” or “the radical suspension or displacement of ethical and political relationships in favor of propagation of a peculiar death ethic that renders massacre and different forms of genocide as natural.”<sup>20</sup> Maldonado-Torres also uses the phrase “death ethic of war” in a sense related to Steve Martinot’s usage that denotes “a characteristic feature of U.S. society that is tied not only to war, but to a set of practices and values that extend across war, including the prison industry and death penalty” but elaborates the concept to describe it as “the constitutive character of coloniality and the naturalization of human difference that is tied to it in the emergence of unfolding of Western modernity.”<sup>21</sup> Because they are in internal colonies called “barrios,” subjects of trauma are at war daily and are thus psychically if not also physically transformed.<sup>22</sup>

At age 13, Lunatico is already aware of the unfair conditions in which he lives. Grise notes that in the barrio, children must try to see the stars through smog, implying that even the sky’s beauty is withheld from barrio dwellers.<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere, at one of Lunatico’s friend’s grandmother’s ranch, “[I]t’s like the stars are brighter there for some reason.”<sup>24</sup> Lunatico remembers being there and describes to Gemini,

at night, i’ll lie down on the sacate [grass] and just stare at the stars and sometimes i’ll fall asleep right there. and it’s safe. i’m not even scared cuz there ain’t no neighbors and you feel like, you know, you kinda feel like you high cuz you not really thinkin ’bout nuthin, and it’s like you high but you ain’t. i used to think, one day, i’m gonna live there on the rancho with the stars.<sup>25</sup>

Significantly, Lunatico’s use of “i’ll” and “i’m” simultaneously describes what he has done in the past at his friend’s grandmother’s ranch and what he had once planned to do continuously in

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and Daniel T. Lichter, Domenico Paris, and Michael C. Taquino, “Toward a New Macro-Segregation?: Decomposing Segregation within and between Metropolitan Cities and Suburbs,” *American Sociological Review* 80, no. 4 (2015): 843-73.

<sup>20</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), xi.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, xi-xii.

<sup>22</sup> Western philosopher Martin Heidegger conceptualizes the human as “Dasein” or “being-there.” Dasein “ek-sist”—that is, it is projected into the future—and is also “thrown there,” which means that Dasein has no control over the sociocultural environment into which it is born. Dasein makes sense of its world through its relationship with the One or the They, a collective anonymous figure like “the herd” or “the mass of people.” The only way to escape the They and thus be “authentic”—or, responsible for one’s own world, one’s own life—is through an encounter with death, according to Heidegger. Maldonado-Torres, however, takes into account colonized Dasein, which I call “subjects of trauma,” and explains, that for the colonized, “the encounter with death is no extra-ordinary affair, but a constitutive feature of the reality of colonized and racialized subjects.” Given the violence prevalent in the barrio, the subjectivity of those restricted to internal colonies is not constituted in the same the way as “ordinary” Dasein. See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962); Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2-3 (2007), 251.

<sup>23</sup> Grise, *blu*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

the future. It is as if the boy has repeatedly escaped in his imagination to experience the calm of the pleasant ranch setting. He appreciates the ranch that is so unlike his barrio, where neighbors are apparently a source of fear. This notion contrasts with the translation of “barrio” as “neighborhood” because, unlike “barrio,” the latter term indicating a residential area reminds us that the area is made up of (friendly) “neighbors,” who typically ensure the area’s safety. In contrast, in Grise’s quintessential barrio, neighbors scare Lunatico. Yet, the young Lunatico extinguishes this dream for living in a safe place. Joy DeGruy who theorizes what she calls, “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,” writes, “It is not surprising, after decades of being depicted as ineffectual and inferior, that some might begin to believe that failure is inevitable.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, Lunatico may foresee his “inevitable failure” because dominant society expects failure of him. He clarifies for his sister that his desire to live “on the rancho with the stars” is what he “used to think,”<sup>27</sup> suggesting that he recognizes the reality of his opportunities for socioeconomic mobility in the barrio.

Lunatico realizes the sociopolitical and economic conditions in the barrio are likely to impede any dream he may have. This political consciousness is apparent in a discussion he has with his brother, Blu, as they talk about the presence of law enforcement at their school. The school cop confiscates a blue marker from Lunatico because the marker is considered contraband. Between themselves, Blu and Lunatico question the school’s policies.

BLU: now why can’t we have markers at school? does that make sense to you? there’s a classroom in the second wing with a broken window, bein held together with masking tape. there ain’t enuf money for books

LUNATICO: but we got enuf money to pay some punk ass cop to worry about me and my goddamn blue marker?<sup>28</sup>

The boys take note their school places more value on how well youth adhere to senseless rules than the quality of their education. The public barrio school that caters to poor, youth of color becomes prison-like as law enforcement officers surveil halls, security scanners check for “contraband,” and security cameras watch students’ every move. Yet this arrangement is not impractical in a State that systemically tracks youth of color from public schools to prisons so as to maintain White supremacist, capitalist, and heteropatriarchal order.<sup>29</sup> Barrio schools’ “security measures” do not protect barrio youth like Lunatico and Blu. Instead, these prison-like conditions, of which the school cop is a representative, ensure the safety of those *outside* the barrio by limiting the quality education needed for socioeconomic mobility. In this way, these schools make sure barrio youth cannot escape their “neighborhoods” or the prisons continuously being erected for them.

Eme—whose name is the Spanish-language equivalent of “Em,” or the letter “M,” which signifies the Mexican Mafia of which he is a part—also testifies to the harsh reality of barrio life, which forces men like him into gangs. When Soledad asks him to leave his gang, explaining that she does not want her children to grown up to be gangsters like him, Eme responds, “our three

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<sup>26</sup> Joy DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (Portland, OR: Joy DeGruy Publications, 2005), 154.

<sup>27</sup> Grise, *blu*, 15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> For more on “the school-to-prison pipeline,” see Annette Fuentes, *Lockdown High: When the Schoolhouse Becomes a Jailhouse* (New York: Verso, 2013); and Christopher A. Mallet, *The School-To-Prison Pipeline: A Comprehensive Assessment* (New York: Springer, 2016).

kids are waitin for their dinner, soledad. wutch a gonna feed 'em? .... can't feed your children on dreams, soledad. not enuf to keep 'em full."<sup>30</sup> Eme implies the socioeconomic and political conditions that shape the lives of people in the barrio force them into and keep them in gangs. He cannot "quit the gang" because he has children to feed. Through this dialogue, Grise suggests that in order to dream about a better life, one must first be able to afford to fulfill basic survival needs. Like their father, Blu and Lunatico must also become gangsters in order to survive, for they cannot dream their way out of the barrio.

People like Eme, Blu, and Lunatico adapt to what Rosalinda Fregoso identifies as "la vida dura," the hard life of this harsh environment, by resigning themselves to "la vida loca," or "the crazy life."<sup>31</sup> Luis J. Rodriguez defines "La Vida Loca" as a "lifestyle" produced by "the barrio gang experience."<sup>32</sup> For example, when Blu recalls he was beaten twelve times as part of an initiation ritual into a gang, Eme remarks, "sometimes you gotta learn the hard way .... insane. no brain. crazy ass barrio."<sup>33</sup> Barrio youth, who inescapably live under "crazy," or senseless, circumstances, reclaim and enact locura on their own terms as suggested in the following dialogue:

BLU: you gotta take it, right?

EME: be able to prove just how crazy you is.

LUNATICO: roll the dice.

EME: get what you get. it's not like anybody got it in for you. it's a game of chance, right?<sup>34</sup>

The three characters portray the gang's initiation beatings as just part of life, as something one simply "has to take." The goal of the initiation ritual is to prove one's commitment to la vida loca, which, as Rodriguez elucidates, represents "only the beginning stages of what I believe is now [in 1993] a consistent and growing genocidal level of destruction predicated on the premise there are marginalized youth with no jobs or future, and therefore expendable."<sup>35</sup> In other words, Eme, Blu, and Lunatico resign and commit themselves to la vida loca because they sense their expendability as poorly-educated brown men. Rodriguez theorizes the psychology of this lifestyle:

There is an aspect of suicide in young people whose options have been cut off. They stand on street corners, flashing hand signs, inviting the bullets. It's either *la torcida* [prison] or death: A warrior's path, when even self-preservation is not at stake.<sup>36</sup>

La vida loca emulates the madness of a State that has a propensity for violence and demonstrates no responsibility for the whole of its community. La vida loca is a desperate attempt to control one's inevitably dismal life. This lifestyle accommodates only two options for the future: prison or death.

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<sup>30</sup> Grise, *blu*, 18-19.

<sup>31</sup> Rosa Linda Fregoso, *Mexicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 97.

<sup>32</sup> Luis J. Rodriguez, *Always Running: La Vida Loca, Gang Days in L.A.* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Grise, *blu*, 20

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Rodriguez, *Always Running*, 6-7.

<sup>36</sup> Rodriguez, *Always Running*, 9; italics in the original.

I question whether self-preservation is really not at stake in participating in this “suicidal” lifestyle, for, as Jasbir Puar posits in her discussion of suicide bombers, “Self-annihilation is the ultimate form of resistance, and ironically, it acts as self-preservation...”<sup>37</sup> Barrio youth seemingly manage the outcomes of their lives by participating in *la vida loca*. Michael Cholbi conceptualizes suicide as an act of self-defense, writing:

Perhaps the threat a person defends herself against by committing suicide is not something distinct from us in a physical or metaphysical sense but is instead distinct from us in an ethical sense. In other words, in killing herself, a person destroys a force that precludes her from living in a way that is consistent with who she believes she is or ought to be.<sup>38</sup>

Encounters with death are part of daily life in the barrio. Confronting death, *La Muerte*, and working with Her, barrio youth escape the socioeconomic and political circumstances that reflect the State’s disregard for barrio inhabitants’ lives. *La vida loca* may also be a result of depression and “learned helplessness,” a general syndrome of not choosing alternatives once one has been rendered helpless enough times. Still, both Blu and Eme appear to question this logic. While their questions (“Right?”) may be rhetorical strategies that serve to emphasize their statements, these questions might also indicate their desire to think through the reality of their options. Does the person being initiated into the gang “gotta take it”? What are other options? Is this initiation ritual really “a game of chance” because they roll dice to determine how many times the inductee will be beaten? Or is the gang initiation itself a consequence of systemic barriers that are based only on the *chances* of a person’s skin color, sex, and wealth? The oppressed are not victims of “bad luck.” It is untrue that “it’s not like anybody got it in for you” because a State built on racism, heterosexism, and capitalism indeed targets youth of color to maintain sociopolitical power amongst only wealthy, white men.

### **Deep (Systemic) Structures of Intergenerational Trauma**

Soledad takes note of how *la vida loca*, which emerges from these sociopolitical and economic circumstances, affects everyone in the barrio. This lifestyle permeates generations and adds to families’ intergenerational trauma. For example, the mother of three describes the “split second before someone hits you”—that is, before a man physically abuses a woman:

see it in their eyes. their body. whole body tenses up. hold it tightly. all the years of anger and rage. disappointment. being looked down on. thought less of. every time they got beat up. beat down. the broken dreams. not wanting to dream big because you might end up with disappointments. not wanting to dream at all.<sup>39</sup>

Soledad reveals she came to learn how to anticipate and interpret this type of abuse by watching her father beat her mother, disclosing her sister and she “knew when he was gonna hit her cuz the whole world stopped, stopped spinning.”<sup>40</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa illuminates this “split second” of intuitive knowing as an instance of “*la facultad*.” Anzaldúa explicates,

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<sup>37</sup> Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 216.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Cholbi, *Suicide: The Philosophical Dimensions* (New York: Broadway Press, 2011), 77-78.

<sup>39</sup> Grise, *blu*, 31-32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

*La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface . . . . When we're up against the wall, when we have all sorts of oppressions coming at us, we are forced to develop this faculty so that we'll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away . . . It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate.<sup>41</sup>

In Soledad's case she is able not only to anticipate physical abuse but also to understand "the meaning of deeper realities" of such abuse. She grasps the reality of life for men in the barrio—men whose lives, on the whole, are saturated with recurring feelings of worthlessness and disappointment, which cause resentment, anger, and rage. Soledad understands the deeper structure of machismo, which is, as Anzaldúa writes, "an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem."<sup>42</sup> Soledad recognizes that "[i]n the Gringo world," Chicanos like her father and husband suffer from "shame of self and self-deprecation."<sup>43</sup> Like Anzaldúa, Soledad recognizes, "The loss of a sense of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them."<sup>44</sup> That is, the oppressive systems that rob these men of the dignity and respect they deserve—not because they are males but because they are (human) beings—are the roots of machismo. Because these men cannot identify the source of their anger, rage, and disappointment, they target those closest to them like partners and children. Nonetheless, Anzaldúa emphasizes, "Though we 'understand' the root causes of male hatred and fear, and the subsequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it."<sup>45</sup> Soledad also expresses, "i was never gonna let a man hit me . . . until he did. until he hit me. gemini was just a baby, just a baby when it happened. kicked and screamed. wasn't gonna let her grow up like that. so when he got arrested. that was it. no more. i wuz done."<sup>46</sup> Protective of her daughter's youth, Soledad does not excuse Eme's abusive behavior. Although she knows this incident is his third violent offense for which he will be punished harshly because of the three-strikes law, she is "done" and will not protect him from imprisonment.<sup>47</sup> Soledad's aim is to interrupt a cycle of abuse that she sees as recurrent in her family and environment.

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<sup>41</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 60-61; italics in the original. Curiously, Anzaldúa also uses the idea of a world that "stops" to describe an instance of becoming aware. But she clarifies, "The 'world' doesn't so much stop as it cracks. What cracked is our perception of the world, how we relate to it, how we engage with it. Afterwards we view reality differently—we see through its rendijas (holes) to the illusion of consensual reality. The world as we know it 'ends.' We experience a radical shift in perception, otra forma de ver." Soledad similarly, as I explain below, experiences this radical shift in perception. See Gloria Anzaldúa, "Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—La Sombra y el Sueño," in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 310.

<sup>42</sup> Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 105.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Grise, *blu*, 32.

<sup>47</sup> The three-strikes law mandates courts to impose harsher prison sentences for people convicted of more than two violent crimes or serious felonies.

However, this mother's attempts appear futile. Later in the play, Soledad and Lunatico argue. After catching Lunatico sneaking back into the house, Soledad supplicates, "it's like i'm watching my life on rewind. brother, son, father. a cd that won't stop skipping. LUNA i'm tired of watching the same movie over and over, por favor."<sup>48</sup> Soledad pleads with Luna to end the cyclical, destructive patterns he is already beginning to perpetuate by lying about his whereabouts. Unmoved by his mother's concerns, he responds, "turn off the tv then, ma,"<sup>49</sup> insinuating that like the television program on rewind, *la vida loca* will continue whether she watches or not. He suggests that the only way for her to relieve her tiredness with this lifestyle is to stop watching and stop caring about what barrio brothers, sons, and fathers do. Lunatico then criticizes his mother for not doing more and for partnering with a woman, Hailstorm, after his father is incarcerated and his brother, Blu, has died. Lunatico violently expresses to his mother, "you ain't my muthafuckin family."<sup>50</sup> Soledad reacts by slapping Lunatico, and he then "*raises his fist to his mother. Stops before he hits her. The earth stops spinning in space. SOLEDAD does not move. Stares LUNATICO down. He is shaking, fist clenched.*"<sup>51</sup> Through this moment, the playwright stresses the potency of the cyclical nature of violence. Lunatico is already following his father's life path, especially as he already demonstrates signs of becoming physically abusive toward a woman. Soledad's facultad recognizes this machista and misogynist energy that makes "the earth stop spinning in space" as it did when her father beat her mother and Eme beat her. Despite this recognition, Soledad resists the cycle of violence by not backing down and confronting her son whose machismo and misogyny tremble before her bravado.

Such cycles of abuse outside of the home, such as the patterns of abuse by the State and its representatives, however, are harder to break. Grise brings attention to these patterns through unique dialogue stylistics. In the author's note on style, she indicates, "There are moments when characters speak the same lines and have the same memory. At other times, characters interrupt and take over each other's monologues because they live a shared experience."<sup>52</sup> Grise thus stresses constancy of experiences that subjects of trauma like those in the barrio undergo. She introduces one particular scene using stage directions that indicate, "Different time. Same story."<sup>53</sup> In this scene, Lunatico tells Blu about an incident with the Cop at school. As Lunatico recalls what the Cop says to him, Lunatico's and the Cop's voice overlap. Soon, Blu's voice also overlaps with the Cop's voice. Together, Blu and Lunatico recall their shared memories of the Cop:

BLU & COP: get to class,

LUNATICO & COP: hope you not as messed up as your brother,

BLU & COP: i know your family.

BLU: he don't know shit.

LUNATICO: got caught taggin in the second wing bathroom and that cop, that cop got me written up as a gang member

BLU: for no reason.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Grise, *blu*, 45.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>54</sup> Grise, *blu*, 23.

Both characters have experienced the same relationship with this law enforcement officer. While Lunatico is younger and the memory of the cop's words is more recent, thus allowing him to remember them more easily, Blu nevertheless remembers the Cop's words to the extent that he can recite these lines with the same cadence as the Cop. By having the brothers' voices overlap with the Cop's, Grise stylistically demonstrates the critical impact that this voice has on these youth, for even Blu, who is five years older than Lunatico, can remember the Cop's language verbatim. This unique form of dialogue also evidences the intensity of the Cop's voice, as two superimposed voices are louder than one. Significantly, the same actor who enacts Eme's role also plays the Cop's role. To an audience who can see and hear these lines embodied, this suggests that Eme too knows these statements well as he has likely similarly experienced a school cop's chastisement.

The next scene evidences Eme's similar confrontations with law enforcement. As Blu and Lunatico remember the school cop, Lunatico describes how the Cop arrests him for having a blue marker. Stage directions then indicate, "*Lights up on EME and SOLEDAD in the past. 'EME tells the story to SOLEDAD. LUNATICO continues speaking to BLU.'*"<sup>55</sup> The following dialogue ensues:

LUNATICO: and he cuffs me.

EME: puts a pair of handcuffs on me

BLU & SOLEDAD: just like that?

LUNATICO (*unbelievably*): just like that.

EME (*knowingly*): just like that.<sup>56</sup>

Here, the playwright conveys how both Eme and Lunatico remember the same story although it happens to two separate people at two different times. They recall "the story" of arrest as an occurrence that happens immediately and without warning. Directions indicating Lunatico's tone as "unbelieving" suggest Lunatico does not expect to be arrested for having a blue marker on school grounds. Eme, however, is described as delivering the words "knowingly" because he is more experienced with life in the barrio than his young 13 year-old son. Lunatico's and Eme's on-stage audience, Blu and Soledad, respectively, also have experience with these oft-occurring events. The characters say,

LUNATICO & EME: i don't say shit, you know,

BLU & EME: keep your mouth shut.

LUNATICO & EME: keep my mouth shut, right?

SOLEDAD: right.<sup>57</sup>

Blu and Soledad too know how arresting officers harshly silence the people they detain, and all four characters have learned—likely because these arrests happen so often—not to talk back or else they risk harsher consequences. Grise further elucidates this barrio family knows the story of racist profiling and police brutality all too well. In the following overlapping dialogue, the Cop's lines are underlined.

BLU & LUNATICO & COP: put a pair of handcuffs on me in front of everyone. i can't move. i can't talk. i'm just sittin there. the cuffs get tighter round my wrists. i know not to say nuthin and the more i keep quiet the more angry the cop gets. i can't say shit but i'm

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<sup>55</sup> Grise, *blu*, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

thinkin fuck you, fuck you, fuck you motherfucker and i want to kick the back of his seat but i can't even move.<sup>58</sup>

Again, the same actor who plays Eme plays the role of the Cop, which may suggest to the audience that Eme too knows this recurring situation. Blu and Lunatico simultaneously relate the physical and verbal abuse they experience at the hands of this typical police officer, who apparently wants to humiliate each brother by arresting him “in front of everyone,” as even the Cop points out. Blu and Lunatico observe that while the officer tells them they “can’t move” and “can’t talk” and commands them to “say nuthin” and “keep quiet,” he becomes more angry when they do not talk back to him. That is, he is angered because he cannot elicit a rageful response from them in order to justify his abusive treatment. In this situation, the Cop incapacitates Blu and Lunatico not only by cuffing them but also by instilling great fear in them. No matter how much the brothers want to spew their own “fuck yous” in response to the Cop, they have learned to fear those representatives of the State who are supposed to protect them.

Grise’s dialogue style functions to underscore memories as a recurring narrative that illuminates a particular condition for subjects of trauma. This narrative is one of consistent, negative encounters with people who officially propagate and maintain the State’s racist, heteronormative, and capitalist ideology such as police officers. Cops like the one at Blu and Lunatico’s school identify youth like Blu and Lunatico as “gang members” but not “for no reason” as the characters believe. The reason they are targeted is simple: in this “game of chance,” both boys come from the same brown family, a fact that affirms for this officer, who has been told and now upholds a particular narrative of brown bodies as always already delinquent, that he is justified in targeting them.

### **“Been at War My Whole Life”: Finding Belonging in the Barrio**

DeGruy writes, “When we are faced with racial prejudice and hypocrisy from a hostile dominant society, and when social inequality and powerlessness come to define our lives, it can have a seriously adverse impact on what we come to believe ourselves to be.”<sup>59</sup> Dominant sociocultural narratives that characterize brown people as abject indeed impact barrio youth like Blu, who states, “i spent my whole life, spent my whole life, trying to prove there was a reason to my being born. you know, sometimes i’m not sure that’s true and i try to, you know, hold it together.”<sup>60</sup> Blu questions his purpose in life and, at times, believes he has no purpose. Through Blu’s words, Grise conveys a common belief amongst subjects of trauma—the belief that one’s life is purposeless and, therefore, worthless. Blu believes he can find his purpose by “claimin streets.”<sup>61</sup> When a military recruitment officer, presses him to “be a part of something,” Blu responds, “i am somebody. i am a part of something. where i’m from. that’s what i, what i, believe in. you grow up in the hood. you’re a part of it, it’s a part of you. here everyone knows who you is and who you against.”<sup>62</sup> Eme likewise believes, “those streets are home. they a part of who we is. they run in the veins of my children.”<sup>63</sup> Blu’s and Eme’s statements may appear to stem from mere gang mentality that reproduces nationalism by delineating boundaries and

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<sup>58</sup> Grise, *blu*, 26.

<sup>59</sup> DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 146.

<sup>60</sup> Grise, *blu*, 26.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.



arbitrary rules for belonging within those boundaries. At the same time, however, Blu's explanation can serve as an acknowledgement of how the socioeconomic, political, and cultural particularities of living in the barrio shape its inhabitants' experiences—experiences that make escape from the barrio seem impossible. For Eme, the barrio shapes who he understands his family and himself to be. He implies his children and he have inherited a particular condition as if genetically coded onto their DNA. This condition, however, has been configured by sociopolitical and economic circumstances—heteronormativity, racism, disenfranchisement, and poverty—that relegate Eme and his family to the barrio. That is, these subjects of trauma have not inherited their circumstances because of something inherent within them but instead because of how Western science and thought have interpreted the physical differences (i.e., skin color, shape of nose and eyes) they have inherited.

Furthermore, Eme upholds their “stories” are not only “written on the sidewalk” but also “tattooed on skin.”<sup>64</sup> Lunatico notes these stories are left behind “like a tagger leaves his placazo.” A placazo, also known as a “placa,” is “a badge, tag, or other distinguishing sign” such as “the stylized graffiti signature commonly known as a tag.”<sup>65</sup> B.V. Olguín identifies “the placa” as “the Chicana/o lumpenproletariat practice of ritually marking a space for the purpose of laying a symbolic, and even material claim to it.”<sup>66</sup> Longing for a sense of belonging, of having origins, people from the barrio lay claim to the streets. These claims to spaces become symbolic contestations of dispossession and displacement of their brown ancestors. Still, Soledad criticizes,

you know, there some people never leave this neighborhood. live all their lives inside a 10 mile radius. they start to act like they own it. claiming streets. claiming neighborhoods. like it mean something to our family. to our people. those streets aren't ours. we don't own them. ain't no one come from the streets.<sup>67</sup>

She implies people's false consciousness as they lay claim to land. Although she has also questioned, “wonder how i got here. why here? this neighborhood, this street,”<sup>68</sup> Soledad acknowledges a history of oppression, noting she “can hear the wailing at night behind mission walls still standing.”<sup>69</sup> These missions are long-lasting material reminders of Spanish colonialism, and the wails Soledad hears are reminders that the Spanish mission was to destroy. Soledad searches for answers to her existential questions “try[ing] to listen to the voices of the ancestors in the trains passing.”<sup>70</sup> She seeks guidance from those ancestors who too endured trauma.

Unlike Soledad who looks to the past for answers, “luna is trying to figure out what it means to be a man. trying to find his own reflection in the faces of other little boys,” says Hailstorm.<sup>71</sup> Lunatico's participation in gang activity is his way of searching for knowledge of not only his place in the world but significantly his place as “a man” in the world. In this way,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>65</sup> B.V. Olguín, *La Pinta: Chicana/o Prisoner Literature, Culture, and Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 130.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>67</sup> Grise, *blu*, 45.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 54.

Grise comments upon barrio gangs as a source of not necessarily a class- and race-based camaraderie, but instead a class-, race-, and gender-based kinship. In a study of a group of gang-associated Chicano male youth, sociologist Victor M. Rios and Patrick Lopez-Aguado find, “The development of a perilous masculinity goes hand in hand with resisting class and race marginalization.”<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, the development of this kind of masculinity comes at a heavy price. Soledad responds to Hailstorm’s observation of Lunatico’s desire to become “a man”: “can’t raise his fuckin fist to me, hailstorm. not in my house.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, like his father, Lunatico has learned a type of masculinity that is predicated on his subjugation of femininity. Rios and Lopez-Aguado write of their research participants,

When the young boys resisted marginalization, it was often at the cost of young women, since many of them resisted by claiming their manhood in a more assertive way ... The more that cholos resist marginalization, the more any identity they can identify as “feminine,” in the narrowest of terms, becomes vulnerable to their aggression.<sup>74</sup>

Gender roles are learned through customs passed down intergenerationally. Despite the fact that his father is in prison and his older brother has died during the Iraq war, the 13 year-old boy still upholds the type of masculinity his father and brother enacted, for he learns how it is performed by other boys in the barrio. Like the older Blu, these subjects of trauma do not know their inherent worth. Grise illuminates how they thus empower themselves by developing their personas as threatening and instilling fear in women. “Brotherhood” becomes the psychic space to which boys like Lunatico, who desperately want to belong somewhere, belong.

A military recruitment officer enlists Blu by tapping into this desire to belong and socially-constructed masculine camaraderie. Blu reveals to Hailstorm that he has joined the military, and she attempts to dissuade him.

BLU: the military is like a brotherhood. forever. always faithful.

HAILSTORM: is a gang. shave your head cholo bald. turn in your colors for a uniform. get a new tat. it’s not like you doin different. is still a gang blu. and ’sides we at war.<sup>75</sup>

The military, Blu suggests, offers him the sense of belonging he craves. However, as with gangs, this type of belonging is cultivated via a type of a masculinity (i.e., “brotherhood”) that staunchly rejects femininity. Hailstorm emphasizes the military is not *like* a gang but instead *is* a gang. Both organizations strip their members of individuality by having them behave and wear the same hair and clothes as the other members. Both organizations delineate territories and kill to maintain boundaries and “respect.” Blu chooses to join the military, however, because it offers him brotherhood in addition to “healthcare. education. benefits.”<sup>76</sup> For a young man with few options for a socioeconomically stable future, the military provides the possibility of socioeconomic security. Secure futures for people from the barrio are not guaranteed as basic human rights. In order to make such a future possible, young men like Blu must risk their lives. While the “present” moment of the play is set during the Iraq War in which Blu has died, through memories, Grise illuminates that subjects of trauma living in the barrio have been

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<sup>72</sup> Victor M. Rios and Patrick Lopez-Aguado, “‘Pelones y Matones’: Chicano Cholos Perform for a Punitive Audience,” in *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*, ed. Arturo J. Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. García (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 395.

<sup>73</sup> Grise, *blu*, 54.

<sup>74</sup> Rios and Lopez-Aguado, “Pelones y Matones,” 395.

<sup>75</sup> Grise, *blu*, 44.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

risking their lives for a long time. Blu stresses, “war’s all round you. been at war my whole life. I fight it here or i fight it there. all the same.”<sup>77</sup>

### **Psychic States of War: Memories of the War between Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui**

Grise makes use of the theme of war to illuminate the war-like conditions in which subjects of trauma usually live. These states of war, if you will, are both physical, as in the case of the material conditions of life in the barrio, and psychic, as I discuss in this section. One way in which Grise broaches psychic violence is by alluding to characters’ brokenness and a general feeling that something is missing in their lives. For instance, Hailstorm observes,

try to find what it is we missin, what got lost along the way and we try goin back, try to learn the prayers and rituals but somethin ain’t right in the incantation, in the conjuration. it’s like we lookin for somethin too far gone already ... searching for a time before war but we can’t think back that far and instead we left with broken memories and broken prayers.<sup>78</sup>

Hailstorm points to a sense of having lost something that cannot be remembered or recuperated because it is “too far gone already.” Grise depicts the broken memories to which Hailstorm refers through the time setting of the play, which she describes as “Present day, looking back on the not too distant past, through a series of memories, dreams, rituals, and prayers.”<sup>79</sup> For subjects of trauma, memories of a time before war are consistently interrupted by traumatic memories of war itself.

The story of war most prominently retold by Chicana and Xicana feminists is the war between Coyolxauhqui and Huitzilopochtli. Grise is no exception to this retelling, as she narrativizes this war story through Hailstorm, who describes Coyolxauhqui as “the mexica god of the moon, eagle feathers in her hair, bells on her cheek.”<sup>80</sup> Hailstorm explains to Soledad that “the 400 stars of the south” were “warriors,” and when Soledad asks if Coyolxauhqui too was a warrior, Hailstorm answers, “the moon. she was the one, the one that fought against the war.”<sup>81</sup> Later, Hailstorm teaches Gemini, “coyolxauhqui was a warrior, a guerillera. eagle feathers in her hair, bells on her cheek.”<sup>82</sup> In this retelling of the Coyolxauhqui myth, Grise suggests that Coyolxauhqui is indeed a warrior but only in the sense that she battles against war itself. Hailstorm continues,

skull tied to her belt. her brother, the god of war, was born of the earth. skirt of snakes, hearts, hands, and skulls. huitzilopochtli. a man. fully grown but not. hummingbird warrior. he holds the fire serpent in his heart. obsidian sword. handed down to him from his father. his father’s father. he gathered all the stars and made them soldiers. killed her. the moon. she was decapitated. cut limb by limb. broke into a million pieces. and then the fighting began.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

Hailstorm's description of Huitzilopochtli suggests Grise patterns the character Blu after "the god of war," who is also known as the "Turquoise Prince."<sup>84</sup> Although all of the characters in the play are at war in some way, as I will explain soon, Blu, the title character, mostly represents war for it is he who experiences war at home and, as part of his military duties, abroad.

Huitzilopochtli is often represented in art as a hummingbird or eagle.<sup>85</sup> Because her brother flew a military helicopter, Gemini describes Blu as such: "he's an eagle. wings spread, soaring. he lives, he lives, on the edge of a cloud."<sup>86</sup> For his sister, Blu's spirit continues to live. She comments further, "when the sun and moon turn bright, bright red, es él que pinta el sol [it is he who paints the sun], el sol [the sun] rising and setting."<sup>87</sup> Gemini believes Blu's spirit gives life to el sol, the sun, which is yet another aspect of Huitzilopochtli. In the ancient myth, Huitzilopochtli decapitates his sister, Coyolxauhqui, whose head becomes the moon. He, Huitzilopochtli, becomes her opposite, the sun. The myth explains that because of the animosity between them, the sun and moon are never seen at the same time. By signaling that this moment initiated "the fighting," Grise draws attention to Xicana and Chicana feminists' interpretation of this myth as the birth of heteropatriarchal relations amongst the Nahuas. Patriarchal dictates, like the obsidian sword used to dismember Coyolxauhqui, are handed down through "the father," he who seemingly benefits the most from patriarchy, and "his father's father."

Yet Blu is not the only character patterned after one of the figures in the ancient story of war. The playwright moreover patterns Soledad, the mother figure in the play, after Huitzilopochtli's mother, Coatlicue, who is the earth deity in the Nahua cosmovision. In the first scene of *blu*, Soledad speaks with both Eme and Hailstorm at different times during her life. Both Soledad's lovers explain to her that she must keep moving in life:

EME: stand still, the world moves around you.

SOLEDAD: don't sound so bad. like the earth. the moon orbits around the earth.

HAILSTORM: but the earth moves, spins on its axis in space.<sup>88</sup>

Soledad is content with not moving at all, and she likens this stillness with the earth's seeming immobility. Yet, as Hailstorm indicates, even the earth does not stop moving. Through this dialogue, Grise draws attention to not only Soledad's inclination to identify with the earth but also the fact that the earth *spins*. The verb *to spin* is important in drawing a parallel between Soledad and the earth. Later, when Soledad recalls her father's abusiveness, she explains that during the man's assaults on her mother, "the whole world stopped, stopped spinning ... the spinning stops."<sup>89</sup> During this traumatic event, Soledad is frozen in fear. The world not only stops but significantly, it stops *spinning*. Soledad's lesson in astronomy teaches her it is not *the world* that is immobilized by fear but instead *she* who is paralyzed. The world appears to stop spinning because Soledad herself, like the earth, stops spinning.

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<sup>84</sup> John Murphy, "Huitzilopochtli," in *Gods and Goddesses of the Inca, Maya, and Aztec Civilizations* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2015), 69.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Turquoise is, of course, a shade of the color blue to which the title character's name refers. The name "Blu" draws attention to "blue" as a feeling as in feeling dispirited as do subjects of trauma.

<sup>86</sup> Grise, *blu*, 31.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

There are other clues Grise provides to associate Soledad with Coatlicue. For example, Soledad describes being pregnant with Blu: “seventeen year old mother and a bastard son.”<sup>90</sup> Like Soledad who is not wed at the time of Blu’s conception, the earth goddess Coatlicue is without a husband at the time of Huitzilopochtli’s conception. In the Coyolxauhqui myth, Coatlicue becomes impregnated by a ball of hummingbird feathers, which falls from the sky and into her apron pocket as she sweeps the temple steps. Grise’s interpretation of the myth intimates that like Blu, Huitzilopochtli is a bastard. In response to Soledad’s claim, Eme says, “he’s no bastard. he’s my son. he’ll have a name. i’ll name him . . .” and then gives Soledad a religious folk charm as a symbol of protection. This dialogue also bears resemblance to the original story of Huitzilopochtli versus Coyolxauhqui. Significantly, when Coyolxauhqui and her 400 brothers and sisters of the south learn the child in Coatlicue’s womb is Huitzilopochtli and plan to kill their mother, Huitzilopochtli springs forth from his mother’s womb and attacks his siblings in the name of protection for his mother.<sup>91</sup> Soledad is suspicious of Eme’s offer for protection. She exhibits resistance to this protection, which, like heteropatriarchal orthodox religion, may be but a guise to exact control of women. She refuses Eme’s offer, saying, “don’t need nobody protectin me.”<sup>92</sup>

Soledad’s daughter, Gemini, likewise demonstrates feminist consciousness. The 14 year-old girl expresses,

bright star in a dark sky. i dreamt i was the moon, eagle feathers in my hair, bells on my cheek, coyolxauhqui. they buried the moon under the earth. my brother he is the hummingbird warrior Huitzilopochtli. god of war. blue sun in midday. i sit here alone on the roof listening to the helicopters, gathering the stars in silent prayers. sun and moon. the earth she orbits, orbits around her son. he carries my head, my head in his hand.

we’ve been dead. dead too long.<sup>93</sup>

Gemini’s dream explicitly positions her as Coyolxauhqui and her brother Blu, whom she has previously described as “a hummingbird,” as Huitzilopochtli. She listens to the sound of helicopters’ blades—the type of aircraft Blu flies overseas—as she would her brother’s hummingbird wings, and she silently prays for her siblings, the stars. Gemini, like Chicana feminists who scrutinize the patriarchal mother’s love for the son and indifference toward the daughter, is aware that Soledad, like the earth, centers the son/sun. The mother’s life revolves around him. The young girl further understands Huitzilopochtli, he who brought forth the hierarchy between the masculine and the feminine, has control over her. The war god has dismembered her and now carries her head in his hand. Alfredo López-Austin notes the importance the ancient Nahuas attributed to the body’s head. He writes, “[T]he most outstanding attributes are the head’s correlation to the cosmos, its power of reason, its importance as a locus

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>91</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa offers the dominant patriarchal Eurocentric interpretation of Coatlicue’s pregnancy as a misdeed, referring to Huitzilopochtli as a “bastard.” In her poem “Llorona Coyolxauhqui,” Anzaldúa’s speaker, who is likely Coyolxauhqui, indeed explains why she plots to kill her mother, expressing, “My mother brought dishonor to our family / got herself banged up and a bastard grew in her belly.” See Anzaldúa, “Llorona Coyolxauhqui,” in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 296.

<sup>92</sup> Grise, *blu*, 9.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 48.

for communication, its nature as a center for relating to society and the universe, and as the place where inner life flowers.”<sup>94</sup> Huitzilopochtli’s hold on Coyolxauhqui/Gemini’s head suggests control over her very being, her life force. Without control over her inner life, reasoning, communication, relationship with the cosmos and society, Gemini is “dead,” without consciousness or awareness.

Notice, however, the girl does not indicate that only she has been “dead too long” but instead “we” have been dead for too long. Huitzilopochtli’s dichotomizing and hierarchicalizing influence fragments everyone. This fragmentation emerges from an unconsciousness or unawareness analogous to what Anzaldúa terms “desconocimiento,” a type of “ignorance” that adheres to dominant and oppressive notions of reason and rationality as well as “conventional knowledge’s current categories, classification, and contents.”<sup>95</sup> Desconocimiento is the lack of awareness of our interconnection or, as I have been terming it, intersubjectivity. Desconocimiento leads to psychic trauma. This unawareness also allows for the systemic categorization of people, which ultimately leads to the harsh socioeconomic circumstances to which people of color are subjected and broken memories and broken dreams as a result. Just as the moon has “broke[n] into a million pieces,” as Hailstorm posits, all of the characters in *blu* are psychically broken by the war-like circumstances of the barrio. Soledad becomes fragmented, dissociated perhaps, during moments of domestic abuse.<sup>96</sup> Eme’s brokenness stems from his imprisonment and subsequent separation from his family and the barrio.<sup>97</sup> Hailstorm is similarly broken because she grew up without home or family.<sup>98</sup> Lunatico’s name, which emphasizes his “craziness,” and the shorter version of his name, “Luna,” which is Spanish for “moon,” both draw attention to the moon’s influence on his life. Like his namesake, the moon, the young boy can expect to be broken by the circumstances of his life. Furthermore, while Grise indeed aligns Blu with Huitzilopochtli, the god of war who breaks others, the playwright demonstrates that this character is not immune to fragmentation. Blu also embodies Coyolxauhqui’s broken energy. Together with his father and mother, Blu attests, “i shattered into a million pieces that day,” reflecting on the day Eme goes to prison.<sup>99</sup> Like his mother’s and father’s, Blu’s brokenness stems from being separated from people who love him and the isolating social, economic, and political conditions that lead to the imprisonment of men of color. By depicting all the characters—and not only Gemini, who most closely represents Coyolxauhqui—as somehow broken, Grise demonstrates that Coyolxauhqui’s story of dismemberment and separation is a story embodied and borne by *all* subjects of trauma. Grise’s characterization of Blu/Huitzilopochtli as “broken” demonstrates the playwright’s impetus to transcend dualistic reasoning, such as an “us versus them” mentality, which only contributes to and maintains imperatives to classify and rank life forms.

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<sup>94</sup> Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, vol. 1, trans. Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1988), 170.

<sup>95</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, “now let us shift ... the path of conocimiento ... inner work, public acts,” in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 545, 541.

<sup>96</sup> Grise, *blu*, 32.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

The myth of Coyolxauhqui is a vital component in Grise's play, which highlights the ways in which the categorization of life—including the distinction between “you” and “me”—produces broken subjects, or what I am calling “subjects of trauma.” The characters’ psychic brokenness prompts their broken traumatic and traumatizing memories. One scene in particular poignantly demonstrates the content of these memories. As Eme, Blu, and Lunatico share a memory of being inducted into the gang, they speak in the round, repeating “rocks, fists, bleach, belts, boots,” signaling the instruments they use to assault the person being initiated into the gang. Directions indicate that during this past incident, “*GEMINI watches from the roof, unnoticed.*”<sup>100</sup> Eme, Blu, and Lunatico hear a single gunshot and duck, while stage lights go up on Gemini sitting alone on the rooftop.<sup>101</sup> In her own soliloquy, she observes, “chain linked fence, clothesline, backseat of a truck, pulled out/turned lawn chair, a pair of tennis shoes left hanging.”<sup>102</sup> The significance of these words becomes clear later when Blu writes letters to both Eme and Gemini. As Eme and Gemini read their letters aloud from their respective spaces, Blu’s, Gemini’s, and Eme’s voices simultaneously describe “home”: “chain linked fence, clothesline, backseat of a truck, pulled out/turned lawn chair, a pair of tennis shoes left hanging.”<sup>103</sup> By depicting “home” using the same words Gemini has used to describe what she sees from atop the roof when the males in her family recall their gang initiation, Grise draws attention to what “home” signifies for people of the barrio. “Home” means being laid bare, being without cover, without protection. Home is like being exposed as are the clothes being dried by the sun, the lovers in a truck, trying to escape prying eyes, the bodies in lawn chairs on public display, and the shoes hanging on a telephone wire for everyone to see yet out of grasp for anyone to salvage.

This notion of home makes sense in Gemini’s soliloquy in which she continues, “dance against the sky, blow away in the night. rocks, fists, bleach, belts, boots ... ssssh ... ssssh ... sssssshhhhh.”<sup>104</sup> For Gemini, home is where violence, such as ritual initiations of gang members, occurs. Later in the play, she repeats this list of tools used to “break in” gang members to the brutality of *la vida loca*, recollecting the crisis that broke her—a gang rape when she “was just a little girl”:

sssssssssh. (beat.) rocks, fists, bleach, boots. a group of homies form a circle around me  
 .... closed my eyes. sky black. my body outside this body circling. watched them. a group  
 of homies. move closer. arms reach round me. push me up against the fence. broken  
 pieces of styrofoam. caught. chain linked fence. an old pair of tennis shoes left hanging.  
 throw me to the floor. hard. lie me down. kicked and screamed. they pushed up against  
 my insides.<sup>105</sup>

Through this scene, Grise points out how women and girls too are part of these initiations into male gangs. The rape of female bodies is yet another tool for young men to prove their masculinity and their readiness for *la vida loca*. Women and girls become “casualties of war” in this sense, for they become faceless bodies, things to be exploited and discarded, as if they were not living beings. The Group of Boys who rape Gemini is played by Eme, Luna, Soledad, and Hailstorm but they are “*heard not seen,*” as stage directions point out. Blu is not present during

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

Gemini's rape; the audience learns this fact when Blu apologizes to Gemini for not doing more after she tells him about her rape.<sup>106</sup> Although the males in her family do not directly rape Gemini, Grise's use of repetition to show overlap between the characters' broken memories signals Eme's, Blu's, and Lunatico's participation in the reproduction of crimes against women. Through this especially violent memory of Gemini's rape, Grise shows how even broken subjects—like the males in Gemini's family—can break others.

### **Being and Becoming, Or the Coyolxauhqui Imperative**

Grise suggests *la vida loca* is not the only option for these subjects of trauma who experience what Anzaldúa terms "the Coyolxauhqui state," a state of "dissociation and fragmentation that characterizes our times."<sup>107</sup> This psychic state arouses and forces us to confront "[o]ur collective shadow—made up of the destructive aspects, psychic wounds, and splits in our own culture," writes Anzaldúa.<sup>108</sup> The playwright's careful integration of elements in the Coyolxauhqui myth encourages a more hopeful interpretation of what the future can hold for subjects of trauma. "Coyolxauhqui," Anzaldúa establishes, "is your symbol for both the process of emotional psychic dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form, a partially unconscious work done in the night by the light of the moon, a labor of re-visioning and re-membering."<sup>109</sup> That is, though Coyolxauhqui's story highlights their brokenness, the story also prompts subjects of trauma to imagine "new forms," to piece back together the fragments of their broken lives. The attempt to reassemble our selves, to pull our selves out of a state of *desconocimiento*, is termed "conocimiento," a "form of spiritual inquiry."<sup>110</sup> *Conocimiento* thus is another survival option for subjects of trauma.

However, unlike *la vida loca*, the first survival option, *conocimiento* facilitates both physical and *psychic* survival. Early on in the play, Gemini shows signs of possessing *conocimiento*, which prompts "you [to] embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself."<sup>111</sup> For instance, sitting on the rooftop reminds Gemini "the world is so much bigger than [her] neighborhood, than [her] street."<sup>112</sup> Shifting her position, Gemini gains a different perspective of the world. She recognizes, "from up here, you can't tell the difference between north and south, east and west. everything looks so amazing."<sup>113</sup> The young girl is aware that even cardinal directions are not delineated by rigid boundaries. From the rooftop, she hones her *conocimiento*, and she can more easily perceive the dissolution of categories. Contrary to the grim environment her family and those in the *barrio* see, Gemini's literal and metaphorical position allows her a larger frame of reference and enables her to see more than the grim environment of the *barrio*. Shifting positions, she is able to appreciate that gradual change can

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>107</sup> Anzaldúa, "Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound," 311.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> Anzaldúa, "now let us shift," 546.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Grise, *blu*, 14.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*



occur as it does when “the sky turns neon when the sun sets.”<sup>114</sup> Her *conocimiento* facilitates her ability to hope for more than the circumstances of her *barrio* life. Grise emphasizes this character’s unique quality, describing her as a “would be traveler” and “dreamer.”<sup>115</sup>

Other characters also wish to transcend their positions in the *barrio*, but it takes them longer to make the psychic shift Gemini makes to cultivate hope. For example, Lunatico struggles with dreaming. Gemini asks him, “what do you dream, luna?”<sup>116</sup> He responds tersely, “told ya. i don’t dream.”<sup>117</sup> When she tells him, “sometimes the dreams, the dreams is all we got, bro,” signaling the motivational power of dreams and hope, he reveals the same dream Blu has. At different times, both Lunatico and Blu confess, “sometimes. i dream of flyin. i don’t even know where to. just flying. my body outside this body. circling. i want to see where the horizon meets the earth. i want to dance against the sky, gemini.”<sup>118</sup> Lunatico’s and Blu’s descriptions of flying may represent the “flight” of the spirit associated with trauma; they recognize their spirits are not wholly situated within their earthly bodies. These descriptions may also suggest they dream of countering forces—like gravity or their socioeconomic plight—that keep them in place on earth. They dream of “circling” their earthly bodies as the moon orbits the earth. From that position in space, they can see that the “horizon” they see on earth is but a matter of perspective. From earth, the horizon is an unreachable clean, flat line that appears to separate the sky and earth. For Lunatico, Blu, and Gemini floating above earth enables them to see that the earth is enveloped by sky, by space. In this way, the sky, space itself, is always already touching the earth. Further, the brothers’ desire to dance against the sky evidences their desire to dance against something vaster than the mission walls or chain-linked fences surrounding their *barrio*. But this desire to dance against the sky proves more vital for subjects of trauma like Gemini whose wish is a prayer to escape physical violence: the rape she endures. She remembers, “no one hears. no one hears. i pray. eyes closed. dance against the sky. blow away in the night. back on concrete.”<sup>119</sup> Soledad wishes the same: “there are some times that i just want to blow away in the night. want to dance against the sky, underneath a full moon.”<sup>120</sup> This mother to children in the *barrio* too wishes to be free of the violent conditions that weigh her down. Through Soledad’s comment, Grise seems to be following Anzaldúa’s guide for the path to *conocimiento*. Toward the end of one tumultuous phase in the process of coming to consciousness, Anzaldúa explains, “Coyolxauhqui’s luz [light] pulls you from the pit of your grief.”<sup>121</sup> In a later phase, Anzaldúa anticipates, “As a modern-day Coyolxauhqui, you search for an account that encapsulates your life, and finding no ready-made story, you trust her light in the darkness to help you bring forth ... a new personal myth.”<sup>122</sup> Wishing to dance “underneath a full moon,” Soledad appears to trust the moon’s light to heal her psychic brokenness. Lunatico, Blu, Gemini, and Soledad each wish to be guided by or become like Coyolxauhqui who transcends her wounds and transforms into not only the moon but also “la Danzante Celeste,” or the Celestial Dancer, she who dances

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>121</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 553.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 559-60.

against the sky.<sup>123</sup> In such manner, these characters exhibit a type of insight, Coyolxauhqui consciousness, which prompts the imperative “to heal and achieve integration.”<sup>124</sup> Anzaldúa terms this “the Coyolxauhqui imperative.”<sup>125</sup>

These characters’ magnetism to the Coyolxauhqui imperative is apparent in their daydreams. Both Lunatico and Blu emphasize they want to “stop fightin. stop frontin. just be.”<sup>126</sup> Relevantly, the Recruitment Officer entices Blu to join the military by offering him an opportunity to “just be.”<sup>127</sup> “Just being,” in this case, signifies simply existing without violence in one’s life. (Of course, the Recruitment Officer has lied to Blu, for the military, especially in times of war, does not allow one to “stop fightin. stop frontin.”) Yet Grise suggests that “just being” does not entail remaining motionless, as Hailstorm reminds Soledad that even the seemingly still earth spins on its axis.<sup>128</sup> Anzaldúa stresses, “The Coyolxauhqui imperative is an ongoing process of making and unmaking. There is never any resolution, just the process of healing.”<sup>129</sup> Coyolxauhqui’s story impels subjects of trauma to “be” by “becoming,” or constantly transforming. “Being” is a process. When Gemini asks Hailstorm why Coyolxauhqui has to die, Hailstorm clarifies, “not dead. she turned into the moon.”<sup>130</sup> Like the moon that cycles through its phases, Coyolxauhqui is not irreparably fragmented (dead) but instead constantly regenerating (turning into something) to reflect the rhythm of an ever-changing spiritual cosmos.<sup>131</sup>

Blu’s and Gemini’s individual stories demonstrate that *conocimiento* includes awareness of the Coyolxauhqui imperative to constantly regenerate and transform. Anzaldúa explains that during the process of *conocimiento*, “You begin to define yourself in terms of who you are becoming, not who you have been.”<sup>132</sup> In this way, *conocimiento*, as a survival tactic, stresses for subjects of trauma they can indeed rewrite their stories and “become.” Learning that the moon was broken into a million pieces by Huitzilopochtli, Gemini resolves, “not goin down like that. not gonna go down like that. not this time” and takes action to change her path.<sup>133</sup> Soon after, “*The sun slowly lowers from the sky. The moon rises.*”<sup>134</sup> The family then creates a large circle

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<sup>123</sup> María Anzures Rionda, *Coyolxauhqui: Nuestra Madre Cósmica* (México: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura Nahuatl, 1991), 5.

<sup>124</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 556; Anzaldúa, “Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound,” 312.

<sup>125</sup> Anzaldúa, “Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound,” 303-17.

<sup>126</sup> Grise, *blu*, 28.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>129</sup> Anzaldúa, “Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound,” 312.

<sup>130</sup> Grise, *blu*, 47.

<sup>131</sup> María Anzures Rionda writes, “Coyolxauhqui nos los indica con su propio ritmo generador ella es LA DANZANTE CÓSMICA, danzante de la reintegración, ella no está descuartizada, ni desmembrada, está dividida en 6 partes porque es el esbozo del ritmo de la unidad primordial. [Coyolxauhqui indicates, with her own generative rhythm, she is THE COSMIC DANCER, dancer of reintegration. She is not cut into four nor dismembered. She is divided into six parts because she is the blueprint for the rhythm of primordial unity.]” See Anzures Rionda, *Coyolxauhqui*, 36; my translation.

<sup>132</sup> Anzaldúa, “now let us shift,” 556.

<sup>133</sup> Grise, *blu*, 47.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

and dances counterclockwise to the sound of drums.<sup>135</sup> Grise notes, “*There is something ancient, ceremonial in the dance. Shifts to more contemporary movement and gestures. At the height of the dance, GEMINI dives off the roof. Arms extended in flight. Lights out before she hits concrete. You can hear her breathing in the dark.*”<sup>136</sup> The transition from an ancient dance to a more contemporary one parallels Gemini’s call for a shift from an old narrative to a newer one. In fact, Gemini later confirms the need for a new narrative. She tells Lunatico, “i knew, i knew when blu left he wouldn’t come back.” She continues,

i’m rewriting the myth. clipped his wings. because this time i do not die. this time he was the ultimate sacrifice. i cut out and eat his heart. even if more a moment, the war will end. the moon will swim. i’ve been dead too long. we’ve been dead too long, luna. i’m gonna resurrect. gonna resurrect me. not gonna die. not this time. not gonna go down like that.<sup>137</sup>

Grise rewrites the plight of Coyolxauhqui for a more contemporary audience. Standing in for the moon goddess, Gemini impedes her brother’s “rise” by clipping his wings. Coyolxauhqui is, by association with Gemini, no longer the sacrificial victim; Gemini/Coyolxauhqui offers the son/sun as sacrifice. Gemini/Coyolxauhqui does not survive as the moon, however. She does not rise into the heavens as before but instead, as the family dance reveals, falls down and continues to breathe.

Grise’s revision of the Coyolxauhqui story accents different parts of the play, and it is up to the audience to piece together how the moon falls and what happens after. At different times, Eme and Gemini both foreshadow that helicopters—to which Eme refers as “metal birds in the barrio. huntin people like vultures”—are “gonna fall out the sky.”<sup>138</sup> The two characters also foresee “someone’s gonna throw a rock into the air” and “the moon is going to break into a million pieces. fall into the ocean.”<sup>139</sup> Eme does not indicate a causal relationship between the rock thrown into the air and the moon’s breakage. Gemini’s conversation with Soledad, however, adds detail to and clarifies the event:

GEMINI: the moon she gonna break into a million pieces. fall into the ocean turn sirena [mermaid].

SOLEDAD: sirena?

GEMINI: sirenas never die, singing underneath a black sky. one day, someone’s gonna throw a rock into the air.

SOLEDAD: make the helicopters fall out the sky?

GEMINI: yeah ma, they gonna fall out the sky one day ...<sup>140</sup>

Gemini rewrites the myth, transforming the moon into a sirena, a mermaid, that will never die or wane like the moon. This transformation can occur because a “rock”—perhaps the moon rock herself—makes the helicopter, representative of “the bird” Huitzilopochtli, fall out of the sky. Abolishing Huitzilopochtli’s heteropatriarchal reign, Coyolxauhqui is free to regenerate into a sirena, a being who is neither sexed or gendered nor human or animal and thus complicates and defies Western classification and categorization.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 31 and 41.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 41-42; ellipsis in original.

In Blu's case, he eventually transforms—both psychically and physically—by joining the military. Although his decision to join costs him his life, his decision is based on not wanting to endure *la vida loca*. Explaining why he joins the military, Blu says, “don't wanna wind up dead or in jail. you know. not goin down. not going down like that.”<sup>141</sup> Like Gemini who is “not going down like that” either, Blu takes action to change his future path; he leaves to the Iraq War and is finally able to achieve his dream of flying—albeit in a helicopter. In a letter to Gemini, he writes, “dear gemini, i rode in a helicopter for the first time today. from up here everything looks so amazing.”<sup>142</sup> The two characters' voices merge, simultaneously saying, “from up here, you can't tell the difference between north and south, east and west ... the world is so much bigger than our neighborhood, than our street.”<sup>143</sup> Through this dialogue, Grise demonstrates from this position, Blu is more aware and hopeful than he was in the barrio. While Gemini has been aware of the vastness of the world since the beginning of the play, Blu comes to this consciousness after his own life shift that allows him to perceive life differently.

Another phase of Blu's transformation occurs when three Soldiers, “played by Eme, Blu, and Lunatico,” report that Blu has died in the war.

SOLDIERS: we regret to inform you

EME: his helicopter fell out the sky.

LUNATICO: the stars became guerilleras.

BLU: the moon fell into the ocean.

LUNATICO: turned sirena.

EME: and now the sky is black.<sup>144</sup>

This dialogue alludes to the idea that Blu, whose helicopter has fallen out of the sky, has finally transformed into the moon. That is, Huitzilopochtli—not Blu, the subject of trauma—has been sacrificed. Huitzilopochtli's heteropatriarchal dominion is abolished. Blu, like Gemini and other subjects of trauma, is able to regenerate into a different form previously disallowed under Huitzilopochtli's reign. Blu, a subject of trauma who has been “dead too long,” transforms into the moon and then into a sirena, who, as Gemini has noted, “will never die.” In a previous scene, Eme notes that when the moon falls into the ocean, “the sky's gonna be black. before there were colors, the sky was black, not blue. the sky has always been black.”<sup>145</sup> In the time before war, before Huitzilopochtli came to be and introduced war, there was no sun and thus no blue sky and no colors; the sky was black. Gemini's revision of the Coyolxauhqui myth restores the time before war, before Huitzilopochtli. This rewriting of the myth is mindful of Blu's position as a subject of trauma and does not simply surrender him by doing unto him as Huitzilopochtli has done unto Coyolxauhqui. The rewriting is not a mere reversal of gendered fates. Gemini's *conocimiento* allows her to circumvent dualistic thinking that pits “us” (sisters) against “them” (our brothers) by focusing on the imperative to shift consciousness and make space for becoming.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 31.

## Ocean Waters Carry Us Home

*blu* concludes with Gemini standing in the middle of a circle of blue candles, creating a portrait of the young bathed by blue candlelight, an illusion of the girl surrounded by water. Everyone except for Blu and Gemini prays, “ocean waters carry you . . . ocean waters carry you . . . ocean waters carry you . . . carry us home.”<sup>146</sup> The family calls forth the rejuvenating ocean waters, into which the moon falls, to heal “you” (Blu and Gemini) and “us” (the rest of the family). Again, the playwright resists creating a separation between “you” and “I.” Further, in Nahua mythology, ocean waters are associated with Chalchiuhtlicue, a water deity sometimes identified as a sirena, a mermaid.<sup>147</sup> Barbara E. Mundy describes,

From the perspective of lived experience, Chalchiuhtlicue *was* a terrifying presence in the city [Tenochtitlan]; in the rainy summer months, Chalchiuhtlicue’s waters could break like an uncontrollable surge of amniotic fluid, invading the city, rushing down its streets, uprooting the carefully planted *chinampas*, washing away the adobe buildings that many called home.<sup>148</sup>

Depicted as drowning people, the water deity thus has violent potential. She is related to death but also fertility, purification, and birth.<sup>149</sup> In this sense, it is fitting for the family to pray to the ocean, Chalchiuhtlicue, who both kills and births a new Blu. She purifies the heteropatriarchal “home” introduced by the Huitzilopochtli. For those of us, who strive to see “that place where the horizon meets the earth,” Chalchiuhtlicue reminds us of her power to integrate and transform our traumas by devouring Huitzilopochtli as the sun sets each day. Her reminder for each day’s and night’s constant becoming serves as motivation for us, subjects of trauma.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>147</sup> Anuschka van’t Hooft, *The Ways of the Water: A Reconstruction of Huastecan Nahua Society Through Its Oral Tradition* (Amsterdam: Leiden University Press, 2007), 237.

<sup>148</sup> Barbara E. Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 43; emphasis and italics in original.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.; Van’t Hooft, *The Ways of the Water*, 237; Grisel Gómez-Cano, *The Return to Coatlicue: Goddesses and Warladies in Mexican Folklore* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010), 177.

**CONCLUSION**  
**Being, Becoming, Unfolding of Teotl and the Cosmos:**  
**An Ontological Shift**

*“Somos gente ritual, porque el rito nos hace fusionarnos con el ritmo del universo.”<sup>1</sup>*

We are a ritualistic people because rite makes us fuse with the rhythm of the universe. Many of us avoid rites and rituals, however, hoping to be free of the limits these rituals may impose on us. For a long time, I resisted the idea that I—all parts of “me,” mindbodyspirit—needed rhythm, routine, which I interpreted as *clock-time*, to function healthily. After all, for me, a critic of capitalist modalities, the clock represents work-discipline. It connotes pressure for worker synchronicity for the sole aim of increased profits for the capitalist.<sup>2</sup> I have also been hesitant to use the word *discipline* to describe any life regimen, such as daily writing and exercise, which alleviated psychic pain. Discipline, explains Foucault, is one way in which power is exercised.<sup>3</sup> I did not want to be disciplined, especially not by the “external schemata” dominant society requires one to accept in order for one to be considered “normal.”<sup>4</sup> No. I did not want to surrender to the rhythm of the colonial or neoliberal machine, which, as I explained in Chapter 1, disorganized and continues to disassemble Indigenous forms of thought and living, and created what I have referred to as “subjects of trauma.”

Through my reading and analysis of decolonial and queer Xicana feminist plays, though, I learned to distinguish between the rhythm of clock-time and the rhythm of a cosmic energy that connects all life, and I believe, if it is acknowledged, can assuage Chicanas’ psychic pain. In Chapter 2, I demonstrated how Cherríe Moraga’s drama, *The Hungry Woman*, suggests this rhythm incites “a resurrection of the ancient in order to construct the modern.”<sup>5</sup> Moraga, I argued, resurrects ancient stories of what I named “heteropatriarchal betrayal” within “a decolonial imaginary” to help us construct our modern plans for future decolonization. Looking to past narratives of trauma as a guide, Moraga calls for a shift in our thinking about subjectivity and offers us a vision for a decolonized self that is intersubjective. In other words, the decolonized self recognizes its interconnection with other selves, other beings—many of whom Western philosophers and scientists do not believe to be “alive.” Similarly, as I argued in Chapter 3, Adelina Anthony’s triptych, *Las Hociconas*, reminds us that this rhythm-energy traverses bodies. In this third chapter, I elucidated the decolonizing potential of theater and performance spaces by exploring the healing potential of Anthony’s performance of a series of affects including anger, sadness, and desire. These affects, which are necessary processes for assuaging Chicana trauma, are imbued with the rhythm of cosmic energy that can literally affect audience members. This rhythm-energy can shift affect in a subject of trauma sitting in the

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<sup>1</sup> “We are ritualistic people because rite makes us fuse with the rhythm of the universe.” María Anzures Rionda, *Coyolxauhqui: Nuestra Madre Cósmica* (México: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura Nahuatl, 1991), 16; my translation.

<sup>2</sup> E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” *Past and Present* 38 (1967): 56-97.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995), 215.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Moraga, *Last Generation*, 4.

audience. In Chapter 4, I showed how Virginia's *Grise blu*, a play set in the barrio, illuminates this same rhythm-energy that dances between and among bodies as it inspires hope. I analyzed this rhythm-energy, which precipitates the Coyolxauhqui imperative, and maintained *Grise* allows subjects of trauma to envision not only *being* but *becoming*.

In their own ways, all three playwrights highlight a form of what Anzaldúa terms "Coyolxauhqui consciousness" by drawing attention to fragmented or broken people like Medea, Luna, Adelina, La Angry Xicana?!, La Sad Girl . . . , La Chismosa!!!, *Blu*, Gemini, Lunatico, Soledad, Hailstorm, and Eme, and their desire to assuage their psychic pain by reassembling themselves. At other times, Anzaldúa refers to this consciousness as the "Coyolxauhqui imperative" and its effect as "Putting Coyolxauhqui Together" and offers it as one of the ways in which the process of making self occurs.<sup>6</sup> This "consciousness" or "imperative" is, as I now understand it, an awareness of the becoming and unfolding of *teotl*, "a single, all-encompassing macroprocess that consists of a complex constellation of systematically interrelated and interpenetrating microprocesses."<sup>7</sup> These microprocesses, philosopher James Maffie explains, are responsible for the arrangement of everything, including reality and the cosmos, which themselves are the "single, all-encompassing macroprocess." *Teotl* is "a creative and artistic process since *teotl* endlessly fashions and refashions itself *into* and *as* the cosmos."<sup>8</sup> Like *teotl*, the Coyolxauhqui imperative that is woven throughout the three Xicana productions I analyze helps us recognize the self as a creative, *spiritual* process that constantly generates and regenerates. The cosmos—and, by extension, the self—is, as Maffie aptly notes, an "ongoing work of performative art."<sup>9</sup>

Moraga, Anthony, and *Grise* make use of *La Danzante Galáctica*, the Galactic Dancer, Coyolxauhqui to represent this timeless performance of regeneration.<sup>10</sup> Each *teatrística* honors *teotl* through both the form and the content of her production by illuminating how subjects of trauma are—like the cosmos—always in flux and always in process. María Anzures Rionda explains, "Coyolxauhqui nos lo indica con su propio ritmo generador ella es LA DANZANTE CÓSMICA, danzante de la reintegración, ella no está descuartizada, ni desmembrada, está dividida en 6 partes porque es el esbozo del ritmo de la unidad primordial. [Coyolxauhqui indicates, with her own generative rhythm, she is THE COSMIC DANCER, dancer of reintegration. She is not cut into four nor dismembered. She is divided into six parts because she is the blueprint for the rhythm of primordial unity.]"<sup>11</sup> Focusing on the self as one that is not permanently broken or fragmented but instead only temporarily fragmented like Coyolxauhqui inspires hope and reminds us we are in tune with the rhythm of the universe. This shift in thinking to understanding the self as part of the cosmos might be necessary for contemporary subjects of trauma who feel themselves disconnected from their environments. For subjects of trauma, recognizing *teotl* and thus acknowledging our interconnectedness is a form of resistance

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 85, 95-116.

<sup>7</sup> James Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2014), 185.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*, 82.

<sup>10</sup> The word "regeneration" is quite apt in the context of my study of intergenerational and historical trauma, especially as the word itself not only signifies a type of rejuvenation but also underscores the remaking of a generation of a family or kinship group.

<sup>11</sup> Anzures Rionda, *Coyolxauhqui*, 36; my translation.

to the ontological violence perpetrated against our ancestors, who believed/maintained in a balanced—that is, non-hierarchical—world of dualities in which difference and not sameness was integral. Every part of the cosmos including people, animals, plants, stars, and rocks was integral to the unfolding of the cosmos. Furthermore, thinking about the self and subjects as cosmically situated and interwoven with the cosmos is but one part of a decolonial process that rejects self-other hierarchies and dichotomies. In order to decolonize the self, we must also decolonize our relationships with all life forms. We must rethink being itself in our desire to become our complete selves.

An ontological shift in thinking is necessary to disassemble the harmful heterosexist, racist, and overall hateful narratives we internalize as we repeat them to each other and ourselves as a result of historical and intergenerational trauma. Such an ontological shift requires that we integrate the spiritual into our understandings of self especially in relation to the “other,” for it is this shift from psychologizing to spiritualizing, as Eduardo Duran has said, that will enable us to more fully understand what ails all of us—not only subjects of trauma—psychically/spiritually.

### **Future Directions for “Becoming”**

Throughout this dissertation, I have posited how Chicana subjectivity is a sociohistorical and geopolitical process that necessarily includes *time* and *place*. This line of thinking motivates me to investigate, in the future, the parallels between feminist of color and postmodern conceptualizations of *subjectivity* and the Nahuatl concept of self/being, the latter of which is intrinsically tied to *teotl*, which moves through a pattern of *time-place* (the when-where of people, happenings, and all things) and *tonalli* (vital force).<sup>12</sup> Time-place is “a matter of *how*” *teotl* becomes and unfolds. Maffie describes *tonalli* as “[t]ime-place orientation or position in the overall *tonalpohualli*.”<sup>13</sup> The *tonalpohualli* is a repeating pattern of 260 *tonalli*. The Nahuas recorded this pattern in the *tonoalamatl*, “the book of *tonallis*.”<sup>14</sup> Maffie takes note, “*In this way human beings are essentially timed and placed.*”<sup>15</sup> A person’s *tonalli* is dependent upon the day of one’s birth, as time-place is charged with *tonalli*.<sup>16</sup> *Tonalli*’s energy and influence, writes Maffie, vary qualitatively throughout the 260-day *tonalpohualli* and throughout the course of one day.<sup>17</sup> Each person, then, is shaped by a distinctive quality of one of the 260 *tonalli*. This *tonalli* determines a person’s “inner vigor, power, energy, and character.”<sup>18</sup> To reiterate: both individuals and *teotl* are animated by *tonalli*. “The concept of *tonalli* in ancient times,” Alfredo López Austin clarifies however, “was not the equivalent of ‘soul’ in Western terms.”<sup>19</sup> He

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<sup>12</sup> Here I am following James Maffie’s explanation of time-place and one of Alfredo López Austin’s descriptions of *tonalli*. See Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*, 422; Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, vol. 1. trans. Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*, 424.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, *Aztec Philosophy*, 424.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, *Aztec Philosophy*, 271.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Alfredo López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology: Concepts of the Ancient Nahuas*, vol. 1. trans. Thelma Ortiz de Montellano and Bernard Ortiz de Montellano (Salt Lake City, UT:



explains further, “From colonial times on, the expression of ‘loss of soul’ was used because of Christian influence.”<sup>20</sup> Tonalli is best described as “a force.” It is a force that “gives a person vigor, warmth, valor, and allows him [sic] to grow.”<sup>21</sup> It “takes substance as something that seems to be breath.”<sup>22</sup> Moreover, “gods, animals, plants, and things participate” in this force.<sup>23</sup> Tonalli is thus an animating force that permeates and connects all things.<sup>24</sup>

Animated by tonalli, both people and teotl unfold or become. In this sense, a person is not only a *reflection* but also an *extension* of the cosmos. In fact, for the Nahuas, “There was a whole complex of ideas by which the universe was conceived as a projection of the human body and, inversely, explained human physiology in relation to the general processes of the cosmos.”<sup>25</sup> The Nahua, I gather, conceive of a subject that is always in process. I draw attention to this conceptualization because social groups’ formulations of the human body guide and justify how people relate to one another and their environments.

For instance, seventeenth century Western thinkers such as Kant and Descartes grounded subjectivity in the split between mind and body. This split privileged *reason*—objective and neutral thought independent of external circumstances. Today, people governed by the United States—a nation founded upon principles like individualism and Cartesian thinking, which emerged from Enlightenment thinking—suffer the social, political, and economic consequences of Western formulations of subjectivity. People relate to one another as self-sufficient, reasoning individuals without realizing our interconnectedness. This failure to realize our interdependence leads to domination, oppression, and much suffering. Enlightenment conceptualizations of subjectivity also give way to teleological narratives about being. Social expectations thus enforce a “bootstrap” mentality that hones in on making “progress” possible.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, those who do

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University of Utah Press, 1988), 206. Elena Avila, for instance, defines it as such. See Elena Avila with Joy Parker, *Woman Who Glows in the Dark: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1999), 51.

<sup>20</sup> López Austin, 206.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>24</sup> For more in-depth analyses of tonalli, see López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*; Miguel León-Portilla, *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, trans. Jack Emory Davis (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963); Miguel León-Portilla, “Three Forms of Thought in Ancient Mexico,” in *Studies in Symbolism and Cultural Communication*, ed. F. Allen Hanson (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1982), 9-24; John D. Monaghan, “The Person, Destiny, and the Construction of Difference in Mesoamerica,” *RES* 33 (1998): 137-46; Eva Hunt, *The Transformation of the Hummingbird: Cultural Roots of a Zinacatecan Mythical Poem* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); David Carrasco, *City of Sacrifice: The Aztec Empire and the Role of Violence in Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); Jacques Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, trans. Patrick O’Brien (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970).

<sup>25</sup> López Austin, *The Human Body and Ideology*, 3.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the history of the notion of progress as an ideology, see Teodor Shanin, “The Idea of Progress,” in *The Post-Development Reader*, ed. Majid Rahnema (London: Zed Books, 1997), 65-71.

not express “reason” or make “progress” in socially-acceptable (read: White supremacist, heteronormative, capitalist, and colonial) ways become deemed and treated as less than human.

In the Americas, this type of Western thinking attempted to displace Mesoamerican thought that understood the self as dynamic, situated within time and place, and interconnected with the cosmos. Nahua philosophers’ understanding of self thus made space for being, which can imply stillness, as well as becoming, intimating rhythmic change and potentiality. For the Nahua philosophers, however, the unfolding and becoming of *teotl* “does not move toward a predetermined goal or ineluctable end (*telos*) at which point *teotl* realizes itself (like Hegel’s absolute spirit) or at which point history or time comes to an end.”<sup>27</sup> Maffie writes, “*Teotl*’s tireless becoming is not linear in this sense. Like the changing of the seasons, *teotl*’s becoming is neither teleological nor eschatological.”<sup>28</sup> This type of thinking allows for people to relate to one another in an interconnected way.

Feminist of color theorists like Audre Lorde, Norma Alarcón, and Gloria Anzaldúa as well as postmodern thinkers like Jane Flax and Félix Guattari, for instance, similarly philosophize subjectivity as a type of “becoming.” In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Lorde creates a “biomythographical” subject, shaped by everyone and everything she has encountered.<sup>29</sup> Alarcón theorizes “subjects-in-process” as having “*provisional* identities.”<sup>30</sup> Anzaldúa philosophizes, “As our bodies interact with internal and external, real and virtual, past and present environments, people, and objects around us, we weave (*tejemos*), and are woven into, our identities. Identity, as consciously and unconsciously created, is always in process—self interacting with different communities and worlds.”<sup>31</sup> Flax grants subjectivity is “heterogeneous and incomplete processes.”<sup>32</sup> Guattari admits, “[E]ach individual, each social group, conveys its own system of modelling [sic] unconscious subjectivity, that is, a certain cartography made up of reference points that are cognitive, but also mythic, ritualistic, and symptomatological, and on the basis of which it positions itself in relation to its affects, its anxieties, and attempts to manage its various inhibitions and drives.”<sup>33</sup>

Like so many Western, Eastern, African, and Indigenous philosophers before them, these latter postmodern writers theorize our existence in order to better understand how we fit in with the rest of the cosmos. Queer/decolonial feminist of color philosophers, however, philosophize and think about our existence not for the mere sake of intellectualizing but for survival—to synthesize ideas that will help us live through the violence of our everyday circumstances. We, queer, decolonial, U.S. Third World feminists of color theorize our existence, our being, and our becoming because our literal existence and being are in danger of ceasing to become. Many of us

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<sup>27</sup> Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*, 23.

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

<sup>29</sup> Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> Norma Alarcón, “Conjugating Subjects in the Age of Multiculturalism,” in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 137; emphasis in original.

<sup>31</sup> Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 69.

<sup>32</sup> Jane Flax, “Multiples: On the Contemporary Politics of Subjectivity,” in *Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics, and Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 93.

<sup>33</sup> Félix Guattari, “Subjectivities: For Better and for Worse,” in *The Guattari Reader*, ed. Gary Genosko (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 197.

are subjects of trauma and most—if not all—of us are *descendants* of subjects of trauma. We are each the “Hungry Woman” contending with betrayal. We are “la Angry Xicana,” “la Sad Girl,” and “La Chismosa,” who often consider suicide. We are Soledad, Gemini, and Hailstorm, who daily endure the cyclical nature of trauma, *la vida loca*, and socioeconomic and political violence. But we are also Coyolxauhqui, who illuminates the dark paths other subjects of trauma walk daily. We are the ones who search for fragments of our stories and our selves—disassembled by a racist heteropatriarchy—in the works of not only other women of color but even the people who choose to ignore our intersectional existence.

Assuaging the psychic and emotional pain of subjects of trauma is an integral part of any decolonial project. Under the umbrella of U.S. Third World feminism, queer Xicana feminist teatristas are simultaneously the people’s philosophers and healers. They offer us medicine to decolonize our psyches, our selves. They challenge us to bear witness to ourselves and subsequently help us integrate and assemble our colonial-and imperial-based intergenerational and historical traumas. These modern-day Coyolxauhquis challenge us, their moon-sisters, to keep moving in the direction of becoming by reiterating that we are not alone as those who commit acts of violence against us would have us believe. We are not split. We are infinitesimally interconnected with the whole of our environments, and therefore, must decolonize our selves as we decolonize all parts of the cosmos.

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