UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

"Bruja Feminism & Cultural Production: Reclaiming the Witch in the Neoliberal Era"

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

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The Dissertation of Norell Martínez is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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2019

DEDICATION

To all the brown and black "brujas" burned at the stake throughout history for holding knowledge of the earth and the body.

To the loves of my life: Sol, Malakai, Canneo and Justin

Y para mis bisabuelas, Maria y Pachita, who guide me in spirit, y mis abuelas, Elvira y Consuelo, whose knowledge of medicina de la tierra I will carry with me always.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Bruja Feminism & Cultural Production: Reclaiming the Witch in the Neoliberal Era"

by

Norell Martínez

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

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Professor Gloria Chacón, Co-Chair
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This study examines the current resurgence of the witch, or la Bruja, in Chicana/Latina/ Indigenous/Caribbean cultural production. I argue that women are connecting the history of witch-hunts with the oppression of their communities and are reclaiming la Bruja for political purposes. This phenomenon points to growing feminist consciousness among young women that the dark history of persecution of witches as women who resist patriarchy represents the intensification of attacks on women's rights and on nature as a whole under the current phase of neoliberal capitalism. These historically based issues are inspiring cultural production that engages with this recognition of the past. Thus, I connect the historic women-led resistance to

the colonial regime in the Americas that sought to obliterate native religious practices and healing knowledge by deeming it "devil worship," to the contemporary call by women of color through cultural texts to reclaim la Bruja. This project considers work produced by or about Indigenous, Chicana/Latina and Caribbean female artists, writers, filmmakers, rappers, poets and zine-makers that speaks to the challenges faced in their communities by drawing on Indigenous and African healing knowledge that once would have been deemed brujería. I view altars and offerings as symbolic of a Bruja aesthetic in the context of feminist poetry and an art zine produced by the L.A Chicana collective, Mujeres de Maíz. I examine the work of Zapotec rapper, Mare Advertencia Lirika, and her song and music video, "Mujer Maíz," and consider the maize diviner in the video as symbolic of a Bruja-healer. I also look at the history of hexing and poisoning as a form of resistance by enslaved women to examine two digital brujería (witchcraft) texts by Caribbean women who use the witch trope to hex Trump, alongside the novel, *Daughters of the Stone* by Afro-Puerto Rican author, Dahlma Llanos Figueroa. Finally, I analyze the documentary, *Catching Babies,* about a birth center in the US-Mexico borderlands and discuss the role of midwives, victims of witch-hunts in Europe and the Americas, to argue for humanizing birthing options. Ultimately, this study shows that la Bruja in cultural production is a response to gender inequality, gender violence and attacks on women's rights under neoliberal capitalism and that Bruja knowledge is as relevant today as it was in the past, as life as we know it —humans, plants and animals—face an existential threat.

INTRODUCTION

"Idols were destroyed, temples burned, and those who celebrated native rites and practiced sacrifices were punished by death; festivities such as banquets, songs, and dances as well as artistic and intellectual activities (paintings, sculptures, observation of stars, hieroglyphic writing) — suspected of being inspired by the devil — were forbidden and those who took part in them mercilessly hunted down"

-- Claude Baudez and Sydney Picasso *Lost Cities of the Maya*

"Witch-hunting did not destroy the resistance of the colonized. Due primarily to the struggle of women, the connection of the American Indians with the land, the local religions and nature survived beyond the persecution providing, for more than five hundred years, a source of anti-colonial, anti capitalist resistance."

--Silvia Federici *Caliban and the Witch*

"As neoliberal ideologies spread across the globe, people are feeling more anxious and helpless in the face of fascism. Witchcraft can be a wonderful antidote to those feelings."

--Daleth West *Spiral Nature Magazine*

"We are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn't burn!" "I'm only here to do brujería (witchcraft) on Trump!" These are slogans from protest signs at the 2019 San Diego's Women's March. The annual march to advocate for women's rights has turned into an anti-Trump protest since he occupied the White House. While the attack on women's rights did not begin with Trump, his presidency is a reminder that women's lives have become precarious and these protest signs are reflective of what some have coined, "witch feminism" or "witch activism" (figure 1 & 2). Women are connecting the history of witch-hunts with the oppression of their communities and are reclaiming la Bruja, or witch, for political purposes.[1] This phenomenon points to growing feminist consciousness among young women especially that equates the dark history of persecution of witches as women who resist patriarchy. These historically based issues are inspiring cultural production that engages with this recognition of the past.

[1] Because I focus specifically on Latinas and spiritual traditions that originated in countries colonized by the Spanish, I will be using the Spanish word "Bruja" (witch), "la Bruja" (the witch) or "brujería" (witchcraft) throughout this dissertation, but at times I will use the "witch" and "bruja" interchangeably.

In this study, I focus on marginalized cultural products that although quintessential to the audience, do not attract too much attention from critics. I examine texts by or about Indigenous, Chicana/Latina and Caribbean female artists, writers, filmmakers, rappers, poets and zine-makers that speak to the challenges their communities face by drawing on Indigenous and African healing knowledge; knowledge that would have once been deemed brujería. I propose that this work is a response to the intensification of the attack on women's rights under the phase of neoliberal capitalism. I find David Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession" a useful definition of neoliberalism:

> "the commodification and privatization of land and the forceful expulsion of peasant populations…conversion of various forms of property rights…into exclusive private property rights… suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labour power and the suppression of alternative (indigenous) forms of production and consumption; colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes of appropriation of assets (including natural resources); monetization of exchange and taxation, particularly of land; the slave trade (which continues particularly in the sex industry); and usury, the national debt and, most devastating of all, the use of the credit system as a radical means of accumulation by dispossession." 159

Throughout the world, this has worsened the material conditions for women, but more so for marginalized women of color. Research suggests "The privatization of public services such as health and education make them inaccessible to the most marginalized women" (Moussié 6). Furthermore, the privatization of land and natural resources disproportionately harms women who depend on farming, inhibiting their right to grow food and access water. As Rachel Moussié reports, "The extraction of natural resources through agribusiness, hydropower, and mining leads to ecological damage and contributes to climate change that will disproportionately affect women in the global South" (7). Additionally, Jon Burnett indicates that a correlation exists between austerity and the "production of hate,". According to Burnett, the escalating violence against the poor, the disabled, LGBTQ, migrants and women "under the rubric of

austerity…increasingly mirror[s] the institutional violence that is being implemented by the government" (221). As all living things are becoming more vulnerable under this phase of capitalism, including animals and plants, women are drawing on la Bruja to connect to the past and to reimagine a better future.[2]

Bruja Persecution from Europe to the Americas

To understand the significance of la Bruja in the past and appreciate the intricate connection to the present, a comprehensive look at Silvia Federici's work on the history of witch hunts in Europe in the 16th and 17th century can further the understanding of the modern significance of la Bruja for the feminist consciousness. Federici argues that patriarchy was crucial in the formation of capitalism in Europe in the 16th and 17th century and required the destruction of women's power through the extermination of so-called "witches." This deliberate extermination policy was implemented by the ruling class through the church and state (Federici, *Caliban* 63). She explains that through the process of primitive (original) accumulation, capitalism's need for an exploitable labor force created the necessary conditions to control women's bodies, sexuality and reproductive function in order to assure a constant labor force, turning the "female body into an instrument for the reproduction of the workforce" (Federici, "Notes"). Women's reproductive labor became undervalued and "a new sexual division of labor came into existence that deepened the differences between women and men, male and female labor, devalued women's work, subordinated women to men, and condemned women to unpaid labor" (Federici "Notes"). Devaluation of women's labor resulted in the execution of thousands of "witches" at the beginning of the modern era in Europe and the Americas.

[2] A United Nations' Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services report concluded that one million plants and animals could go extinct in the foreseeable future. Industrial farming and fishing were singled out as major drivers of the crisis. Human, animal and plant life are at risk today more than ever (*Democracy Now*!).

A look at the 1487 publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a treatise on demonology and guide to the conduct of witch trials in Europe written by the Catholic clergy Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger demonstrates the plethora of sexist views towards women that justified the idea that witches were more often women than men. The sexist views further propagated by this treatise dictated that women are vehicles for the devil's interventions on earth; they were weak, prone to sin, and easily induced by evil. "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust," they report, "which is in women insatiable… it is sufficiently clear that it is no matter for wonder that there are more women than men found infected with the heresy of witchcraft" (47). Five years after its publication, Columbus made his first voyage to the Americas and, Federici argues, the arrival of the Spanish "brought their baggage of misogynous beliefs and restructured the economy and political power in ways that favored men" (*Caliban* 230). They also brought with them the Christian notion of the devil and used it to target practitioners of the old religion, mainly women, as a strategy of control and repression.

In the colonies, witch-hunting was a means to destroy, brutalize and divide the Indigenous peoples and to justify their enslavement and genocide. Federici argues that evangelization went hand in hand with the demand by the Spanish Crown for an increase in the natural resources and thus, the exploitation of Indigenous labor (*Caliban* 226). According to her, "Witch-hunting was a deliberate strategy used by the authorities to instill terror, destroy collective resistance, silence entire communities, and turn their members against each other…[it] was a means of dehumanization and as such, the paradigmatic form of repression, serving to justify enslavement and genocide" (*Caliban* 220). It was essential to destroy Indigenous religion in order to fulfill this project and create a false narrative of the Americas as the "land of the devil." The Native population was full of heretics who needed to be "civilized" and taught the

way of God; they were idol worshipers incapable of cessation of evil without intervention. As Fernando Cervantes observes, Franciscan friars were convinced that "Satanic intervention was at the heart of Indian cultures" (26). Irene Silverblatt notes that the association between Indigenous religion and devil worship prompted further vehement action as "the Spanish beg[a]n to evaluate all native religious practice and theory according to European criteria. It was thus not a great leap from the discovery of idolatry to the discovery of witchcraft. Since witchcraft, in the logic of contemporary Western thought, involved a complot with the devil…" (171). A fierce campaign against Indigenous and African people who practiced their spiritual traditions was deployed as a means to silence and marginalize them, and the arts practiced mainly by women were mistrusted and repressed. Consequently, midwives, herbalists, medics, diviners and religious female leaders were charged with witchcraft. This process exhibits what Anibal Quijano calls the "coloniality of power," to describe the process of control and hegemony that emerged during the modernist era and the era of colonialism in the Americas that continues to be present today. He asserts that European colonizers "repressed as much as possible the colonized forms of knowledge production, the models of the production of meaning, their symbolic universe, the model of expression and objectification and subjectivity… repression in this field was most violent, profound, and long-lasting among the Indians of Ibero-America…" (541). Indeed, any knowledge and understanding of nature, humanity, and beauty or even what was considered to be magical— that stood outside of western European epistemology was deemed primitive and wrong. This had profound effects and, as Irene Lara asserts, should be considered one "of the greatest [forms of] hechicería (sorcery) of all, encouraging through their technologies of power this internalization that keeps us from re-membering…" (26).

With the establishment of the plantation economy in the Americas, similar accusations of witchcraft were made about African peoples. Documents by Jesuit priests display the correlation between witchcraft and religious rituals performed by enslaved Africans. According to Inquisitor Mañozca in New Granada (modern day Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela), colonists feared that the spiritual power of their slaves would cause illness and death: "when they see one of their slaves fall ill or die, they sense the harm that the witches cause" (qtd. in White 4). Similarly, Andrew Redden notes that in the 17th century New Granada, "Between 1614 and 1655 out of 28 cases of slaves or free Africans prosecuted for brujería… hechicería (sorcery), or superstition, 23 - an unusually high proportion in relative terms- were prosecuted for brujeria" (255). On islands throughout the Caribbean, the constant fear of slave uprisings also made African rituals suspicious and associated to witchcraft. Practitioners of African creolized religions like Jamaican Obeah, Cuban Lucumí or Haitian Vodou, were considered "devil worship" — a stigma that continues to exist today —and violently repressed and criminalized.[3]

Federici and Silverblatt document the importance of conserving Indigenous spiritual practices as a form of resistance against colonization and the central role that women played in the resistance, considering that it was largely women who were accused of witchcraft.[4] Silverblatt, whose work centers on colonial Perú notes, "The Spanish decreed that witchcraft and idolatry were indistinguishable; thus, witchcraft, maintenance of ancient traditions, and conscious political resistance became increasingly intertwined for colonial Indians. 'Witches,' manipulating structures and ideologies introduced politico-religious movement that was emerging in response to colonialism" (95). Similarly, Federici explains that in Central and

[3] The level of punishment and persecution varied throughout the Caribbean. In Jamaica, for instance, Obeah was criminalized, while other planation societies regarded equivalent practices with disapproval and suspicion but it did not always translate into constructing laws against them. However, it was still dangerous for people to practice their religion and necessary to do so in secret.

[4] Men were also accused of witchcraft as well, but records show that women were under more scrutiny than men.

Southern Mexico women played a leading role in defense of their communities against colonialism by preserving the old religion, playing leadership roles in underground idol-worship and directing or counseling anti-colonial revolts (231-232). Likewise, according to Barbara Bush in her work on Caribbean women in slave society, she claims that Black women in the Caribbean played a prominent role in religious rituals and resistance emanating from religious practices, which she notes, "played an important role in organized slave revolts; but it was also crucial in preserving the individuality of slaves. It provided them with a strong sense of group autonomy and the will and strength to survive" (153). This made women much more likely to be targets of the witch-hunts. As much as colonizers tried to curtail religious practices with the threat of witch-hunts, they consistently failed, and women were at the forefront. As Federici claims, "Witch-hunting did not destroy the resistance of the colonized. Due primarily to the struggle of women, the connection of the American Indians with the land, the local religions and nature survived beyond the persecution, providing, for more than five hundred years, a source of anti-colonial, anti capitalist resistance" (220). Today many women of color who claim la Bruja are tapping into this history of resistance and reclaim the word with pride to challenge patriarchy. As a Tarot reader, Tatianna Morales remarks, "[Brujería] is in our blood and must be activated for our empowerment and for the abolishment of the patriarchal rule. Reclaiming brujería is reclaiming our story and finding our voice as divine beings again" (qtd. in Yu).[5]

As the current trend in repurposing the witch continues to rise, women of color are tapping into this history through their cultural production, yet there is a dearth of scholarship documenting this phenomenon. Kristen J. Solleé in her book, *Witches Sluts Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive,* examines the history of the witch in the US. She looks at contemporary

[5] Yu, Eda. "Brujas Are Decolonizing Witchcraft With Indigenous Spirituality." *Broadly*, 10 Jan. 2018, https://broadly.vice.com

appropriations of the witch among feminists today and describes how these manifest in cultural production. Like Sollée, this work also focuses on cultural production. However, I highlight the work of women of color to understand, as Cultural Studies Lawrence Grossberg suggests, "the structures of power and inequality in the contemporary world and the possibilities for challenging them" (8). For women of color, la Bruja gives them a sense of agency in a world that is increasingly becoming unstable.

For this dissertation, the analysis of the following texts requires a look back to move forward, what the Akan in Ghana call *Sankofa*, meaning, "go back and fetch it" or "it is not taboo to return and fetch when you forget" (Temple 127). In other words, one must return to the past to understand the present to create a better future. Similarly, the Aymara term *Q'amasa Ajayu*, defined by Julieta Paredes as "la lucha de las mujeres que viene desde antes, que va hacia adelante para que no regresemos atrás ("the struggle of women that comes from before, that moves forward so that we do not have to go back")" also mirrors the purpose of this project (qtd. in Gargallo Celentani 306).[6]

Feminismo Comunitario: Memory, Community and Body Land

In this dissertation, I use a theoretical framework grounded in Indigenous feminists thought in Abiayala[7]. Feminismo comunitario*,* or community feminism, is not just a theory but a feminist praxis, political ideology and worldview that is grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, particularly the notion of equilibrium and well-being of all living things. It is a circular, rather than a linear, decolonial theory that both critiques neoliberal capitalism and connects the history of colonialism to the current neoliberal system that works to oppress women today.

[6] All translations in this dissertation are mine unless otherwise noted.

[7] In the Kuna language, *Abiayala* sometimes spelled Abya Yala, refers to the American continent since before the arrival of Columbus. Indigenous communities assert that using this term instead of "America" or "New World" is a step toward epistemic decolonization and the establishment of indigenous peoples' autonomy and self-determination.

According to feministas comunitarias, colonialism, capitalism and now neoliberalism —forces they say are rooted in patriarchy — are the cause of a great disequilibrium. Restoring equilibrium means dismantling these systems that are oppressive to women. In other words, when the power is disproportionately in the hands of men a great imbalance occurs in the community that needs to be recalibrated. If it is not, it will be detrimental for everyone. If the balance is regained, it will not only benefit women but the whole community. The two prominent voices of feminismo comunitario are Julieta Paredes (Aymara), known for her book, *Hilando fino desde el feminismo comunitario,* and Lorena Cabnal (Xinca), an activist and intellectual from Guatemala. Both are community organizers and intellectuals fighting for women's rights on the ground and are not affiliated with academic institutions. While feminismo comunitario is multi-layered, made up of various aspects too numerous to describe here, what I find most useful are the following three components:

1. *Memoria: Memoria* is one of five conceptual frameworks conceived by feminista comunitaria activists that allow one to understand the connection to the past to create change for the future. Paredes explains that *memoria* refers to the roots from which we come, what ties us to our ancestors and connects us to the struggles of our female ancestors more specifically. *Memoria* also signifies drawing on the knowledge of the grandmothers and great-grandmothers and the valuable technical, biotechnical and scientific contributions that they have made (Paredes 117). In Paredes' words,

> "La memoria nos habla de donde venimos, que problemas, que luchas se dieron en medio, como así las mujeres estamos donde estamos, nos habla de como antes, también hubieron mujeres rebeldes. Nos permite recoger a mujeres de nuestras comunidades en sus resistencias antipatriarcales y nos permite reconocer a las que hoy todavía están en las comunidades y valorarlas, algunas de ellas ancianitas, valorar sus aportes a nuestras luchas como mujeres" (117).[8]

[8] "Memory tells us where we come from, what problems, what struggles occurred since then; memory tells us why as women we are where we are, memory informs us of times when there were also rebellious women. It allows

Memoria is reminiscent of what Joni L. Jones calls the act of "radical remembering" a "profound reordering and revisioning" that "constitutes a breach in a patriarchal social order" (227). It is important to my project because la Bruja symbolizes the recuperating of the memory of struggles of those women who were persecuted for their rebellion against patriarchy.

2. *Community*: Community is the idea of being in relationship to the community and that the community in itself is an entity, an organism if you will; it is alive and dynamic. Feministas comunitarias do not see themselves as individuals in relation to men but as women and men in relation to the community based on the participation of both without hierarchies. Paredes asserts, "No queremos pensarnos frente a los hombres, sino pensarnos mujeres y hombres en relación a la comunidad" (79).[9] With this in mind, feministas comunitarias understand that women are half of a community and for the whole community to thrive both halves need to flourish. A community, in this case, is not limited to a village, town or city; it encompasses all forms of communities in our society: urban or rural, religious, cultural or political communities, communities of struggle, of territory, of education, of friendship and beyond (Paredes 86). Paredes explains that women are an essential part of all forms of communities, of society and the world, "We are half of everything," she says, "if we negate one part of the whole, it results in the denial of the existence of the other part (49). In other words, if women are denied equal access to resources, are mistreated and do not have a voice in decision-making, this will be detrimental to the whole community and creates a disequilibrium. As Paredes argues, "la comunidad es como un cuerpo, mitad del cuerpo son los hermanos, mitad del cuerpo somos nosotras. Hoy por el

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us to embrace women from our communities in their anti-patriarchal resistance and allows us to recognize and value those who are still in our communities today, some of them elderly; it helps us value their contributions to our struggles as women."

[9] "We do not want to think of ourselves in opposition to men, but to think of ourselves as women and men in relation to the community."

machismo, este cuerpo esta chueco y desequilibrado…para poder equilibrar a la comunidad, el lado de las mujeres tiene que darse más fuerza" (qtd. in Gargallo Celentani 329).[10] Through magic, spells, and healing, la Bruja helps advocate for community wellness in order to obtain social justice.

3. *Territorio Cuerpo* (Body Land): Territorio cuerpo is Lorena Cabnal's theory that bodies have a relationship to the network of life. She argues that the same patriarchal, colonial capitalist-neoliberal structures that expropriate and violate the earth are the same structures that violate women's bodies. Thus, territorio cuerpo is grounded in the ecofeminist notion that women's bodies are a continuation of the land. It is not the simplified or essentialized notion that women are more connected to the earth, as some feminist critics have expressed, but that the defense of both women's bodies and the earth go together and that women are more impacted by environmental catastrophe. She notes, "no concibo este cuerpo de mujer, sin un espacio en la tierra que dignifique mi existencia, y promueva mi vida en plenitud. Las violencias históricas y opresivas existen tanto para mi primer territorio cuerpo, como también para mi territorio histórico, la tierra" (23).[11] While territorio cuerpo is not deployed in every one of my chapters, this ecofeminist concept is fundamental to my project. La Bruja has always symbolized a figure that understands the power of nature and connects to the natural world to do her magic, such as the hierbera (herbalist) who heals with plants, or the midwife whose knowledge of the female body assists in women's reproductive health.

[10] "the community is like a body, half of the body are the brothers, half of the body is us. Today because of machismo, this body is crooked and unbalanced ... to be able to balance the community, the women's side has to grow stronger."

[11] "I cannot understand this woman's body without a space on earth that dignifies my existence and promotes my life in plentitude. Historical and oppressive violence exists both for my first body land, as well as for my historical body, the earth."

In the following pages I deploy feminismo comunitario in my study of la Bruja and cultural production. While some of the protagonists and/or producers of the texts I examine do not describe themselves as Brujas or use the word "Bruja," they display what would be considered "superstitious" and "primitive" practices. The texts also illustrate how women resisted repression and gendered violence by demonstrating forms of power that operated outside of patriarchal structural norms. In essence these texts reflect what Irene Lara calls a "bruja positionality," which she explains is "built on healing the internalized desconocimientos that dehumanize la Bruja and the transgressive spirituality and sexuality that she represents," as a practice of what Gloria Anzaldúa might call "spiritual activism" (13).[12] Spiritual activism is the belief in the unity of all things, our interdependence, and interconnectedness, or what AnaLouise Keating calls, "spirituality for social change" (242).[13] Thus, Lara notes, a bruja positionality enacts "a spiritual vision of interconnectedness between all living things; this entails claiming la Bruja within and without in spite of the fear her representation engenders in dominant culture" (13). This, she says, includes validating and deploying Indigenous, mestiza —and I would add African—spiritual knowledge to create social change (13). Hence, through the aesthetic forms, the symbols and images, the narrative and/or the cultural figures branded as Brujas, the texts reflect a Bruja positionality.

[12] By desconocimientos Lara refers to Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of conocimientos and desconocimientos. Conocimento is consciousness-raising, self-awareness and knowledge, wisdom and intuition that is generally not legitimized by the dominant culture (Anzaldúa *Interviews* 177-79). Desconocimiento is the opposite, "A not-knowing, a refusal to know, an ignorance that damages… Desconocimientos are the evils of modern life" (Anzaldúa *Interviews* 178).

[13] In "Now Let us Shift" and in and other writings Anzaldúa shares her ideas in different contexts about what she means by spiritual activism. Here she states, "You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label. This conocimiento motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, oceans —to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing" ("Now Let us Shift" 558). However, AnaLouise Keating's extensive studies on Anzaldúa's work and on spiritual activism specifically, gives a clearer definition of this concept as "specific actions designed to challenge individual and systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of social injustice…spirituality for social change…" (242)

In chapter 1, "Femzines, Altars and Ofrendas: Chicana Bruja Aesthetics in Times of Austerity," I discuss the altar as a Bruja aesthetic that is deployed in the self-published poetry and visual art zine, *Flor y Canto,* by East Los Angeles Chicana collective, Mujeres de Maíz (Women of Maize). The group was formed in the late 1990s, soon after the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented. California economy was in crisis due in part to privatization and deindustrialization, and the anti-Latino sentiment was high. Latino immigrants became the scapegoat for California's economic woes and as a result, Proposition 187 was passed — a law to ban undocumented immigrants from accessing non-emergency health care services and public education. While it was overturned the xenophobia towards Latinos did not disappear. I analyze the poetry and visual art in the volume titled, "Ofrendas of the Flesh," and look at how Chicanas in East L.A reclaim la Bruja by implementing the altar aesthetic in their zines, a medium they use to give a platform to Latinas to speak about their experiences, particularly the issue of gender violence. I use altars and *ofrendas* (offerings) as a framework alongside feminismo comunitario to examine the zine project as a whole and the poetry and visual art, in particular and deploy what Laura E. Perez calls altarities, offerings on an altar "where the material and the still disembodied are invoked" (6). Here the altar is symbolic of a politicized spirituality that makes the "invisible" visible in a time when women of color, particularly Latinas, are under attack. It honors women by placing them on metaphorical altars to give them homage. Furthermore, the altar as a Bruja aesthetic draws on the colonial legacy of persecution of Indigenous and African people in the Americas. The altar was a site to connect with the divine and to honor the ancestors but was relegated as devil-worship by the colonizers. In regions like Mexico, people were forced to hide their altars in the domestic sphere to continue

their spiritual practices because the clergy condemned them for idol-worship. Thus, the altar was considered a tool to perform brujería according to European colonizers.

In chapter 2, "Indigenous Feminist Hip Hop: Invoking the Maíz Diviner to Denounce Agribusiness in Mexico," I examine the work of Indigenous hip hop artist, Mare Advertencia Lirika, a Zapotec rapper from Oaxaca. I specifically focus on her song and music video, "Mujer Maíz," and argue that it is a denouncement of agribusiness and the importing of corn into Mexico after the NAFTA was implemented and the United States flooded the market, not allowing Mexican farmers to compete, one of the tragedies of neoliberalism. Mare makes a forceful anti-capitalist statement merging spirituality and ecofeminism to denounce the effects of neoliberalism on maize cultivation in Mexico in "Mujer Maíz." The song points to the impact of free trade agreements between the US and Mexico, its harmful effects on maize farmers due to the massive importation of US corn, alongside transgenetic contamination of maize—a process that has inevitably affected the lives of women in the state of Oaxaca. I argue that "Mujer Maíz" makes the following interventions: 1) it uses the trope of maize to highlight the intersections between the devastation of the earth's resources and violence against women; 2) it underscores the effectiveness of Indigenous feminist hip hop as a vehicle to make an anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and anti-patriarchal critique; 3), it recovers the spiritual dimensions of ecofeminism via the corn diviner in the video who represents the central role that Indigenous female healers played in restoring balance. In this case, the imbalance is due to violence against women's bodies and the earth. In this chapter, the figure, Mujer Maíz, is represented as a corn diviner in the video, a tradition practiced in many pre-colonial Mesoamerica communities, one that was deemed *hechicería* by clerics in the colonial era. I use Lorena Cabnal's concept of territorio

cuerpo as a lens to discuss the interconnectedness between the well-being of the earth and the well-being of women.

In Chapter 3 titled, "Brujas in the Time of Trump: Hexing the Ruling Class," I examine two texts I consider digital brujería alongside the novel, *Daughters of the Stone* by Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa. I explore the history of enslaved women who use their knowledge of plants and magic to hex and poison the ruling class. The novel focuses on a curandera (healer) on a Puerto Rican plantation in the 19th century that gets revenge and re-appropriates her land from the wealthy plantation owners by putting spells on them. Similarly, the two digital texts — one a homemade Youtube video titled, "Brujas Hex Trump" and the other, an electronic spellbook/poetry zine by the Yerbamala Collective, an anonymous group of anti-fascist witches from different parts of the world including Puerto Rico, Brazil and the US — center on themes of hexing Trump and the right-wing, ruling class. This chapter addresses the Trump election as a result of decades under neoliberalism that intensified the erosion of women's rights — a priority for the conservative agenda. I use the concept of balance that feministas comunitarias advocate for, which is what folk healers like curanderas, aim to achieve —when there is an imbalance both the body and mind suffer. Using hexing as a form of agency to achieve balance and create equality in a world that is terribly out of balance —between rich and poor, men and women, humans and nature— is the focus of this chapter.

In my final chapter, "Cross-Border Childbirth, Neoliberalism, and the Bruja-Midwife: Ancestral Knowledge as an Antidote to Gender Violence," la Bruja is the midwife, a figure widely demonized for her understanding of women's bodies and her knowledge of abortifacient plants. Accused of practicing witchcraft, many midwives were burned at the stake during the witch-hunts in Europe and the Americas, as they were one of the most hated and feared of all

healers by religious leaders. Yet midwives continued to play a crucial role in assisting women giving birth. Here I focus on a documentary called *Catching Babies* about a birth center at the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez border called Maternidad La Luz. One of the highlights of the documentary is a Chicana midwifery student named Sandra Iturbe from this border region, a native in a sea of non-local white students, who employs Mesoamerican birthing traditions in her practice. I argue that the midwife's role in this border region is significant in the neoliberal era due to a large number of women from Ciudad Juarez crossing the border to give birth — a city known both for the maquiladora industry that largely employs women and the murder and disappearances of hundreds of women. La Bruja-midwife's role is to care for Mexican women who cross the border to give birth, mostly working-class women who do not want to give birth in Ciudad Juarez because of the lack of quality care. What the documentary does not show, however, is the problem with midwifery tourism, when midwifery students from the "first world" travel to developed countries to train on "third world" women's bodies in order to fulfill the requirements for midwifery certification. Hence, the importance of Chicana midwives who understand their community. I employ Emma Delfina Chirix Garcia's notion of the midwife as a *cuidadora de la vida y cuidadora del cuerpo de la mujer* (caretakers of life and caretakers of women's bodies) in the Kaqchikel community and her argument that using the temazcal (sweatlodge) humanizes and honors the bodies of Indigenous women who have historically been considered disposable. This lens alongside feminismo comunitario is deployed to look at the process of reclaiming la Bruja-midwife as a *cuidadora de vida* to care for the bodies of women at the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez border, many who face economic and social inequality. The temazcal, also used in the film *Catching Babies,* has been deployed since pre-colonial times to assist women during childbirth

and I claim that in the documentary it is utilized as a form of reproductive justice to support vulnerable women.

A Note on Spirituality

I conclude this introduction by stating that the women who produce these texts or are represented in them perform a decolonized spirituality that is integral to the feminist activist consciousness of la Bruja and inseparable from social justice. The spiritual here vastly differs from religious institutions and western ideas of religion. I consider it a form of liberation theology but expressed in a hybrid, non-institutionalized, do-it-yourself style that acknowledges the common good of all living things. I borrow from Christina García López definition of spirituality here as the interconnection of all living things or more accurately, "an active mode of being that consciously centers an epistemology of interconnectivity between elements of existence…" (3). I also draw from Laura E. Pérez idea of a "politicizing spirituality" in her analysis of Chicana art. For Pérez spirituality is a "manifestation on the earthly plane in acts of goodness with respect to real bodies and in human societies, in nature, and on the globe, rather than in vague, abstract, and binary notions of goodness, Gods/gods/s/Spirit(s), and spirituality" (298). In addition, Irene Lara's and Elisa Facio, in their edited volume, *Fleshing the Spirit*, they understand spirituality as playing "a decolonizing role in creating meaning, inspiring action, and supporting healing and justice in our communities" (3). Finally, as mentioned above, Gloria Anzaldúa advocates for creating social change and insists on the unity— an interdependence—of all things by adapting what she called "spiritual activism." My point is that spirituality is deployed in this project not as "the opium of the people," but as resistance, as a means to decolonize, to remember, to reclaim a feminist consciousness in order to heal.

Thus, la Bruja in the following cultural texts decolonizes the spiritual by remembering the ways of knowing of the ancestors, including spiritual traditions, their understanding of health, of the body, of nature, of connection. However, this is distinct from the desire of going back to a romanticized past, nor is the past looked at without criticisms. As García López puts it, the "…process of spiritual decolonization… does not refer to a return to the past but rather to reintegration of what has fragmented and ruptured" (25). Furthermore, she explains, "the reclaiming of what we already know, that which is already ours but which we have become alienated from and blinded to" (14). Far from New Age spirituality, which has attracted mostly white, middle class women, what the women in the texts deploy is something ancient, or as Sandra Cisneros puts, it is not "New Age" but "old age," "so ancient and wonderful and filled with such wisdom that we have to relearn it because our miseducation has taught us to name it 'superstition'" (qtd. in Lopez Garcia 13). Denying people their ancestral and cultural knowledge or creating false constructs that their knowledge is wrong, or primitive, or less, is violent.

This project attempts to undo this form of colonization and illustrates the desire for women to reclaim something that was lost and by rediscovering it they deploy a political consciousness intertwined with the spiritual to challenge the sexist status quo in times of neoliberalism. In addition, my aim is to debunk claims of la Bruja as evil and instead point to who the real devils are: those who profit off of people's suffering, who dehumanize people to exploit and kill them, those who thrive under a system so evil that it does not allow people to access the resources they need to have a dignified life, a system called capitalism.

Figure 1: "Just here to do BRUJERIA on Trump" protest sign.
From @aurorargh on Instagram

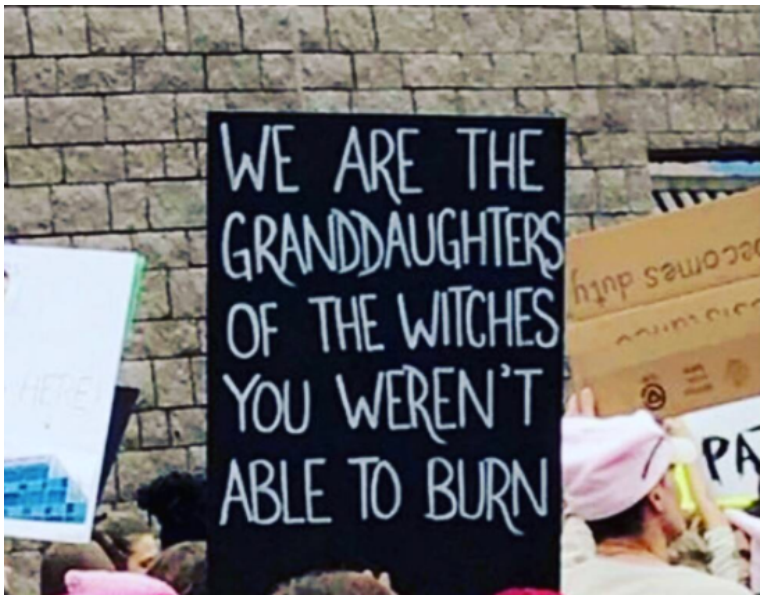

Figure 2: "We are the granddaughters of the witches you weren't able to burn" protest sign at the 2017 Women's March.
From theodysseyonline.com

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Chapter 1: Femzines, Altars and *Ofrendas*: Chicana Bruja Aesthetics in Times of Austerity

> "An altar makes visible that which is invisible and brings near that which is far away; it marks the potential for communication and exchange between different but necessarily connected worlds, the human and the divine."
> --Kay Turner *Beautiful Necessities*

> "That altar-installation artists and related art forms have inspired Chicana artists can be more precisely connected to the search for, and expression of, alternative spiritualties and alternative art practices, particularly those that are visionary with respect to social justice and transformation."
> --Laura E. Pérez *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*

> "And although later I made many inquiries in the surrounding villages, I was never able to find the trail of the one who made the offering, because the Indians of this land… hide this very diligently, warned, as I see it, by the Devil on account of what is of interest [to him]."
> --Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón *Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions That Today Live Among the Indians Native to This New Spain, 1629*

Every Bruja needs an altar. It is her workspace. She brings the physical and spiritual together here to work her "magic." Yet it is this "workspace" that marks her as "other." In this chapter, the altar is featured as a site where offerings heal when invoked and enacted. Altars have existed throughout time and across cultures. However, in the Americas, colonial agents racialized, proscribed and tagged altars with suspicion, often associating them with brujas and brujería. In Mexico and other parts of the Latin America, altars were often destroyed, and anyone found making offerings at sacred sites punished, forcing many to create private altars at home. Ramon A. Gutierrez explains that during the spiritual conquest of Mexico the colonizers sought to "desecrate and eradicate the sites of Indian worship. By necessity, Indian shrines were driven into secret spaces, deep within the household and clearly out of the site of the Catholic clergy" (20). Home altars allowed people to retain their cultural traditions and spiritual practices to avoid

persecution. Women were commonly the creators and caretakers of domestic altars; thus, many Latina artists use the altar today as a medium in their art to make social critiques. This chapter examines existing scholarship on altars and offerings as an art aesthetic, or what Laura E. Pérez refers to as aesthetic altarities — art as offerings on an altar "where the material and the still disembodied are invoked" (*Chicana* 6). In her work on Chicana art, she argues that for Chicana artists the altar represents a gendered aesthetic form used to acknowledge, make visible and pay respect to that which is "disembodied," or visually, socially and culturally invisible. Thus, creating art with an altar-like function serves to invoke all of those women who go unacknowledged, whose pain is ignored, or whose bodies are abused, and so, this art-altar can in itself be interpreted as a political act.

I examine the grassroots publication project of East L.A Chicana collective, Mujeres de Maíz, using the altar as a framework, or altarities, as Pérez calls it. Since 1997 Mujeres de Maíz (MdM) releases an annual underground, self-published feminist zine, or femzines as they are referred to in the zine world, called *Flor y Canto*. This submission-based publication consists of poetry and visual art by women of color from across the nation.[14] Fourteen volumes have been released since their founding. I focus on volume 12, "Ofrendas of the Flesh," which asks contributors to address the various ways women's "flesh" is taken or abused, or how women reclaim and take back their "flesh." The pieces in this volume respond to the pleasure and pain women experience and convey how bodies are objectified, commodified and misread, but also how women take agency and control and reclaim their bodies, create new meaning and resist

[14] The Chicana members of MdM are editors and producers of *Flor y Canto*. Though a Chicana-led project, the poetry and art on the pages are not limited to a Chicana demographic. Hence, I do not use the terms "Chicanas" and "women of color" interchangeably but rather deploy them to specify the difference between the producers and the contributors to the zine. I use the term "women of color" to refer to women who belong to racial & ethnic groups that have been legally and socially subordinated in the US, which include Latinas, Black, Asian American & Native American women. I choose to use the term, not to erase the individual concerns of each group or with the intention to cling to categories or labels that maintain restrictive forms of identity politics, but to unify across color lines in the struggle against sexism, racism, homophobia and class oppression.

these forms of violence. In invoking the altar as an aesthetic form, "Ofrendas" denounces gender violence by making women's voices visible.

This is particularly important in the context of the economic and political climate of the 1990s when MdM was founded and started producing their femzine. During this time the state of California was fraught with economic, racial and political tensions due to a recession caused partly by austerity measures. The economic woes caused anxieties among its citizens and Latino immigrants were easy scapegoats. To consider the ways in which Chicanas use poetry and visual art to speak out against and heal from gender violence in the neoliberal era, I examine *Flor y Canto's* volume 12, "Ofrendas of the Flesh." MdM's work is particularly important in pushing back against negative representations of Latinas, an arduous issue in the 1990s since it was they who were targeted and partly blamed for California's economic distress. Because of their supposed "hyper-fertility," they were thought to be a drain on the economy by coming to the United States where they are allegedly giving birth on taxpayer money and then utilizing public services. Proposition 187 was passed in order to block undocumented immigrants from accessing public services like these, especially targeting Latinas immigrants. While my analysis of the poetry and visual art is not limited exclusively to direct responses to Proposition 187, motherhood or Latina immigrants, I consider the project a counter-narrative to these misrepresentations of women of color in general and Latinas in particular.

The 1990s' marked the beginning of third wave feminism, and femzine culture became the vehicle of expression for third wave feminist thought.[15] Although MdM's zine project reflects a typical third wave feminist trend of zine production, *Flor y Canto* diverges from the

[15] Femzines are associated with being the vehicle of expression for third wave feminist thought. Third wave feminists are the generation of women born after the height of the second wave movement who grew up in a world with the successes of the first two waves. It reached its apogee in the 1990s and was born partially in response to backlash against the initiatives won by the second wave movement, which revealed to young women that the work of second wave feminists was not yet done.

traditional zine-making approach in that MdM draws on a Chicana feminist epistemology inspired by Indigenous worldviews to denounce the gender status quo. Furthermore, they adopt a politicized spirituality influenced by Mesoamerican conceptions of art and poetry, one that expands understanding of creative expressions as transformative and healing and defying Western notions of art. The MdM employs this notion in their femzine to make a broader critique of patriarchy, gender inequality, racism, sexism, and homophobia.[16] Thus, I argue that their third wave feminist activism is similarly a form of *art*ivism because they view art and poetry as a form of healing from the trauma of violence experienced by marginalized women.[17] In this way, MdM also resignifies la bruja by embracing the ofrenda and altar tradition of their ancestors that European colonizers once deemed heathenism. Thus, to embrace this aesthetic and spiritual tradition is not just a political act but also one that is about remembering and speaking out against a history of repression of racialized women.

Hence, to analyze the pieces in "Ofrendas of the Flesh" I employ Pérez's aesthetic altarities interwoven with the feminista comunitaria concept of *memoria,* which together illustrate a remembering of a collective past about female resistance that connects to the present. Pérez explains that traditionally altars are spaces where one "invokes, mediates, and offers homage to the unseen but felt presence in our lives, whether these be deities, ancestors, or the memories of our personal, familial, and collective pasts…" (*Chicana* 7). This is commensurate

[16] Throughout this essay I use the singular form when referring to MdM as a single entity or group, and the plural form when referring to them as a collection of individual women.

[17] Duncombe, Lambert and Anzaldúa's definition is useful here. Duncombe and Lambert argue that *artivism* is not "art about politics," meaning that using "social injustice and political struggle as a mere subject matter" will not do. *Artivism*, they say, is art "that intends to change the very way we see, act and make sense of our world – including what we understand to be politics itself." Although Anzaldúa does not use the term *artivism*, her understanding of women of color's "creative acts" is relevant, especially when considering the work of MdM. She declares that for women of color, "the act of writing, painting, performing and filming are acts of deliberate and desperate determination to subvert the status quo. Creative acts," she says, "are forms of political activism employing definite aesthetic strategies for resisting dominant cultural norms and are not merely aesthetic exercises" ("Haciendo" xxiv).

with *memoria*, which Julieta Paredes claims are acknowledging where we come from, our collective pasts, our struggles and our female ancestor's struggles, remembering the women in our communities who resisted patriarchy (117). In the words of Paredes, "La memoria nos habla de dónde venimos, qué problemas, qué luchas se dieron en medio, cómo así las mujeres estamos donde estamos, nos habla de cómo antes, también hubieron mujeres rebeldes. Nos permite recoger a mujeres de nuestras comunidades en sus resistencias antipatriarcales…" (117).[18] Yet Pérez examines a darker side of the altar—the altar as sacrificial slab where one is being sacrificed against their will. Chicanas draw on the altar as a sacrificial slab in their art to speak about pain and violence, and thus to address inequality in all of its forms (*Chicana* 115). Together, these frameworks help us read *Flor y Canto* zines and "Ofrendas of the Flesh" in particular, as texts that challenge the social devaluation of women of color, the misogyny, homophobia, and patriarchy, by remembering and embodying the ancestral traditions of the struggle of women in the past. Likewise, the zine validates women's diverse experiences and views them worthy of recognition instead of deeming them disposable, a common trend that is more prevalent under a neoliberal regime.

In what follows, I examine the world of femzines and third wave feminism. I then consider how contemporary Chicana feminists like MdM take an artivist approach in their third wave politics and employ their cultural knowledge, histories, and politicized spiritual understandings using a Mesoamerican cosmology to make a feminist critique, a cosmology that is commensurate with feminismo comunitario. I discuss the idea of using ofrendas and altars in MdM's zine as an act of re-empowering la bruja. Next I shift my discussion to the texts and do an analytical reading of several poems and images in "Ofrendas" as examples of altarities to

[18] "Memory tells us where we come from, what problems, what struggles occurred since then; memory tells us why as women we are where we are, memory informs us of times when there were also rebellious women. It allows us to embrace women from our communities in their anti-patriarchal resistance..."

illustrate Chicanas' deployment of artivism in speaking against patriarchy and gender violence and ultimately heal from this trauma.

Third Wave Feminism & the FemZine Movement

MdM's *Flor y Canto* zine is part of a tradition amongst contemporary feminists to self-publish as a form of protest. Known as "femzines" or "girl zines" in the zine world, these non-professional, underground booklets became a popular vehicle for women, girls, queer and transgender people to voice their thoughts, experiences, anger, and resistance of growing up in a patriarchal and homophobic world. Young women who called themselves Riot Grrrls in the punk scene of the 1990s catalyzed femzines. Here they echoed what many women felt at the time: they were "tired of being written out— out of history, out of the 'scene', out of our bodies…" (qtd. in Nguyen 176).[19] The trend quickly spread and became popular amongst other social enclaves of young women.[20] The subjects and themes covered in zines are amply varied, often with topics too radical or too niche for mainstream media. Some are highly autobiographical, focusing on personal experiences, thoughts, and concerns, while others focus on topics such as politics, music, pop culture, or sexuality. To this day, femzines provide a space for women's uncensored personal or political narratives, allowing women to use a wide variety of aesthetic, iconographic, and narrative styles to express their concerns.

Femzines were a defining element of third wave activism and exemplified the distinction between the second and third wave generations in regards to political interventions and activism, which means that their responses fall outside traditional modes of doing politics, such as public protests or direct action tactics. For example, some have argued that third wavers prefer to

[19] The "rrr" in front of girl represents an angry growl.

[20] Zine history suggests three main peaks of publishing. The first began in the 1930's in the US by science fiction fans, when the term "fanzine" or "zine" was coined. Fast-forward 40 years to the mid 1970's and the fans of punk rock music began printing zines about punk music and culture. Out of the alternative punk scene the third peak of zine publishing emerged, the Riot Grrrl zine movement of the early1990s.

engage in “micro-politics” such as self-publishing in lieu of public dissent. Micro-politics here refers to “a political approach that emphasizes individual actions and choices made within a feminist interpretive approach” (Piepmeier 162). In other words, rather than marching on the streets or pushing for policy changes, women could produce uncensored personal or political narratives within cultural products like zines where they use a wide variety of aesthetic, iconographic, and narrative styles to express their concerns. Third wave zinesters are not less political, rather feminist activism can be expressed using alternative and unexpected measures and media (Soward and Renegar 61). Zines are indeed a site for expressing dissent, to voice thoughts, experiences, anger and resistance against patriarchy and homophobia and are a popular vehicle for women, girls, queer, and transgender people to articulate their opposition to oppressive structures.

Neoliberal economics, however, did play a definitive role in a widespread political cynicism among the post-Civil Rights generation, as some have argued, producing a population of young people that engage with less rigorous forms of resistance. Anita Harris explains that contemporary feminists have “had to contend with the partial absorption and depoliticization of feminist ideas and images by government, big business, and consumer culture,” due to growing up in a late capitalist world (7). Similarly, bell hooks suggests, “the late capitalist, neoliberal, consumption-oriented cultural climate has created the notion that things cannot ever get better…” (11). Indeed, the decline of social movements of the Civil Rights era and the subsequent demoralization meant that the next generation did not come of age in an environment where it was common to advance a cause via direct action and were not necessarily provided the tools to engage with traditional forms of social protest activism.

On the other hand, Chicana/o youth like the MdM members, who came of age in the barrios of East L.A in the 1990s when third wave feminism emerged, faced unique challenges that would very much politicize them. This time period was marked by economic devastation, gang violence, the crack epidemic, and high crime rates in the inner cities of Los Angeles. Police violence was also a focal point of that period — the Rodney King beating by police in South Central L.A revealed to youth of color that their lives had little value in the eyes of the law when the three police who brutally beat King were acquitted. In addition to this, the impacts of global capitalism were felt on both a global and local level. The North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented three years prior to the formation of the MdM and the release of the first zine. This restructuring brought more urban decay, de-industrialization, low wages, and cuts to social programs and public education to communities of color in poor neighborhoods like the East L.A. barrios. These economic anxieties accompanied vicious anti-immigrant rhetoric, as Latino/as were the perfect scapegoats for the economic woes facing California.

Thus, unlike their third wave feminist counterparts, urban Chicanas from the East L.A barrios like MdM could not afford to be "politically cynical." Living in a city like Los Angeles with a large immigrant population from Mexico and Central America, and being immigrants or children of immigrants themselves, they saw firsthand the harmful impact of these narratives on their communities. While some of the authors published in their zine are not Latinas, are not from California, and were not impacted by this rhetoric, the project itself and the themes that the editors and authors engage within the zine illustrate a time fraught with racial and economic tensions.

Proposition 187, Austerity & the "Hyper-Fertile" Latina

The once thriving economy of Los Angeles began to atrophy in the 1970s. Auto, steel and rubber factories with strong union representation like Goodyear, Ford, General Motors and Bethlehem Steel, shut down and were replaced by specialty craft industries. By 1986 "industrial employment had fallen 17 percent in textiles, 30 percent in primary metals, and 40 percent in steel" (Calavita 293). Non-union, low paying jobs that did little to remedy the growing ranks of unemployed. Industries such as apparel sweatshop, furniture manufacturing, and food distribution employed fewer than one hundred workers (Viesca 452). As Los Angeles historian, Mike Davis asserts:

> two high-wage heavy manufacturing jobs have been replaced by only one low-wage sweatshop or warehouse job, the aggregate employment level in the Southeast has been sustained at 70 to75 percent of its 1970s peak by the influx of hundreds of small employers. The secret formula of this new, low-wage 'reindustrialization' has been the combination of a seemingly infinite supply of immigrant labor from Mexico and Central America with the entrepreneurial energy of East Asia. (65)

This was followed by an economic recession that hit California from 1990 to 1994, bringing with it misdirected economic anxieties about the large influx of Latina/os, many of whom were economic refugees impacted by neoliberal economics in their own countries. Latino immigrants, particularly those from Mexico and Central America, became the perfect scapegoat for Californians and for then-governor Pete Wilson who was up for reelection and capitalized off Californian's frustrations. His low approval ratings quickly rose when he ran on an anti-immigrant platform that helped spur a xenophobic movement in the state of California culminating in the passing of Proposition 187. Although eventually ruled unconstitutional, the proposition called "Save our State," aimed to bar undocumented people from attending public

schools and required all non-emergency health care services to verify legal status along with those seeking cash assistance and other benefits.

The correlation between the social, political, and economic crisis and the upsurge in nativism was glaring. Neoliberal policies produced economic insecurity in California and the ruling class fooled people into believing that immigrants were at fault for the lack of resources in the state. This deception worked to diverge public attention from what led to the crisis —clearly not the influx of immigrants but rather the deep cuts to aerospace and defense spending and consequently the adoption of austerity policies. Ultimately it was the weakening of the welfare state to pay for the crisis that impacted the California economy. In order to accomplish what David Harvey calls, "the neoliberal revolution," it was necessary to gain consent by misleading the public, "disguising real problems under cultural prejudices" (39). He explains, "Cultural and traditional values… and fears (of communists, immigrants, strangers, or 'others') can be mobilized to mask other realities. Political slogans can be invoked that mask specific strategies beneath vague rhetorical devices" (39). Indeed, this strategy is effective and continues to be used by the ruling class today.

The structural adjustments in the 1980s under the Reagan administration brought cuts to social programs as a money-saving measure. These cuts became "integrally related to the new economic austerity and efforts to increase profitability through cutting labor costs" (Calavita 294). Kitty Calavita notes that what led to the crisis of the 1990s in California and subsequently the Proposition 187 campaign was a "balanced-budget conservatism" that was partly the "product of widespread economic insecurity and frustration" (294). Calavita defines balanced-budget conservatism as a "deficit-mania and disdain for a government that is unable to balance its books… among its symptoms are an entrenched anti-government ideology, suspicion of

government spending, resistance to taxes, and a subtle semantic shift from 'citizen' to 'taxpayer' as the central unit of civic life" (295). She points to the contradictions in government rhetoric where it simultaneously spends heavily on military and gives tax cuts to the wealthy and corporations while creating a deficit that then results in an ideological attack on the public sector. She suggests that this balanced-budget conservatism "serves as a target for the frustration and anger of those facing economic uncertainty, deflects responsibility from the private sector's cost-cutting, and facilitates the austerity measures of the government as it dismantles the safety net" (295). By shifting the semantic from "citizen" to "taxpayer," Calavita suggests, those impacted by the crisis feel a direct and tangible impact when their tax dollars are not being spent to serve *their* interests. In other words, when resources are scarce, and people are not willing to share them, there then is more hostility towards the poor who tend to use public services.

Although Proposition 187 was declared unconstitutional, the anti-immigrant hysteria it promoted and the damage it did in dehumanizing and criminalizing immigrants persisted. As is commonly the case, economic and social insecurity make women more vulnerable to exploitation and violence. The controversial proposition especially targeted Mexican women. These were "depicted as purposely crossing the border to give birth in publicly financed county hospitals to gain citizenship status and thus eligibility for public assistance" (E. Gutiérrez, "Latinas" 684). A false correlation was made between Mexican women's high-fertility rates and the use of public services. One of the reasons why Proposition 187 aimed to revoke access to health care services by undocumented immigrants was precisely to deny immigrant women prenatal care. Governor Pete Wilson highlighted this in his campaign as a top government priority touting the "provision of reproductive health services to undocumented immigrant women as his main gubernatorial concerns in 1993…" (E. Gutierrez, *Fertility* 115). According to

Elena R. Gutierrez, on the day following the election and the passing of Proposition 187 "Wilson barred the "continuation of prenatal services to undocumented immigrant women" (*Fertility* 117).

The numerous stories about the "horde" of "illegal" Mexican women crossing the border to have their babies —babies who will be born US citizens and eligible for welfare — pervaded the media, particularly in southern California where more Latina/os tend to reside. Elena R. Gutiérrez cites a flyer circulated during the Proposition 187 controversy by a group identified only as Students Against the Brown Peril that was sent to students and the general public: "America has a serious problem. Low-life Mexicans are streaming into our society and polluting our cultural landscape… These vermin are popping up from the sewers of Mexico and siphoning money from our welfare system. They keep insisting that American taxpayers pay for their unrestrained breeding habits" (*Fertility* 120). This racist and cruel description of Mexican women saturated mainstream media. Katrina Bloch and Tiffany Taylor argue that the "beliefs that these mothers have inferior cultural beliefs and values legitimates neoliberal policies that deny structural explanations for the status of the women. Instead, policies and the related discourse focus completely on personal responsibility" (202). Even while the state's economic challenges had nothing to do with levels of immigration, Latina fertility, or the use of public resources, it was Latina/os and especially Latinas that were responsible.

But the political and economic challenges facing California during this period were not limited to the local or state level. The global shift towards neoliberal economics impacted the world's poorest people. This was most apparent in 1994 when a group of Indigenous people from the highlands of Chiapas took up arms against the Mexican government in protest of NAFTA. The Ejercito Zapatista Liberación Nacional (EZLN), or Zapatistas, revolted against the Mexican

state and the impact that NAFTA would have on their communities. This guerilla group made up of mainly Mayan people from the Chiapas highlands engaged in an anti-globalization struggle for democracy and land reform. Their spokesperson, the mestizo Sub-comandante Marcos called NAFTA "a death certificate for the Indian peoples of Mexico…." (qtd. in *Proletarian* 24). Critics describe NAFTA's impact on Mexican's Indigenous and working class as designed to

> permanently undo Mexico's traditional nationalist protectionism. From the point of view of Mexican capital, both indigenous and U.S.-owned, it aimed to extend the cheap-labor, tariff-free, border-industry maquiladora program to all of Mexico… also meant to guarantee that future Mexican regimes will continue the 'liberal' pro-imperialist program of President Salinas. It represents a sharp attack on the living standards of Mexican workers by subordinating them more directly to imperialist capital. (*Proletarian* 24*)*

This watershed moment opened the eyes of Mexican society and the world of the struggles of Mexico's most vulnerable population. NAFTA did not just impact the people in the US and Canada; it devastated the most impoverished communities in Mexico, too. The Zapatista movement resonated with the world's underclass, but it was especially significant for young Chicana/o activists in the US who identified with their struggles.

Flor y Canto: A Product of its Time

Like the rebels in Chiapas, urban youth of color in L.A also felt persecuted by the state and relegated to second-class citizenship. They too experienced low-intensity warfare, police violence and lived the effects of neoliberalism in their barrios. Chicana/o youth were inspired to organize political and artistic movements grounded in the Zapatista vision: "un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos (a world where many worlds fit)" (EZLN). MdM members looked to the Zapatistas, and especially the Zapatista women, who played critical leadership roles in the uprising, for inspiration to resolve gender disparities in their community. Three years after the Zapatista rebellion, MdM launched the collective and published the first volume of their

femzine, *Flor y Canto*. Their name, Mujeres de Maíz, is a reference to the Mayan Zapatista women whose people considered maize sacred food since ancient times, highlighting women's vital role in the cultivation and preparation of the plant as well as the struggle for liberation and access to land to continue their way of life — work that has often been invisible.[21] The critical leadership role that Indigenous women played in the Zapatista uprising was rarely seen in public before in Mexico. Zapatista women denounced neoliberalism and state violence as a force that exploits and aims to annihilate Indigenous peoples while also challenging traditional gender roles. They demanded that their right as women to live in full abundance is respected.

Much of the work within each volume of *Flor y Canto* exemplifies what it is like for women living in the age of neoliberal globalization — the economic disparities, environmental catastrophe, the impact of war, and so much more. The poetry and art in the zines show the beautiful and ugly, the resistance and triumphs, the local and global, and the personal and public angles of these struggles. While most of the submissions are by women of color who live in the US, the lens from which they express themselves reveals global feminist solidarity. For example, volume 6, titled "Somos Medicina," shows an image by graphic artist Favianna Rodriguez of a woman wearing a hijab with the words "We resist Colonization." This alludes to the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation. In the same volume, a black and white photograph of a woman holding up a machete high over her head with the word "Atenco" written on it stands in front of a microphone speaking at a protest. The description of the image explains that this

[21] The name "Women of Maize" alludes to the cultural importance of maíze in Mesoamerica as essential to the survival and livelihood of the people. It also makes visible the role Indigenous woman have played throughout history in agricultural traditions and resistance struggles, work that has often been over looked. Miguel Angel Asturias' classic novel, *Hombres de Maíz* (1949), for instance, about an Indigenous community whose land is under threat by outside interests, centers on male Indigenous leaders. The title references the creation story of the Maya K'iche' people, the Popol Vuh, a tale about the first people who were created from maize. The hero twins in the tale, Hunahpú and Xbalanqué are often depicted as male. However there is debate among scholars questioning whether Xbalanqué is actually female. If this is true, it is another example of the ways in which Indigenous women have been erased.

campesina woman supports the resistance struggle to protect ancestral land in San Salvador Atenco in Mexico against "big business corporate development to build an international airport" (48 "Somos"). These images point to the global land struggles across the world against the ruling class. However, on a local level, volume 13, "Madre, Mother," is dedicated to Zoraida Ale Reyes, a transgender woman who was murdered in Los Angeles. A digital poster by Zuleica Zepeda dedicated to her that reads, "Transgender Liberation! Not One More!" covers the page ("Madre" iii). While violence against transgender people is global, this print illustrates an intimate look at how the death of this woman impacts the local community. Throughout the pages of each volume, we find that many struggles across the world intersect. In these zines women are upheld and made visible as part of these struggles, showing that MdM's publication is a product of its time — a time when women's lives, women's bodies, continue to be policed, exploited and oppressed — but also a time when some of the most oppressed groups, such as the Zapatista women, are rising up and demanding their rights.

Xicanisma & Zapatista Feminism: A Feminismo Comunitario Perspective

While Zapatista women provided a new model of feminism for urban Chicanas like MdM, the work of women of color feminist writers of the second wave also had a strong impact on them. MdM uses these as a framework for their third wave artivist work as is seen in the introduction to each volume where they proclaim that the collective began "among the writings of empowering mentors" and credit the "penetrating power of Xicanisma" as having a profound impact on their generation of women ("One"). Coined by Ana Castillo, "Xicanisma" refers to a Chicana feminism particular to the experiences of Chicanas in the US, a lens to examine the societal, political, and economic issues that they face. By using the "X" Castillo incorporates the

Figure 3: Fourteen issues of *Flor y Canto* have been published since 1997

Nahuatl language of the Mexica to pay homage to the Indigenous roots of Chicanas.[22] Xicanista writers such as Castillo along with Cherríe Morage and Gloria Anzaldúa amongst others, embrace a Xicana indígena politic — meaning that they reclaim their Indigenous origins as a political act and as a step towards regaining cultural integrity.[23] While Chicano nationalists made similar claims, Xicanas advocate for the restoring of women as community leaders and carriers of sacred knowledge, for the "rights of gays, lesbians, transgender and two-spirit peoples…" and they seek to interrupt acts of sexual violence against women in the community, a blind spot of the Chicano Movement (La Red).[24] They created a theory that engaged with Indigenous epistemologies to call for an end to racist and sexist oppression, to honor the feminine and female, and to recover what was lost due to colonialism. As Castillo affirms, "It is our task as Xicanistas, to not only reclaim our indigenismo—but also to reinsert the forsaken feminine into our consciousness…The very act of self-definition is a rejection of colonization" (12).

Like their Xicana predecessors, MdM deploys a pre-Columbian vision of the world to challenge gender inequality and give voice and representation to urban women of color. The themes in *Flor y Canto*, the poetry and art within its pages, are an amalgamation of work that alludes to the Indigenous past while addressing the urban realities of the present. They implement this framework to subvert the racist stereotypes of women of color while questioning the social and economic issues women experience. There is certainly a wide diversity of voices and not all pieces conform to Xicana indígena ideology, yet a strong presence of a pre-

[22] I will use the term "Xicana" when referring to Chicana feminists who embrace a Xicana indígena politics in their work.

[23] I acknowledge that there are problems and contradictions with the use of Indigenous worldviews, including the essentializing and romanticization of a pre-Columbian past. It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyze these issues in-depth. See the work of Sheila Marie Contreras and Rosaura Sánchez article "Reconstructing Chicana Gender Identity" for an expanded critique.

[24] La Red Xicana Indigena. http://www.freewebs.com/laredxicanaindigena/, 2004.

Columbian imaginary persists in each volume. Paintings of female goddesses, clay sculptures that employ an Indigenous aesthetic, and Nahuatl words sprinkled throughout the pages, underscore the power of the feminine. Poems with titles like "Coyolxuaqui Rising," invoke the Aztec moon deity and call on young women to rise like the moon, to tear down walls and be the "Next generation of Dolores Huerta, Soldaderas, Sor Juana y Gloria Anzaldúa…" (Pando "Rites" 39). Not only does this defy demeaning ideas of Mexican/Chicana women as weak and unintelligent by naming talented and impressive female figures, but it also mirrors Anzaldúa's method of reviving female deities that were driven underground by the male-dominated Aztecs to make critiques of patriarchal societies that undermine women's power. This piece exemplifies how artists in *Flor y Canto* invoke a Xicana indígena politic to highlight positive representations of women of color, more specifically Latinas who are targeted and policed in the throes of anti-immigrant repression.

While I do not use Xicanisma and Zapatista feminism as frameworks to analyze MdM's femzine, I consider these commensurate with feminismo comunitario: first because they engage with Indigenous cosmology and ancestral forms of resistance, and second because the idea that gender equality is in everyone's interest is very much a part of Zapatista feminism, as the Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres del EZLN shows, the demands women make will benefit the movement overall.[25] The second demand, "Las mujeres tienen derecho a trabajar y recibir un salario justo ("Women have the right to work and earn a just salary")" illustrates that equal

[25] The Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws are as follows: 1st: Women, regardless of their race, creed, color or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in any way that their desire and capacity determine, 2nd: Women have the right to work and receive a just salary, 3rd:Women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for, 4th: Women have the right to participate in the matters of the community and have charge if they are free and democratically elected, 5th:Women and their children have the right to Primary Attention in their health and nutrition, 6th: Women have the right to education, 7th: Women have the right to choose their partner and are not obliged to enter into marriage, 8th: Women have the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished, 9th: Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces, 10th: Women will have all the rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give.

access to work and pay is beneficial for the whole community (*Enlace Zapatista*).[26] That gender equality is in everyone's interest is one of feminismo comunitario's basic principles because of the concept of balance and equilibrium. The community is like an entity and, as Paredes argues, "Para poder equilibrar a la comunidad, el lado de las mujeres tiene que darse más fuerza" (329).[27] This entity —the community— needs both sides to be strong for equilibrium to be reached.

Third, in Xicanisma feminism the emphasis on reclaiming one's Indigenous roots connects with the feminista comunitaria concept of *memoria*. Paredes expresses that *memoria* "Es la… que nos enlaza con los antepasados, es esa forma de la vida que se ha dado en estas tierras que es irrepetible" (116).[28] The link to an ancestral past is what many Chicanas draw on when they claim their Indigenous roots and their ties to female ancestral deities. However, Paredes warns of a *memoria* that mistakenly romanticizes pre-colonial times as an idyllic and an almost perfect time for women (116). Feministas comunitarias call this *entronque patriarcal,* or patriarchal roots — the idea that patriarchy existed in Indigenous communities before colonization. Paredes says that although it is important to have dignity and pride in our communities with noteworthy cultures and achievements, it is important to recognize "patriarcalismos, opresiones, autoritarismos e injusticias heredadas y que, por supuesto estaban presentes en las sociedades pre-coloniales, también" (116-117).[29] There is a risk in Xicanisma feminism of romanticizing an Indigenous past. However, Chicana writers like Anzaldúa,

[26] *Enlace Zapatista.* "Ley Revolucionaria de Mujeres. 31 Dec. 1993. http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx

[27] "In order to balance the community, the women's side has to be stronger."

[28] "It is ... that which links us with the ancestors, it is that form of life that has been given in these lands that is like no other."

[29] "inherited patriarchies, oppressions, authoritarianisms and injustices that, of course, were present in pre-colonial societies, as well."

Moraga, and Castillo critique their Chicano male counterparts for ignoring the contributions of women and for not recognizing that patriarchy existed in pre-Columbian times.[30]

Aside from this, the concept of community in and of itself is upheld by feministas comunitarias and illustrated in the femzine project overall. Paredes believes that community is dynamic, not a sum of individuals but a complementary whole that nurtures those who walk within it. She notes, "Una comunidad no es una suma de individualidades, si no otro lugar dinámico, más que la suma. La comunidad nutre a quienes caminan con la comunidad, ella, a su vez, es alimentada por el trabajo, el desarrollo y elaboraciones individuales y colectivas que se dan en su interior" (qtd. in Gargallo Celentani 332).[31] MdM mirrors this assertion in different aspects of their publication structure and methods. First, MdM creates a publication, not for the individual gain of one person or one group but by and for the community. Diverging from the more traditional femzines —mostly solitary endeavors or written and/or edited by one person, MdM makes a conscious choice to publish many women and to create a community-produced publication that came out of the barrio by inviting East L.A residents who are not in the collective to be part of the editorial committee (Alarcon).[32] They include transgender women and men, non-gender binary as well as queer and heterosexual women in their publication and editorial committees. Furthermore, they sell the zine in hardcopy locally rather than electronic versions to give access to those who do not own computers, but hard copies can also be ordered online (Alarcon).[33] Although Alarcon states that it is laborious work putting the zines together,

[30] Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* critiques the machismo among the Mexica, for example, when she discusses how feminine deities like Coatlicue ("Skirt of Snakes") were gruesome and ghastly figures, driven underground by the male-dominated Aztecs who substituted male deities in their place (49).

[31] "A community is not a sum of individualities, but another dynamic place, more than the sum. The community nurtures those who walk with the community, she, in turn, is nourished by work, development and individual and collective work that occur within."

[32] Alarcon, Margaret. Personal Interview. 18 August 2015.

[33] While most of their audience is made up of Chicanas from Southern California, people in other cities, states and countries have accessed the femzine, as well. Alarcon notes that there are also many self-educated or

the editors do not receive any remuneration. All proceeds from sales go towards funding the next publication. Their zine is published on high-quality paper, includes an ISSN number, and full-color printing, instead of a raw cut-and-paste, Xerox copy style zine, common among zinesters (figure 3). The co-founders of MdM — Fe Montes, Claudia Mercado, Margaret 'Quica' Alarcon, Gina Aparicio—claim this method allows the zine to be taken more seriously and would give it further reach to ensure that women of color are heard far and wide regardless of age, ethnicity, or level of training (Alarcon).[34] These strategies provide more opportunities for women of color to disseminate their stories, illustrating MdM's commitment to propagating such voices. It also mirrors Paredes' assertion that a community is nurtured through collective work that occurs within it and this, in turn, is reciprocated back to the community.

Most significantly, however, is that MdM's femzine projects compel us to ask what is significant about art. What power does it have when marginalized people engage in art-making? How can we view art outside of a western and capitalist framework? If so, what would this look like and could it liberate us? Perhaps the strongest intervention MdM makes when drawing on Xicanisma, Zapatista feminism, and Mesoamerican epistemology is that they challenge us to reconsider our view of the role of the artist and art-making.

Artivism, Art-Making and Indigenous Ways of Knowing

For MdM art is a tool for "social change and transformation, connecting issues from local to global, personal to political" and is grounded in the Nahua concept of "teaching and healing by offering flower and song" ("Cantando").[35] The meaning of *xochitl in cuicatl,* or flower and song, refers to artistic expression, which was transmitted by the *tlamatini*, knowers of things,

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institutionally educated Latinas amongst their readers.

[34] Membership has been fluid throughout the years and many women have joined and left the group, including some of the co-founders.

[35] The term "Nahua" is used to discuss the group of Mesoamerican peoples that spoke the Nahuatl language. The Nahua people include the Toltecs and Mexica.

mainly through poetry. For the Nahua, the *tlamatinime* were trained specialists who were caretakers and interpreters of the codices, masters of the word, who transmitted the history of the people orally through poetry and "promoted communication with the divine through the arts rather than through warfare" (Medina).[36] They engaged in teaching, healing and mediating the well-being and spiritual growth of the beholder through *xochitl in cuicatl*, which literally translates to "flower and song" but means "poetry and truth." This was based on the idea that artistic expressions in the forms of words, songs and paintings connect us to the divine. Indeed, poetry, as Gloria Chacón points out, "stands at the top of the indigenous literary pyramid as the most popular form of expression practiced among Native communities. Historically, it is intimately connected to song, prayer, and various religious rituals" (70). This mirrors Miguel León-Portilla assertion that for the Nahua "the only possible way to speak truthful words on earth was through the path of poetry and art" (qtd. in Pérez, *Chicana* 314).[37] When the artist "truly expressed his or her heart in flower and song the inner self was deified or filled with divine energy" (Carrasco, *Religions* 81). Pérez elaborates, stating that art from this perspective "point to different systems of reading visual signs, that is, to different ways of knowing, and even more, to the insufficiency of one system of signs (visual, oral, performative) to convey meaning and 'truths' fully" ("Spirit Glyphs" 48). To perceive art through this lens, Pérez states, is to value the power of art as socially transformative, politically meaningful and healing and explains why MdM chose to name their publication *Flor y Canto* (*Chicana* 25).

The act of describing their zines as "modern day codices," and the women within the pages "scribes" is politically meaningful and elevates women of color artists to *tlamatini*—modern day healers and teachers. To honor a woman of color with this title, even if only on a

[36] Medina, Lara. Forward. "Somos Medicina," *Flor y Canto,* vol. 6.

[37] For a detailed study on the traditions and philosophy of the Nahua people, see Miguel León-Portilla. León-Portilla explains that the Toltecs were highly regarded for their artistry, religious practices and philosophical ideas.

symbolic level, is to sanction her as "knower of things" and "speaker of truth," a significant gesture in a racist, patriarchal and hierarchical society. By providing a space for women whom society has silenced and marginalized to "speak their truths," the zine becomes a vehicle for such "truths" to be told. Truths that are painful, that remind us that "Poor women aren't allowed liberation," and truths that are hopeful, that remind women of their collective power, that "WE ARE NOT ALONE" as Maya Chinchilla proclaims in her poem (15 "13 Baktun"). It is these narratives that do not get heard on nightly news shows, unseen and indiscernible in mainstream platforms.

Indeed, MdM's artivism is realized by placing women in these demographics in the elevated position of artist. The zine showcases the work of emerging and established female artists to advocate for and promote creative acts by women of color. Considering that this demographic is gravely underrepresented in the art and literary world and that women of color face a disproportionate amount of economic and social inequality, especially during times of economic instability, MdM's work makes a significant contribution to the world of alternative media by publishing their work. In showcasing their poetry, art and performances to the public—through a zine or an art show—they give women the opportunity to be valued and respected by the public in a world that consistently devalues them, particularly in traditional art and literary spaces. Challenging the notion that art is only reserved for the elite, MdM publishes and exhibits work by women who are not formally trained, whom the world would not consider "real" artists, women who are "recipient[s] of much negativity, but…producer[s] of much creativity," as MdM describes them, and deserve to have their work seen and their words read ("Cantando"). When women with no access to formal education or artistic training get their work exhibited, being called an "artist," "poet," or "writer," is quite significant, considering the bourgeois notion that

these are titles one earns, usually determined by standards like formal training or obtaining mastery. Anzaldúa questions this elitism in the writing world. She asks, "Does not our class, our culture as well as the white man tell us writing is not for women such as us?" ("Speaking" 166). MdM disrupts this exclusivity, elevating all women to the position of "artist," reflecting an artivist framework that is grounded in an ancient notion that differs greatly from the Western conception of art, which is regarded mostly as economically unproductive or simply a commodity (Pérez, *Chicana* 22). By challenging Western notions of art and artists MdM's particular form of third wave artivism shines through.

When critics argue that artivism does "not cultivate an ideological struggle" they are viewing art and art-making from a Western perspective (Delgado).[38] Anthropologist Manuel Delgado, argues against artivism, questioning whether it "is revolutionary or not, or if it is at least an effective contribution towards truly overcoming the capitalist system." He states, "it does not cultivate an ideological struggle…or nourish the organic foundation of social change. Instead, it aims to promote an imaginary horizontal territory based on individual, responsible and rational autonomy…". Indeed, the political strategies of artivists are not very well articulated or organized into a unified historic bloc, nor can one point to their theoretical underpinnings. Yet, when Chicana artists appropriate Nahua concepts of art and art-making, they challenge European notions of art as merely expressions of an individual's inventiveness and instead re-imagine art as socially transformative and healing. Healing may not necessarily be comparable to overcoming an oppressive system like capitalism and there is certainly no substitute for direct action activism and interventions. Nonetheless, for many women of color, healing is a politically significant act; healing can mean the act of liberating oneself from patriarchal and colonized

[38] Delgado, Manuel. "The Limits of Critique: Artivism and Post-Politics" *LIMEN*, 2014

constructions of sexuality, or unlearning dominant conceptions of race and gender hierarchies, or undoing the psychological damage of the legacies of colonialism, racism and sexism that are passed down across generations. Not only that, art can also be a reminder of the beauty of the world and humanity. As the Zapatistas note, "perhaps it could be the Arts that remind humanity that people not only kill and destroy, impose and dominate, humiliate and doom to oblivion, but can also create, liberate, and remember" (qtd. in *Telesur*).[39]

Thus, for MdM healing is connected to a spirituality grounded in Indigenous cosmologies like the Zapatista's statement above that disrupt European worldviews about art and the social and political power of art but also that connect us to our ancestral memory. When it comes to those politically disempowered, invoking the spiritual in art and writing is not only a rejection of Western notions of art, but one that helps us imagine a socially just world. Pérez asserts,

> … Chicana writers and artists interrupt the reproduction of gendered, raced, and sexed politics of spirituality and of art. From a perspective of concern for social, global, and environmental justice, this kind of writing and art rejects politically disempowering European and Euroamerican narratives of the socially useless (i.e., economically unproductive), and thus marginal role of the writer/artist… ("Spirit Glyphs" 41)

In *Flor y Canto*, the culturally hybrid spiritual aesthetics infused with visions of social justice and gender equality are not unique to MdM. Many Chicana artists combine spirituality and politics in their art and include hybrid forms of spirituality grounded in Indigenous beliefs. Spirituality here is closer to liberation theology and less tied to Western thought or institutionalized religions. For many Chicana artists, art, politics, and spirituality are intertwined because many regard spirituality as "inseparable from questions of social justice, with respect to class, gender, sexuality, culture and 'race'" (Perez, *Chicana* 20). *Flor y Canto* exemplifies these aesthetic traditions, particularly in their altar-like approach. By doing so MdM reclaims and

[39] *Telesur*. "Zapatista Creative Resistance Shines a Light on Path to Freedom." 31 July 2016, www.telesurenglish.net/news

celebrates a tradition disrupted (but not annihilated) by European colonizers because they considered this *hechicería*, or witchcraft. This illustrates MdM's recycling of la bruja in cultural production influenced by Xicana indígena feminism. In the following section I will discuss the importance of the altar to Indigenous people in Mexico and explain why it was such a threat to Spanish clergy that it forced altars underground and into the domestic sphere in order for people to continue practicing their spiritual traditions. I will also explore why the altar is a gendered tradition and why this exemplifies the repurposing of la bruja for MdM.

Altars, Ofrendas & Brujería

People have maintained personal shrines in their home and have given offerings on their altars since ancient times. William A. Beezley explains,

> At least dating to Roman times, families in the Mediterranean basin had home altars to the household gods, the lares. At least dating from the rise of the Bantus, western African peoples maintained domestic relics. At least dating to the Toltec peoples, families in the Mexican central valley had personal shrines to deities. On both sides of the Atlantic these home shrines gave a personal character to more formal, more austere, and often more bureaucratic, hierarchical religions. (91)

Particularly important is how altars signify a form of resistance to the spiritual conquest in the Americas. Indigenous people in Mexico were forced to hide their spiritual practices from Spanish clergy in order to avoid being persecuted. As Ramón A. Gutierrez explains, "Indian shrines were driven into secret, deep within the household and clearly out of sign of the Catholic clergy" (20). Spanish clergy tried to stop native religious practices and so worship became confined to the domestic sphere. Ramón A. Gutierrez explains,

> Despite attempts of Christian clerics to eradicate such native practices in the initial years of the conquest, these practices persisted. At first they persisted clandestinely in the security of homes as acts of Indian contestation and opposition to the religion of their dominators. Secretly the Indians clung to the indigenous statues and icons. They continued to make covert offerings and to worship at sites that were holy in the preconquest topography. (44)

Considered "satanic practices" by Spanish clergy, they implemented many strategies to stop Indigenous people from continuing to worship their gods. Beezley explains,

> Early in the colonial period, the church hierarchy concluded that home altars had become the preserve of the old heretical religions, and especially satanic practices. Therefore, church officials, led by Padre Juan de Acosta, promoted the use of music and dances as a public prelude to the mass to draw the indigenous peoples away from their home altars to the public religious centers and later to the newly constructed churches. These friars attempted to eliminate the creation of home altars because of what they believed were the residual, although attenuated, pre-Columbian symbols. (92)

Hostile to native spiritual practices, Spanish clergy were concerned that they would interfere with the purity of Catholic teachings and reduced them to witchcraft, or *hechicería*. Offerings in the domestic sphere were particularly threatening to Catholic clergy, and indicated that natives continued to practice their ways. Offerings were placed on altars or sacred places to pay homage or ask for protection, depending on the intention of the altar.

Sometimes offerings were given in particular places that were considered sacred and resulted in altars or shrines being built in those sites. Gabriella Ricciardi explains that before the colonial project took place in Mesoamerica native people believed in animism. She notes, "Spirits were connected to people and places, and altars and shrines were built in sacred places that were often defined by their topography — hills and mountains, plateaus and canyons, rivers and lakes" (539). Even if a physical altar did not exist, an offering would be given as a gesture of respect. But, as Ricciardi states, "When the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs began in 1519, the Franciscan friars who accompanied the conquerors tried to impose Catholicism on the region and eradicate native people's forms of worship" (539). These Spanish clergy believed this was idolatry and devil worship. They could not fathom that the natural world was worthy of love and respect. Kay Turner suggests that offerings are "a sign of thanks and a signal that the desired

relationship is intact and can be relied upon" (134). The colonizers did not understand that people had a relationship with the land and saw the sacredness in it long before they arrived on the shores of the Americas.

Several Catholic priests documented Nahua ritual practices to root out any vestiges of native religious worship, including offerings. In Ruiz de Alarcón 1629 *Treatise* he describes finding offerings left by people in the hills. He found copal, skeins of thread and little cloths, candles, and bouquets (49). Many times these were found next to piles of stones. He reports,

> The offering, then, was in a pile of rocks, off a long distance from the roads. A small cave had been made in it in which the offering was protected from the sun and the water. And although later I made many inquiries in the surrounding villages, I was never able to find the trail of the one who made the offering, because the Indians of this land… hide this very diligently, warned, as I see it, by the Devil on account of what is of interest [to him]. (49)

This is just one example of the Spanish colonizer's view of *ofrendas* —or any spiritual practice that was not centered on a Christian worldview — and their insistence on thwarting them. Domestic altars were adopted by Indigenous people for this reason and in many cases, the home altar was constructed in opposition to institutional religious spaces like the Catholic church with its elaborate and often exaggerated architecture and images of European saints all around (usually male) that did not reflect the Indigenous population that the clergy were attempting to convert (R. Gutierrez 43). Aside from this, the Catholic altar is restricted only for the male priest, where a statue, symbol or painting of Jesus is central while the Virgin Mary is placed on the side.

This lack of intimacy and accessibility to places of worship are what made domestic altars historically associated with women's resistance to patriarchal religions. In fact, the link between women and altars has existed since ancient times. According to Ricciardi, "In many pre-patriarchal cultures — in Old Europe, the Near East, the Indus Valley, and the Mediterranean — altars to goddesses are found in hearths, since fireplaces symbolize home and family. These

goddesses are honored in order to celebrate women's life-giving and life-nourishing qualities" (538). She adds that in 5000-6000 BCE in the Neolithic era the first Western domestic altars were made, an era when women were religious leaders and goddesses were worshipped (538). Today women continue to keep altars partly because women are denied full participation in male-dominated religions. Women have also opted to participate in non-affiliated spiritual practices, reclaiming and reinventing their own beliefs, similar to the ways that Indigenous people syncretized their own spiritual practices with that of Catholicism. What is important here, however, is that women take agency over their own space, where they can put together their own stories and belief systems without imposition (Figure 4). As Kay Turner argues in her book on women's altars, *Beautiful Necessities,* many women of different ages and backgrounds are rejecting patriarchal religions, "which they view as unyieldingly hostile to women. Their claim on the altar tradition is based not on religion *per se*, but on an intuitive or political —often a feminist — alignment with the *spiritual dimension*, a feeling for the sacred that is broadly based on individuality, receptivity, and creativity" (61).

Indeed, contemporary Chicana feminists like MdM who incorporate the altar aesthetic in their creative work continue a tradition where women challenge a patriarchal religious culture that silences women and relegates them to the margins. They use their creativity via the altar/*ofrenda* aesthetic in their femzine to make a commentary about the challenges women face. Not only that, MdM's engagement with altars and *ofrendas* as a theme in their zine— alongside the honoring of their Indigenous roots as seen in their embrace of Xicanisma — is a form of reclaiming la Bruja because they are pushing back against the historical criminalization of *ofrenda*-making and altar creations, acts that were deemed brujería since home altars are often associated with the "witch" who performs her spells there.

Figure 4: An example of a domestic altar with offerings. Photo by Dana Salvo. From *Home Altars of Mexico* by Dana Salvo

While MdM's work is not a literal altar, embracing the concept of an offering on an altar illustrates their engagement with a decolonized spirituality, one where the spiritual and the material coalesce into a tangible publication that uses the altar aesthetic. This is akin to Paredes' belief that to decolonize our conception and perception of our body we need to stop seeing the body and spirit as two separate entities. "Para descolonizar el concepto y el sentimiento del cuerpo," she says, "hay que descolonizarnos de esa concepción escindida y esquizofrénica del alma por un lado y el cuerpo por otro; es lo que ha planteado la colonia" (100).[40] Similarly, Pérez suggests that the altar is a site where the material and physical world come together. Hence, MdM's offering of poetry and art makes us think differently about art and art-making, about the healing aspect of this, and about the material and the spiritual converge. Spirituality here is not necessarily the "opium of the masses" but rather an understanding that fosters a politicized consciousness to challenge inequality. Pérez argues that the African, Latin American and Indigenous diasporic traditions from which Chicanas draw from and implement in their writing and art are "politically oppositional to (neo)colonizing cultural and religious systems, but also because some of these traditions have not been altogether interrupted in the memory or practices of Chicana/o culture itself ("Spirit Glyphs" 43) In other words, this ancestral knowledge is deployed to challenge the status quo.

In the next section I will discuss Pérez' idea of the altar as a politicized and gendered aesthetic form in Chicana art and its presence in the poems and visual art in "Ofrendas of the Flesh."

Aesthetic Altarities

[40] "In order to decolonize the notion and feeling of the body, we must decolonize that split and schizophrenic conception of the soul on one side and body on the other; this is what colonialism has proposed."

According to Pérez, Chicana artists have used the altar as an art form for the past three decades. Most have utilized it to make social commentary on culturally relevant matters in the Chicana/o community. While the altar does not function the same way in all art installations, altar-inspired art has oftentimes been used to convey a gender conscious, politicized, spirituality that speaks to social issues, such as patriarchy in Mexican culture, or to validate the experiences of Mexican women, as is the case in the work of Chicana artist Amalia Mesa-Bains. Pérez explains the multiple ways Chicanas use the altar in their art:

> Altar-installation and altar-inspired art inescapably references the altar's timeless and cross-cultural spiritual function, whether to sacralize the profane; to interrogate the spiritual claims and political effects of dominant religious beliefs; to figure the imbrication of the artistic, the spiritual, and the political; or… to articulate presently meaningful, hybrid forms of spirituality and spiritually conscious art making. (*Chicana* 92).

In this section I focus on the overlap of the artistic, the spiritual and the political as seen in MdM's femzine. I discuss three ways I see altarities in MdM's zine, as described by Pérez: the altar as a site of invocation of the "unseen," the altar as a site of *ofrenda*, or offering, and the altar as a site of sacrifice or death. This aesthetic approach is more palpable in the introduction of each volume, but it is especially present in volume 12, "Ofrendas of the Flesh." Engaging with altarities as a way to speak about these issues reveals a Chicana artistic, political and spiritual aesthetic that diverges from other third wave femzine creators.

While many third wave femzinesters address gender violence by sharing personal stories or by offering guidance on how to respond to violence, here Chicanas write poetry that convey their understanding of violence as a systemic issue that affects communities of color, and women in particular, on the local and global level. Although there are a number of poems that describe personal experiences with violence, the use of altarities creates a more nuanced understanding of that experience, one that draws on the spiritual and political as a form of healing.

Below I define the three functions of the altar that I use as frameworks to analyze the poetry and art in "Ofrendas" and I explain how the altar is evident in MdM's zine project in general.

Altar as a Site of Invocation & Memory: Chicanas have adopted the altar to bring visibility to the "invisible." Altars, Pérez affirms, are sites of recuperation, recovery, or memory of those who are not "seen," or are "dead" in the eyes of many, those who are "not fully within social discourse," the ethnic "minority," the Latina/o, the sexually "queer" (*Chicana* 125). Chicanas use altars in their art to recognize the existence of those who society does not "see." Perez adds that altars are also sites of invocation of "that which is disembodied for reason of its *alterity* with respect to dominant cultural norms" (*Chicana* 144). Perez uses the Latin word for "the other," or the alter*,* to complicate the function of the altar as a site where Chicana artists invoke "the other," but also as an art form of "the Other" in the eyes of the dominant culture, who deem Chicanas as socially and culturally outside the norm.

By dedicating *Flor y Canto* to the community of women of the past, present and future generations, MdM's publication project functions as a site of invocation and memory. "This *amoxtli,*" they write, "is an offering to those before us and those to come. A seed in our struggle to remain human" ("Somos").[41] In paying homage to the generations of the past and future, MdM draws from the Dakota Sioux belief of the Seven Generations: the idea that actions represent learning from the previous three generations and the understanding that existing actions will influence the lives of three subsequent generations (Wildcat 121). As Wildcat affirms, "we are simultaneously shaped by history and are shapers of future history" (122). *Flor y Canto* documents their shaping of Chicana "herstory," while acknowledging that Xicana feminist activists shape their work. The altar is thus manifested in the simultaneous act of offering and

[41] Amoxtli means "Book" in Nahuatl.

paying homage to the past, present and future generations, a promise to continue to make this artistic *ofrenda* to their community by drawing on the legacy of resistance of the previous generations.

Altar as a Site of Offering: The altar can also serve as a site of offering or ofrenda. To give an ofrenda is to pay homage to someone or something; it is the act of surrendering or sacrificing on one's own terms, in hopes that it will manifest into hopeful and better futures. For Pérez, when Chicanas invoke the altar in their art it functions as an "offering on the altar," offering the fruit of her artistic labor with the aspiration that it will be transformative and healing to the community (*Chicana* 6). In many spiritual traditions altars are believed to be sites of "mediation between the material and the spiritual" world (Pérez, *Chicana* 124). Thus, certain items are placed on the altar as offerings to the spirits during healing ceremonies or other special occasions. When Chicanas draw on the concept of offering in their altar-inspired art, they are paying homage and respect to that which is not seen: the invisible, unheard, and unrecognized in their art. The altar as a site of memory and the altar as site of ofrenda overlap—in fact, one cannot exist without the other, as is the case in the tradition of Day of the Dead, where the altar *is* the offering. However, for the purpose of this essay, they are discussed as distinct entities.

MdM considers the work they do to publish and distribute the zine as an offering to the community. In producing an *amoxtli* that is abounding with "poetry and truth" by women of color, MdM creates a "sacred object," which they place on the community "altar." They do this with the hope that the "flower and song" on the pages will be healing and empowering for other women. By "chronicling ourselves for ourselves," they write, "we inspire the minds and spirits of the younger generation to keep the dream alive" ("Somos").

Altar as a Site of Sacrifice or Death: Chicanas use the darker aspect of the altar in their art to represent a site of death, destruction, or sacrifice. The altar as "sacrificial slab," as Perez calls it, signifies violence and annihilation, or that which has been sacrificed against one's will (*Chicana* 114). For instance, the Mexica's sacrificial slab was the altar where human sacrifices took place to make offerings to the gods. However, sometimes these ceremonies were violent performances of power and utilized to impose terror on enemy tribes (Carrasco, *The Aztecs* 77). Thus, to be sacrificed for the "common good" of the Mexica empire was not necessarily the "common good" for their enemies nor for those being sacrificed against their will. Therefore, Chicana artists invoke the altar as sacrificial slab to speak against the powers and systems that sacrifice people for the "common good" of the privileged few. Thus, Chicanas depict those who have fallen victims of capitalism, patriarchy, sexism, and other types of violence as being metaphorically sacrificed. Each volume of *Flor y Canto* is centered on a theme that connects to larger social issues. The poetry and art in the zine make commentaries on the social, political, environmental and economic oppression that people in communities of color face and how this inevitably affects women.

Ofrendas of the Flesh: Memory, Offerings & Sacrificial Slab

The volume "Ofrendas of the Flesh," takes an explicit altar-like approach on multiple levels. As the title indicates, the theme of the booklet concerns offerings, more specifically it asks women to consider how they offer their "flesh" or bodies in a world where women's bodies are abused and violated physically and institutionally. The theme of this volume echoes what Chicana feminist theorist, Cherríe Moraga, calls "a theory in the flesh," where women's "flesh and blood" experiences, their physical realities and struggles, their sexuality, skin color, and where they grew up come together to "create a politic born out of necessity" (23). Although

artists interpret the theme in a number of ways, the submissions in this volume ultimately speak the raw knowledge women bring from their lived experiences. Some express that they reclaim their bodies by making offerings on their own terms: "Women's flesh is ours to offer," declare the editors, "it is ours to act, reclaim, take back hide and voice as we wish" ("Ofrendas"). Women "offer" what they consider sacred, whether that comes in the form of offering their flesh to the ink of a tattoo, or offering their flesh to a sexual partner of their own liking. In this sense, women articulate their agency over their own bodies and their lives in the form of ofrenda. To offer herself in any way she wishes counters the misconception that women's bodies are readily available or that women have no control over their own bodies, especially important for women of color whose bodies have historically been violated.

However, the reader also finds that women interpret the theme by drawing on the altar as sacrificial slab. In the "Forward" section, Diea May makes a connection between the 1997 incident in Italy—when the Italian Supreme Court declared a man free because the woman he raped had been wearing jeans—to the ways in which women's bodies continue to be abused and assaulted without consequence today. The international movement known as Denim Day was born as a result of this incident, "a yearly reminder that women's flesh is abused and taken advantage of physically and institutionally" (May 2). The altar thus becomes a sacrificial slab that women invoke to speak out against these abuses. Conversely, the altar as a site of memory and invocation of the alter, or "the other," is also suggested here, as women use their art to bring visibility to the often invisible, unheard and untold stories of those who have fallen victims to the hegemonic powers that perpetuate gender violence. For instance, women draw on the Day of the Dead altar and the Aztec sacrificial altar to tell their stories or make critiques against the violation of their body and the power disparities they experience.

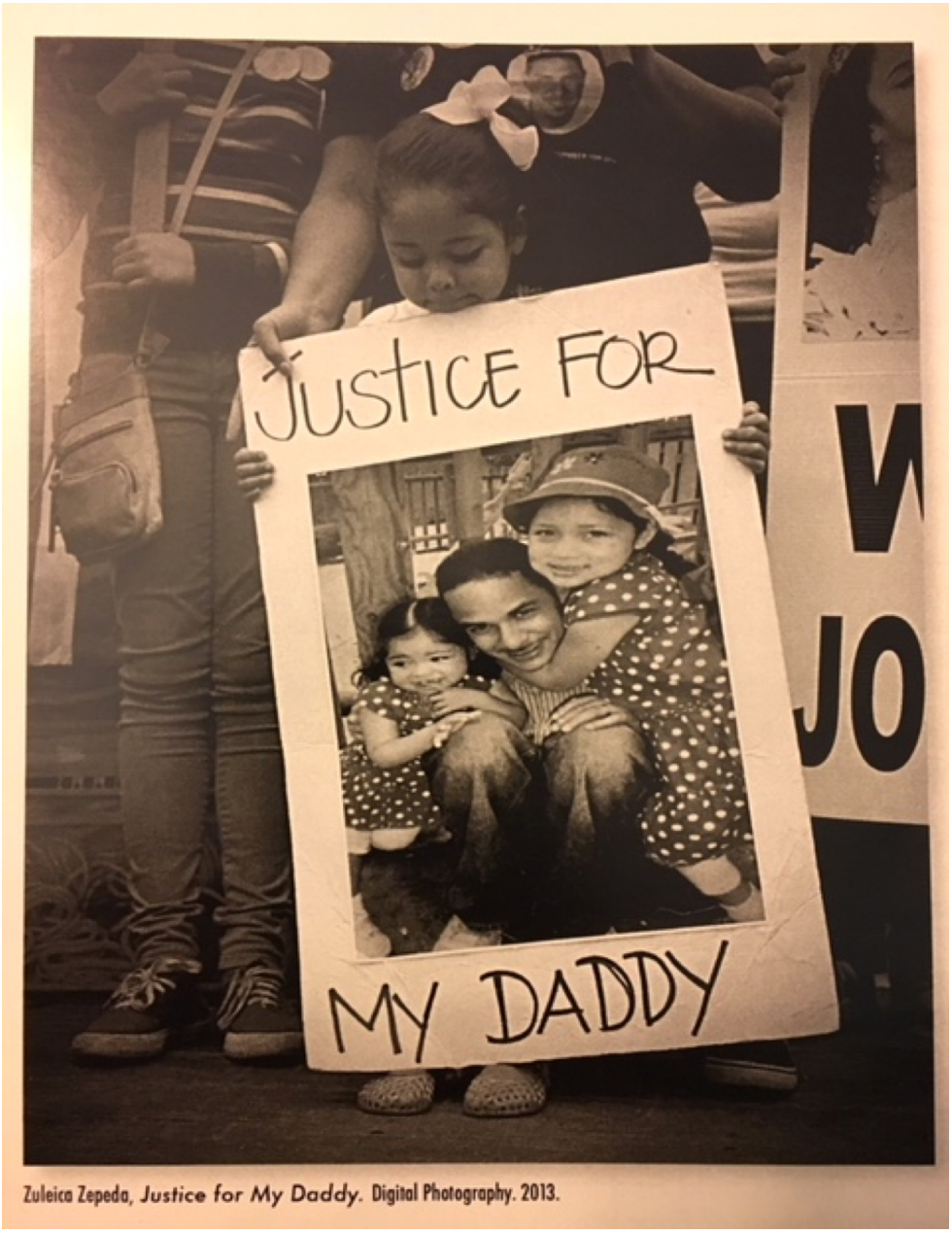


Figure 5: "Justice for my Daddy" by Zuleica Zepeda.
Front Flor y Canto, volume 12 "Ofrendas of the Flesh

However, before presenting the poetry and art, MdM opens the zine by addressing racial and state violence against men of color. "Ofrendas" opens with a dedication, "to all the families who mourn because of the police state." In a poem, titled "Too Many," Diea May speaks against police violence against men. She writes, "heart clenches/brutality badged/soul shudders/ personally/ gun purloins people… wombyn nation mourns our people/we question/ and we anger/and we continue" (ii). She not only describes an intimate scene of police brutality, she alludes to the women who are left behind to pick up the pieces. They "mourn," she says, but they also "continue" to convey strength and perseverance in the face of adversity. She concludes the poem by stating, "May all the young men whose lives are taken by badged persons rest in power… Blessings to the families that continue to mourn while many forget" (ii). On the opposite page sits a black and white photograph of a little girl holding a protest sign that reads, "Justice for My Daddy" by Zuleica Zepeda. In the middle of the sign there is a picture of two young girls hugging a young man who is squatting down to embrace them, while smiling at the camera (Figure 5).

It may seem out of place to honor the lives of men in the opening of a zine that focuses on the voices of women. Yet May invokes the altar as sacrificial slab here to educate readers about state violence against communities of color. Here the altar is a site of death and annihilation. Men of color are sacrificed by the police state for the "common good" of the capitalist state. By placing this poem and photograph at the entrance of the zine, readers are aware that police violence in communities of color is not separate from violent acts against women of color. To combat one, the other must also be combated, as Black Lives Matter activists remind us, "laws, policies, and the culture that underpin gender inequalities are

reinforced by America's racial divide" (Asoka).[42] Likewise, feministas comunitarias argue that state violence imposed on a community impacts everyone, not just the person targeted. While it is mainly men of color who are targeted by police in the US, women of color inevitably suffer because of this violence since they are the other half of the community. As Paredes states, "La negación de una de las partes en la sumisión y el sometimiento, es atentar también contra la existencia de la otra" (87).[43] By pointing to the way men's flesh is sacrificed by the police state, this piece also functions as a pedagogical tool to educate an audience made up mostly of women, that violence is not merely behavioral but that it is also structural, and that these are often intertwined.

Another form of structural violence that the poets in "Ofrendas" address is the exploitation of women. In Diana Pando's poem "Mythology of Flesh and Turquoise Serpents," she explicitly uses the altar as the sacrificial stone by placing it in the context of an Aztec human sacrifice to speak to the ways in which women's bodies are abused and exploited because of capitalist greed. Pando uses the vivid imagery of a sacrificial ceremony—obsidian daggers, turquoise fire serpents, entrails and carnage—as a way to compare this seemingly barbarous act to that of greedy capitalist who exploit women in the most inhumane ways. She writes, "Hermanas bust ass in cubicle ten hours a day and clean office buildings to put food on table. Offerings of flesh observed but we look the other way cuz it's easier on the eye" (3). She sets what we do not want to see before us in an altar-like fashion, even if we are not the exploiters, we are complicit if we refuse to see the Other. Implying that the victim is a mother by making a reference to putting food on the table adds to Pando's critique, as it is well-known that women

[42] Asoka, Kaavya and Marcia Chatelain. "Women and Black Lives Matter: An Interview with Marcia Chatelain." *Dissent*, 2015. www.dissentmagazine.org

[43] "The denial of one part [of the community] into submission and subjugation, is an attack against the existence of the other [part]"

tend to be the most vulnerable to exploitation in the workforce. The worker is thus making a sacrifice for her family while simultaneously sacrificing herself to her employer. In fact, the neoliberal era has seen an increase in exploitation of women workers throughout the world, especially immigrant women who are escaping poverty and violence in their countries. As Paredes notes, "Las mujeres son imprescindibles a estas reestructuraciones neoliberales como parche y mano de obra barata para las reformas estructurales" (57).[44] In the US it is typically migrant women confined to the type of labor Pando refers to. Desperation and oftentimes not having documents makes them easy targets for exploitation.

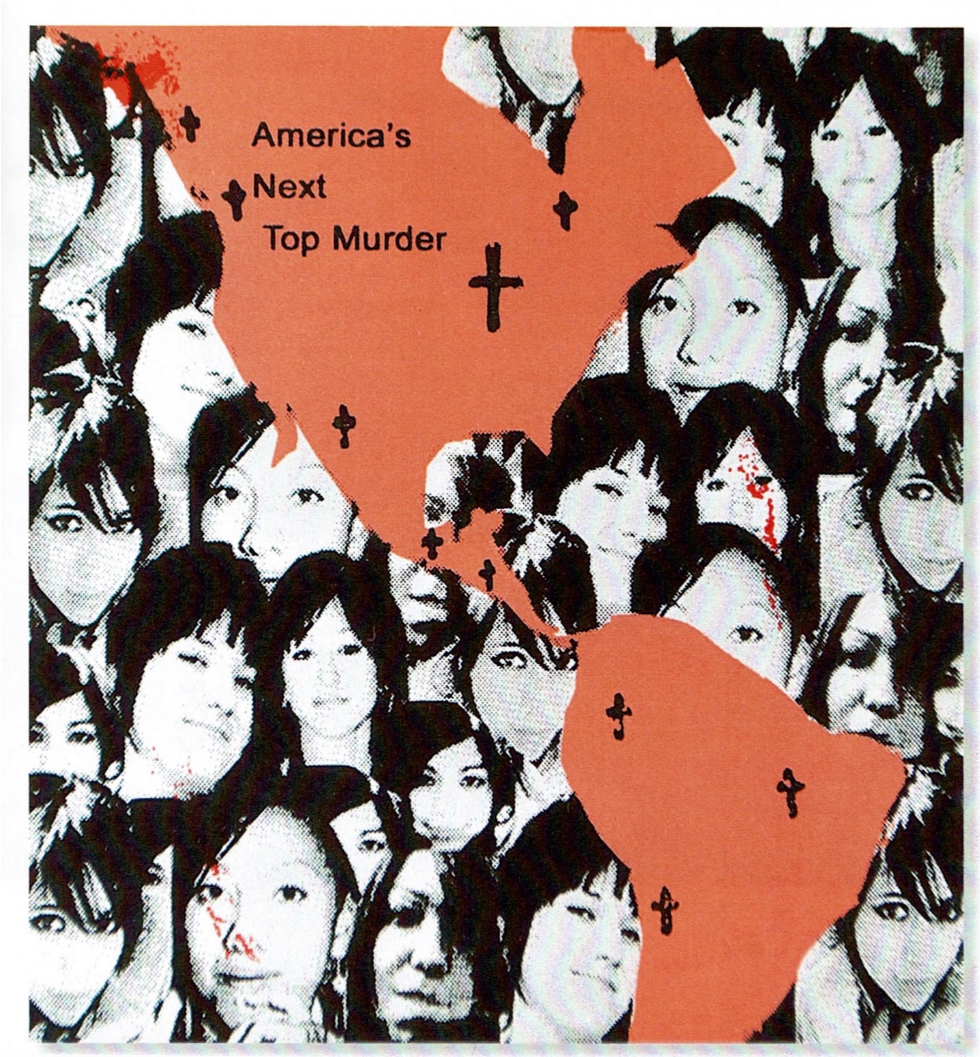
Pando moves on from women workers to the femicides in Ciudad Juarez. She writes, "This is the body of Christ. Wait, no it's the body and blood of maquiladoras making money for men refusing to mourn Mujeres de Juarez. Flowery offering of flesh strewn in desert…" (3). By specifically stating that maquiladoras make money for men, she points to a larger issue rooted in a system of patriarchy that deems women's bodies more exploitable and their lives less valuable, precisely because they are women. As Rosa-Linda Fregoso states, "One way to politicize violence against women …is by highlighting the role of the patriarchal state in creating the conditions of possibility for the proliferation of gender violence" (133). Pando recreates this site of sacrificial violence to challenge perceptions of barbarity, considering the ways in which capitalist society sacrifices victims every single day. The increase in maquiladora factories since NAFTA went into affect has brought an array of human rights violations against women in places like Cuidad Juarez, where women's bodies are seen as nothing but disposable.

Pando concludes the poem by describing the end of the sacrificial ceremony, alluding to mythical figures and leftover entrails: "Turquoise fire serpent/Slithers in sharp opal teeth/ Looking to devour/ entrails of sueños [dreams] left over on man made altars/and realizing it's not

[44] "Women are indispensable to the neoliberal restructurings as a form of cheap labor for structural reforms"

the Universe demanding tribute/it's our own hunger." Turquoise fire serpent is what the Aztecs called the Lord of Fire, Xiuhtecuhtli, who amongst other things was the patron god of the Aztec emperors and of the merchant class, the pochteca. It is he who devours the entrails of dreams "left over on man made alters [sic]" pointing to the Aztec's own elitist and imperialist culture, as human sacrifice was more tied to military strategies than spirituality. Thus, by pointing to the "man made altars" and "our own hunger" she is suggesting that violence is not inherent in the spiritual beliefs of the Aztecs but much more connected to human avarice. In utilizing the trope of human sacrifice to discuss the exploitation of women's bodies, Pando asks readers to take another look at capitalist society. In making parallels between the Aztecs and "our own hunger," she does not romanticize Aztec culture but rather illustrates Fregoso's assertion that violence is endemic to the State, "produced by an authoritarian government that has cultivated forms of violence… and even death" (132). Thus, Pando's poem deploys the sacrificial altar to make a larger critique of violence against women, pointing to the altar as a site of violence imposed on women that is linked to patriarchy, capitalism, and the State.

Like Pando, Felicia Montes also provides a critique of gender violence but this time through a digital silkscreen image that points to the continent of the Americas as a site of sacrifice. Montes' image is a black and white photo collage of Latina faces cut out and clustered together. Their eyes and black hair stand out, while their faces look colorless. Each woman looks straight into the camera as if acknowledging the viewer's gaze. An image of murder or death is conveyed, as a slight random splattering of blood over the faces of the women is present, although it is subtle. A large map of the Americas, orange in color, sits over the collage with the words, "America's Next Top Murder" in black (Figure 6). The words sit over the North



Felicia 'Fe' Montes, *America's Next Top Murder*. Silkscreen. 2011.

Figure 6: "America's Next Top Murder" by Felicia Montes.
From *Flor y Canto* volume 12, "Ofrendas of the Flesh"

American section of the map and Christian crosses are dispersed throughout the north, central and southern sections of the Americas indicating that women have died in these locations.

Montes' image points to a global, interlocking capitalist system across the Americas that function, first and foremost, to make profit at all costs for its ruling classes, as they are all complicit in the murders and exploitation of women. By not limiting the geographical sites of violence to one region in the Americas, Montes suggests that it is not only a Mexican issue despite it being the nation-state that has attracted the most attention regarding its femicides, but rather that women's lives are devalued all across the continent. Countries like Guatemala, El Salvador and Colombia have high numbers of femicides. Additionally, studies suggest that four women die daily due to femicides in the US and most are women of color (Russell & Harmes). Montes suggests that gender violence is not limited to "Third World" countries when she displays the words "America's Next Top Murder" across North America (22). She makes developed countries like the US complicit in the femicides, as US economic imperialist strategies such as free trade agreements rarely benefit the poorest communities; women have suffered the most from these policies.

In placing the religious iconography of the cross throughout both continents, a common item on domestic altars, Montes creates an altar-like aesthetic of memory, invocation and coexistence with the spirits of the dead. Paying homage to these women counters the mostly apathetic reaction of officials who have done little to deal with this very serious problem. Clustering the faces of these women, who are clearly Latina, into one unifying image, Montes is at risk of homogenizing the individual experience and story of each woman. However, these images also indicate what many have observed, that it is the dark-skinned, poor women who are most vulnerable to violence. Thus, to pay reverence to them is also to make their social

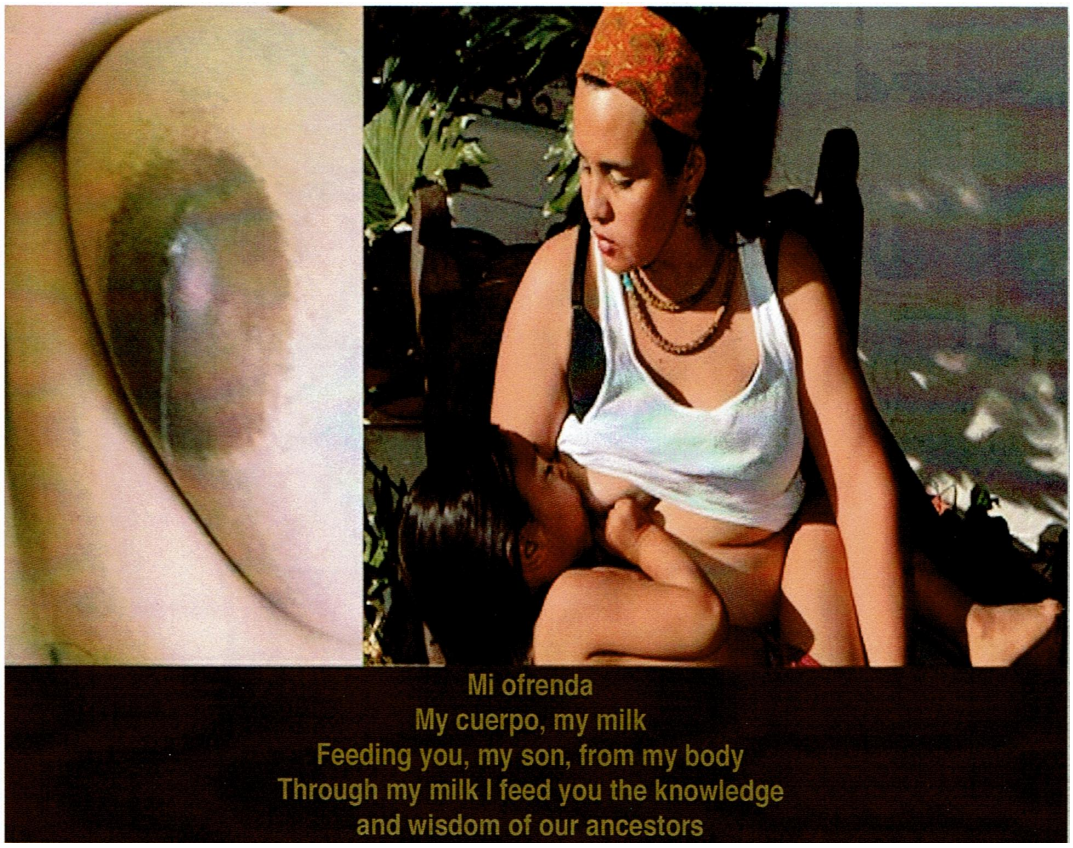


Figure 7: "Circle of Life" by Lucia Martínez & Jessica Ruizquez.
From *Flor y Canto*, volume 12, "Ofrendas of the Flesh"

invisibility visible. As Pérez asserts, altars cultivate memory and "that in itself is political and that in turn can generate wider social and political effects" (*Chicana* 124). Montes' image attests to this phenomenon.

Another compelling visual ofrenda is a digital collage titled "Circle of Life," by Lucía Martinez and Jessica Ruizquez (Figure 7). In their biography the artists identify as "Chicana lesbianas." Their piece consists of two photo images that sit side-by-side. One is a close-up photograph of a breast with mother's milk trickling down from the nipple and next to it a women sits breastfeeding a toddler-aged boy. It is implied that the close-up of the breast is hers. She sits on a wood chair, the upper part of her body revealed. She wears a white tank top, a black bra, a brown-beaded necklace, and a red and yellow paisley bandana on her head. Her hair, barely visible, is black, her skin light. She looks down at her child with a somber face. Underneath the images, in gold text the words, "Mi ofrenda/My cuerpo, my milk/Feeding you, my son, from my body/Through my milk I feed you the knowledge/and wisdom of our ancestors" ("Ofrendas" 49). On the surface this offering from mother to child is about nurturing and feeding, yet at a closer look a closer look suggests a political commentary on the health of communities of color.

Considering the health disparities among people of color and the lack of advocacy for maternity rights, this gesture is significant. Breast milk benefit the "neurological, immunological, digestive, and physical development of children," and it also has short and long term benefits for mothers (Chapman).[45] Studies show that socioeconomic status has a direct correlation with breastfeeding. High rates of poverty and lower education levels are common factors among mothers who do not choose to breastfeed (Dieterich et. al.).[46] While African-American women

[45] Chapman University. "Breastfeeding gaps between white, black, and Hispanic mothers in the US." *Science Daily*. 12 July 2016

[46] Dieterich, Christine M., et al. "Breastfeeding and Health Outcomes for the Mother-Infant Dyad." *Pediatric Clinics of North America*

have the lowest rates of breastfeeding, Latinas are a high-risk group because they suffer similar economic disparities. Thus, the act of breastfeeding is an act of resistance against a system that prevents women from being able to breast feed, a system where the "haves" can breastfeed and the "have-nots" cannot, even if they wanted to, since the US is the only developed country in the world that does not require employers to offer paid leave for new mothers — a policy that gravely impacts the ability to breastfeed for many low-income women.

In the age of neoliberalism tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans and corporations has led to more cuts to public services such as healthcare, food assistance, and WIC (Women, Infant and Children), services that offer breastfeeding incentives to low income families. These programs benefit the health of all children, and thus the community. As Bloch and Taylor assert, "While neoliberal policies are in theory gender-neutral, neoliberal politics have led to an overall worsening of the position of women and mothers" (208). This is why the simple act of breastfeeding is a form of resistance against the consistent attack on public resources that promote the health of underserved communities. Thus, the altar as a site of offering and breast milk as the *ofrenda* on the altar is indicative of the times we are living in — that it is now a luxury to breastfeed.

While it is unclear if the artists are partners, it is a noteworthy representation of brown queer motherhood. Oftentimes queer women tend to be left out of narratives of motherhood, particularly Latinas. If, as studies suggest, breastfeeding is a signifier of a higher education and income level, brown queer women defy the stereotype of the uneducated, low income, not "respectable" married Latina, who would fit the "stereotype" of the breastfeeding mom, as the act is often associated with ideas of femininity. Since Latina motherhood is already seen as a

threat, queer Latina motherhood is even more threatening to the status quo. Thus, the piece works as an ofrenda; an homage to queer brown mothers.

Furthermore, to say that through her breast milk she feeds her child "knowledge and wisdom of the ancestors," she suggests an ancestral understanding of health that existed before a violent capitalist system made it difficult for women to breastfeed, a system that also privileges the infant formula industry rather than people's health.[47] Thus, the offering on the altar is health — breast milk signifies health and breastfeeding becomes a political act that defies a system that does not promote a healthy quality of life for all people, a system that perpetuates the inability for families to emotionally bond with their babies due to economic insecurity. Here the artists refuse to be victims of an unjust system and instead they pass on knowledge and wisdom via breast milk to give their child health. From a feminismo comunitario perspective this piece conveys that the health of the whole community is necessary for everyone in the community to thrive. If mothers are not healthy, children are not healthy. If children grow up unhealthy there are larger implications of undernourishment for the whole community.

Lastly, the altar and *ofrenda* are not only to revere or pay homage to others; some pay homage to themselves. In doing so, the altar functions as a site of healing. In Mary Alvarado's poem, "An Offering to the Silence," the question of sexual violence is raised. Here Alvarado grapples with the deeply personal experience of rape, a particularly secretive issue that is often not discussed in public, hence the title. Many femzines creators have used their zine as a platform to openly address their experiences of rape and incest. Piepmeier explains that discussing these personal issues in public through zines helps with the healing process (165). Although she speaks of women who create their own zines, this idea is still relevant here because

[47] See Stephen Solomon's "The Controversy Over Infant Formula" in the *New York Times* to learn more about Nestle's aggressive marketing of infant formula in developing countries causing undernourishment and death in infant children in the name of profits.

Alvarado is making her story public, indicating that healing has begun to take place. Piepmeier observes that many femzines address rape "from cathartic personal stories to more explicitly didactic guides on how to respond" (165). In Alvarado's poem, however, we see neither of those strategies. She uses the Day of the Dead altar as a site to pay homage to the dead, that is, to herself. For Alvarado, the dead is a child, a young victim of rape. She uses the second person point of view throughout the poem to indicate that she is speaking to someone else, to the person that is "dead," whom she is invoking. To Alvarado, the "dead" is that little girl that learned to hate her body, repressed her sexual desires and curiosity, and stopped being who she was after she was violated.

The tradition of the Day of the Dead, a holiday celebrated throughout Latin America, is rooted in the belief that on the 2nd of November those who have departed will visit earth to celebrate with the living. The living prepare for the visit of the deceased by paying homage to them in the form of *ofrendas*, which of course, include altars filled with flowers, food and other treats. Alvarado gives her *ofrenda* to "la niña que se perdió," ("the girl that was lost") when she was raped (11). She writes, "Mi cuerpo, el cuerpo mío. Una vela, una ofrenda a ese cuerpo virgen, that virgin body ("My body, the body that is mine. A candle, an offering to that virgin body")" (11). Alvarado lights a candle to pay tribute to the virgin body that metaphorically died at the age of eight years old. Although virginity is usually attributed to purity in the eyes of the Church, here Alvarado re-appropriates spirituality from patriarchal institutions like the Catholic Church that equate virginity with a women's worth. By placing her virginity on the altar as something that is dead, not because she allowed it to be, but because it was forcefully taken from her, she points back to a patriarchal culture that perpetuates forms of violence on female bodies while at the same time policing them.

Alvarado also pays homage on her altar to the person that she used to be. She writes, "El 2 de noviembre comes and an offering is made to that dead person you let him make of you when he raped you at 8" (12). On her altar she places "An offering a esa vagina que te tardaste en aceptar ("an offering to that virgin that you took so long to accept"), and you… castigated its sexuality and found aversion, repugnance, and grew antipathy, and animosity, and made it your nemesis" (11). As the Day of the Dead ritual is centered on a coexistence with the dead, here Alvarado makes peace by coexisting with her traumatic past, which also includes a past of self-loathing, both of her body and her sexuality. Yet, she invokes that part of her that is "dead" and gives it new life, and thus, the process becomes a form of rebirth. When November 2nd comes, she says, "I no longer give him, the one who rapes, the power to kill me; Instead I celebrate to please, love, and feed my body daily! I give life to that pandemic disease called SILENCE on November 2" (12). The altar provides a space for healing but also has a cyclical function that illustrates the Mesoamerican notion of life and death itself; that life and death are inextricably intertwined, where death is "not…the end of existence, but as a gateway to other levels" and this is partially why the Day of the Dead is celebrated (Scalora 63). Thus, Alvarado's poem echoes this cycle in her own healing process, first presenting the little girl who "died" as a result of being violated, then presenting the "new" women who is alive and happy, and finally connecting back to that little girl, that part of herself, who dwells in the realm of the dead. Silence turns into voice in the process, as silence is what sexual predators thrive on and what partially perpetuates the abuse of young children. Here Alvarado "gives life" to silence by transforming it on her altar.

Alvarado's ofrenda poem illustrates violence against women on the micro level — the personal side of the attack on women's bodies. During the longest government shut down that took place under the Trump administration, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) expired,

a program that assists survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, because it is tied to a larger budget debate. Trump's demand for five million dollars for a border wall partially shut down the government waiting for Democrats to agree to fund it. This illustrates the intersection between state sanctioned violence against marginalized people and against women's bodies. While VAWA has received grants and continues to fund programs, future payments will be delayed until the law is reauthorized (Gathright).[48] VAWA is just one example of the lack of funding for community wellness, funding that has become more unstable in the neoliberal era. Alvarado's experience is a very personal one but it shows how lack of state support for women and girls who experience sexual violence creates a culture of apathy and sends a message to its citizens that the lives of women and girls are not valued.

Alvarado, Pando, Montes, May, Martinez and Ruizquez' visual and literary art illustrate how Latinas coalesce art, politics, and Chicana Indigenous spirituality to speak out against gender violence. In doing so they demonstrate a unique approach to third wave activism, one that is informed by their own cultural memory and traditions.

Conclusion

In creating an ofrenda-like zine, MdM's assists in the healing process for both the women who are published and for the community at large. MdM writes, "This work is a prayer for the healing of our selves, our communities, and our Mother Earth" ("13 Baktun"). While healing can take place in different forms, for women of color—who are often the least recognized for their creative talents—artistic expression allows more room and more freedom to step out of prescribed roles and be artists and writers, even if just in one volume of *Flor y Canto*. Not only that, MdM's publication project is helping to reverse a trend in the art and literary world,

[48] Gathright, Jenny. "Violence Against Women Act Expires Because Of Government Shutdown." *NPR.Org*, 24 Dec. 2018, www.npr.org

comprised of spaces where the work by women of color is rarely present. Evidence of the lack of representation of women of color in the art and literary world is documented widely. Studies show that a serious gender gap exists in the publishing world and in the visual art world.[49] The amount of women of color artists who get their work showcased is even lower, although exact numbers are unknown since studies focus on women as a homogenous group. This is not surprising considering the level of discrimination against women in the US, which has intensified under neoliberalism. According to recent findings by United Nations experts, gender prejudice in the US is worse than in most developed countries (Grobe).[50] While all women are victims of inequity, the study found that "women who are poor, belong to Native American, Afro-American and Hispanic ethnic minorities, migrant women, LBTQ women, women with disabilities and older women are disparately vulnerable" (Grobe).

Furthermore, when an aesthetic form like altarities is applied to honor a person or a people by remembering them, by making them visible and by coexisting with them, it makes a political statement; it conveys that they are worth remembering in a world that deems them not valuable. It reflects the feminismo comunitario concept of *memoria*, "visibilizando las mujeres invisibilizadas…" (Paredes 92).[51] To make an ofrenda is to honor a person or community, especially women who have been invisible. Yet altarities also allows one to be aware of and point to the forces that sacrifice or kill and exploit members of the community. In other words, it allows one to name the enemy. As Archuleta claims in her discussion of the power behind naming the enemy through writing for Native women, "Although Indigenous women face

[49] A 2012 report released by VIDA revealed that there was a serious gender gap in the literary publishing world (Gay). In their 2014 study exclusively about women of color writers, VIDA found that out of the 67 women who responded to their survey, only 11 were women of color (King). They agree that they received incomplete data to conclude definite results. Still, the data hints at a depressing reality. The numbers for women in the visual arts world do not fare better. Museums and galleries in the U.S exhibit 80% more males than females (Davis).

[50] Grobe, Stefen. "UN Experts Find Level of Discrimination Against Women in US 'Shocking.'" *Euronews*. www.euronews.com

[51] "making visible the women who are invisible."

numerous enemies from the past into the present, we realize that healing and empowerment cannot take place until we identify the many sources of our oppression" (92). In "Ofrendas" Chicanas use alarities as an aesthetic language to name the enemy, so that healing, survival, and resistance can take place.

The act of engaging with altars and *ofrendas* in their femzine is reclaiming la bruja because they embrace a tradition that was thought to be *hechicería* by European colonizers, and thus banned. Indigenous people continued to make *ofrendas* and built altars clandestinely despite being warned not to. MdM's work illustrates how Chicana feminists decolonize spirituality by continuing traditions that were seen as heathenism and devil worship. Because women have traditionally been connected to domestic altar-making, the altar is a gendered aesthetic and thus, MdM not only honors the Indigenous roots of altars and *ofrendas* but the women who keep this tradition alive on their own terms outside of a Church hierarchy. For this reason we can look at the Mujeres de Maíz femzine project from a feminismo comunitario lens, as it invokes the concept of *memoria* — making the invisible visible, honoring and respecting those who are deemed disposable and unseen while bringing to the forefront the idea that without seeing the "unseen" the community is incomplete. As Paredes reminds us, to not *see* one part of the community is to negate the other half (87).

Furthermore, MdM's *Flor y Canto* invites us into an intimate space where one can see how women of color grapple with violence. Articulating it through a medium like poetry and art signifies awareness, which is the first step in the process of healing and creating change. As Anzaldúa asserts, "Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the 'real' world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (*Borderlands* 109). This idea links back to the question of third wave

feminist activism. Although MdM are part of this feminist generation and engage with similar meanings of activism as their feminist counterparts, Chicanas like MdM draw from their own epistemologies, both spiritual and cultural to enact their activism. In MdM's case their *art*ivism is rooted in making other women art creators, and through that process elevates them as healers and wise-women, like the *tlamatini*.

While zines do not offer an official platform for women of color to voice their concerns, their presence in these small publications are significant nonetheless. I say "small" because these little, grassroots, underground, self-published booklets are not high-profile publications; they get easily lost in the world of official publishing. Nevertheless, Barbara Christian reminds critics of the ramifications of their work as critics, in the choices they make in the work they choose to critique: "literary criticism," she states, "is promotion as well as understanding, a response to the writer to whom there is often no response… I know, from literary history, that writing disappears unless there is a response to it" (62). To look at these underground publications that gleam with the "poetry and truth" of women is to promote their work and ensure that it continues circulating and living in our imaginations. By making them the subject of analysis, critics put these artists on *altares* and keep their memory alive; it is how we coexist with them in our work.

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Chapter 2: Indigenous Feminist Hip-Hop: Invoking the *Maíz* Diviner to Denounce Agribusiness in Mexico

> "And these fortune-tellers are so audacious and without fear of God that they venture to judge that they are one. And they are believed like prophets…with all the basis for success being in whether the maize kernels fall face up or face down…"
>
> --Hernando Ruiz de Alarcón *Treatise on the Heathen Superstitions That Today Live Among the Indians Native to This New Spain, 1629*

> "Es la fuerza que nos une la que viene de la tierra
> El maíz es mi semilla por el que gente pelea
> La injusticia de los hombres solo trae mas violencia
> El maíz me dio la vida y ahora yo te doy consciencia"
>
> --Mare Advertencia Lirika "Mujer Maíz"

In the previous chapter I discussed altars and offerings as a Bruja aesthetic to examine the poetry and art in Chicana feminist zines. This chapter examines existing scholarship of hip hop, beginning with the origins of hip hop feminism and Indigenous hip hop feminism, and more specifically the emergence of Oaxacan xip xop (as the Oaxacan youth in the hip hop movement spell it). I discuss, as well, how it began in the throes of global restructuring and its particular effects on women.[52] I will then offer my analysis of the video that is informed by feminismo comunitario and territorio cuerpo. I highlight the importance of maize to Indigenous people, focusing on the disruption NAFTA has wrought on Indigenous peoples' agricultural traditions and how the transgenetic contamination of maize brings larger risks to its cultivation in Mexico. I will end by discussing la Bruja as maize diviner and her role as symbolic of the spiritual decolonization and feminist resistance against this process.

[52] Throughout the essay I will spell hip-hop with an 'x' when referring specifically to Oaxacan hip hop. Oaxacan youth in the hip hop movement spell it with an 'x' as a way to identify Oaxacan hip hop specifically because of the 'x' in OaXaca. Also, because the 'h' is silent in Spanish, the 'x' makes the same phonetic sound that the 'h' makes in English. See documentary film *Xip-Xop OaXaca* (2007) by ManoVuelta Productions for more on the hip hop movement in Oaxaca.

More specifically, I turn to the maize diviner in a foundational song and music video "Mujer Maíz" (Maize Woman)[53] by Zapotec/ben'zaa[54] rapper, Mare Advertencia Lírika because the song illustrates the material realities of Indigenous women in Mexico in the struggle against neoliberal regimes and global capital, strategies that began under colonialism and continue today. What I find compelling about this song and video is that it critiques a system that simultaneously oppresses women and commodifies maize by drawing on the maize diviner who is simultaneously the maize woman, or la Bruja. She symbolizes that women are central to the fight against this violence because they are also the ones being disproportionately affected by this economic restructuring. Furthermore, the song critiques agribusiness and transgenetic contamination of maize in Mexico, the abuse of the land due to capitalism and the ongoing neoliberal economic policies that lead to the oppression of the people who work the land. In addition, the visual component of this piece centers on the maize woman who is both the woman who plants, grows and harvests maize and is also symbolic of the land, the earth, and mother nature.[55] Depicted as a maize diviner, or what I call a bruja-healer, she illustrates maize rituals

[53] "Mujer Maíz" is performed by the trio Advertencia Lirika. This song was a demo recording, meaning that it was not part of any official album or record label. It was released in 2008 and the video was recorded in 2010. Although the song was originally produced with the two other members, I focus on Mare's work as a solo artist in this chapter because: 1) she is the founder of the group and continues to produce music while the other women have ended their music careers. It was also very difficult to find any information about these two members. 2) Mare is involved in activism and fuses her artistic work with grassroots social justice movements in Mexico, issues that this song engages with, and 3) because she is of Zapotec/ben'zaa descent. The latter is crucial because Indigenous women in a country like Mexico are much less visible and are certainly in the minority in the music industry, which is why it is critical that Indigenous female artists receive more scholarly attention. In fact, Mare has received very little scholarly attention while other hip hop feminist groups of color in Latin America engaging with similar themes have received much more attention from scholars.

[54] The Zapotec people call themselves ben'zaa, binnizá or bene xhon, depending on the region where they are from. Their name translates to "gente de las nubes" or "cloud people." In this essay I will refer to them as ben'zaa for practical purposes since I will not be speaking about a group in a specific region. I prefer to avoid the names given to them by outside imperialist and colonizing powers and will refer to them by the name they give themselves. The Aztecs named the Zapotec people "Tzapotécatl," meaning "inhabitants of the place of the sapote" because of the abundant sapotes that grew in the region. The term "Zapoteco" was subsequently used by the Spanish colonizers to refer to the ben'zaa people.

[55] Many feminist critics have argued that associating women with nature is problematic partly because it legitimates the domination and exploitation of both, or it reproduces stereotypes that women, like the earth, are nurturing mothers. However, my aim in this chapter is to show that women are impacted the most by environmental

and ceremonies, and more specifically the role that women play in these rituals.[56] I claim that this figure challenges a colonial Christian framework that respecting the land is pagan, that rituals of celebrating the Earth are brujería, and that women and the land are disposable.

Throughout the chapter, I deploy feminismo comunitario as a framework, and more specifically Lorena Cabnal's notion of territorio cuerpo (body land)— an ecofeminst notion that the fight in defense of land is linked to that of women's bodies. Mujer Maíz represents the many Indigenous women who refuse to let their own territorio cuerpo be colonized but also speaks to the spiritual dimensions of territorio cuerpo—the understanding that all life forms are sacred. Mare's Indigenous hip hop feminism as reflected in "Mujer Maíz" is a reminder that women are part of the network of life and thus are sacred too, making Mare's work a crucial addition to the world of hip hop feminism in Abiayala, the Kuna word for the American continent before the arrival of Columbus.[57] Born and raised in Oaxaca City, Mare formed the first female hip hop group of its kind in 2004. Called Advertencia Lírika (Lyrical Warning) the group consisted of Mare, Luna and Itza. In 2009 the group disbanded and Mare has released three solo albums since; she continues to be the only female rapper in Oaxaca. Her poetic skills mirror Gloria Chacón's assertion that Indigenous women poets "are among the most viable and highly profiled poets in Mesoamerica" in the twenty-first century (69). As one of few Indigenous female MCs in Mexico — noteworthy in a patriarchal country that privileges whiteness and relegates Indigenous people to second-class citizens—Mare is reaching international acclaim as a feminist rapper.

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degradation and why the Earth in the song is symbolic of women who are that forefront of the struggle to save maize.

[56] At times I hyphenate the words "bruja" and "healer" throughout the essay (bruja-healer) when referring to brujas as healers, magic-makers, or diviners because they were labeled as Brujas by European colonizers.

[57] In Kuna Abiayala means *sangre que corre libre*, or land of vital blood. Abiayala refers to the American continent in its totality since before the arrival of Columbus. Indigenous communities assert that using this term Abiayala instead of "America" or "New World" is a step toward epistemic decolonization and the establishment of Indigenous peoples' autonomy and self-determination. I will use this term when referring to Indigenous people in the American continent. I will use "Latin America" and "North America" when referring to those regions specifically, as the term "Abiayala" is transnational in nature and defies national borders.

With her powerful lyrics that denounce social inequity in Mexico, government corruption, the unjust treatment of Indigenous peoples and especially gender disparities, Mare is also a grassroots activist who works with various organizations that center on social justice issues in Mexico and across the world. She won the Maria Sabina award in 2013 for defending women's rights through music. That same year she toured 12 US cities where she performed and facilitated workshops with immigrant groups in the Latina/o community. Mare, like other hip hop feminists, aims to undo the stereotypes and the patriarchal gender roles imposed on women and uses hip hop as a platform to disseminate her message. As one of few Indigenous female rappers in all of Latin America, she brings her experience as an Indigenous woman to the forefront. Although she advocates for the rights of all women, she incorporates an Indigenous epistemology into her music, making her not solely a hip hop feminist, but also an Indigenous hip hop feminist.

Hip Hop Feminism - From the United States to Latin America

Hip hop feminism is a sociocultural movement that uses hip hop as a platform to advocate for women's rights and gender equality. Female rappers raise awareness about patriarchy, misogyny, capitalism, homophobia, sexism and racism's effects on women, and use hip hop to advocate for the liberation of women in all of its forms. In the words of Aisha Durham, hip hop feminism is

> … a sociocultural, intellectual, and political movement grounded in the situated knowledge of women of color from the broader hip hop or the U.S. post-civil rights generation who recognize culture as a pivotal site for political intervention to challenge, resist, and mobilize collectives to dismantle systems of exploitation. (3)

Conceptualized by women of color from the post-civil rights generation in the 1990s, hip hop feminism builds on intersectional approaches developed by Black feminists, and thus much of

the work by hip hop feminist scholars centers on Black women's experiences.[58] However, Durham's definition can be expanded to include colonization and environmental degradation as part of systems of exploitation that especially affect Indigenous women and can be applied outside of a US context to discuss women's experiences in other parts of the world, as well.

In fact, hip hop feminism has become an international phenomenon and scholars are calling for more examination of this growing movement in a transnational context. For instance, Tanya Saunders who writes on transnational hip hop feminism in the African Diaspora calls on hip hop feminist scholars to look outside US borders and examine the work of female MCs in the Americas, partly because of the history of uneven power relations between the US and many of these countries. She asserts, "The limited critical engagement in the US of the issues being addressed by non-English speaking hip-hop feminists, not living within US borders, limits recognition of how what happens in the US is firmly interconnected with transnational systems of power that are foundational to the Americas, and by extension to the west" (185). Indeed, many Latin American hip hop feminists like Mare rap about the effects of US economic policies abroad and the correlation with increased gender inequities. Responding to Saunders' call, I analyze the work of a hip hop feminist in Mexico who raps in Spanish, one that critiques misogyny and gender violence in Latin American countries, but that also makes clear that this violence is partly due to living under a neoliberal regime. My discussion of Mare's work adds another dimension to Saunders' work, one that includes the voice of an Indigenous woman living

[58] The term "Hip Hop Feminism" was coined by Joan Morgan in her debut book *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost* where she embraces the contradictions and complexities of being a feminist who grew up on hip hop, a genre that is known for its misogyny and homophobic, hypermasculine sensibilities. She calls for a feminism "that samples and layers many voices, injects its sensibilities into the old and flips it into something new, provocative, and powerful" (62).

in the 21st century in the Americas — a necessary perspective that is often ignored, even in the world of hip hop feminism.[59]

In analyzing Mare's work, I also respond to calls for more consideration of Indigenous rappers in the fields of hip hop studies. Kyle T. Mays, for instance, argues that Indigenous erasure exists in the field (130). Among other things, he asks for more positive representation and coverage of contemporary Indigenous people in all of their complexities, "without reproducing ideas of Indianness that feed into settler fantasies about what being an Indigenous person looks like or means" (130).

While Indigenous hip hop feminism has not been fully explored within the field of hip hop feminism studies, Mays dedicates a section to it in his book *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes* (2018), titled "Indigenous Masculinity in Hip Hop Culture Or, How Indigenous Feminism Can Reform Indigenous Manhood." Though not exhaustive and with limited focus on North American Cree rapper, Eekwol, May creates much needed space for Indigenous women's participation in hip hop, highlighting the fact that Indigenous women are often omitted from gender studies and hip hop studies discourse. Mays defines Indigenous hip hop feminism as "rooted *first* in the experiences of Indigenous women and how they actually live their lives" (81). He draws from Indigenous feminist Cree/Metis Kim Anderson who argues that "Indigenous feminism is about honoring creation in all its forms while also fostering the kind of critical thinking that allow us to stay true to our traditional reverence of life" (qtd. in Mays 81). This Indigenous feminist epistemology conjoins with the notion that Indigenous hip hop feminism is

[59] While hip hop feminist scholars like Saunders are beginning to see the important work of feminist rappers outside of the US, their focus is still largely on Black female rappers in the African diaspora and they often overlook mestiza rappers. Indigenous female rappers are discussed even less than their mestiza counterparts. To be fair, there are significantly less self-identified Indigenous female rappers than mestiza rappers. However, the few Indigenous female MCs that exist do not get as much attention as mestiza MCs. For instance, Chilean artist, Ana Tijoux has an enormous following throughout Latin America, the US, Canada and Europe with several Grammy nominations under her belt. On the other hand, Jaas Newen a female Mapuche rapper in Chile who raps in Mapuzungún and Spanish, has not received the same attention as Tijoux, although they rap about similar topics.

"fundamentally about decolonization," as Mays claims. He maintains that an Indigenous hip hop feminist framework centers on "colonialism but is in a constant state of reaction to it, constantly challenging it and dealing with the outcome of colonialism" (80). Indeed, reverence for all life, Indigenous women's experiences, and decolonization are integral to a hip hop feminist framework. In the spirit of broadening the discussion on Indigenous hip hop in general, and Indigenous hip hop feminism in particular, this work contributes to and intersects within various fields, including hip hop studies, Black feminist hip hop studies, decolonial studies, and Indigenous feminisms. In exploring the work of Mare, one of the few Indigenous female MCs in the region and a contemporary urban rapper—one who breaks stereotypes of Indigenous people as backwards, uneducated, rural, and technologically inept—I add to existing scholarship on Indigenous hip hop feminism to address the erasure problem in hip hop studies that Mays rightfully asserts. Specifically, I expand Mays' work by calling for an Indigenous hip hop feminism that is transnational, one that is rooted in the experiences and feminist theories of Indigenous women in Abiayala—a community-centered feminist theory and praxis that advocates for the rights of all living things: the Earth, animals and people, as part of a sacred network of life.

Indigenous Hip Hop Feminism & Feminismo Comunitario

Similar to Anderson's assertion above that Indigenous feminism honors "creation in all of its forms," feminismo comunitario draws on the notion that all life should be honored. However, feministas comunitarias develop this idea by emphasizing that women are a critical part of their communities, and therefore it is of upmost importance that they not be mistreated, denied resources, exploited and seen as inferior —for this would have a negative impact on the community as a whole because all members of a community need to thrive in order for the whole

community to thrive. Furthermore, as Paredes reminds us, women are the ones who birth all members of the community (39).[60] Because women are so central to the wellbeing of a community, a great imbalance—*una desarmonización*—occurs if women are harmed, one that will impact everyone negatively. [61] The current manifestation of patriarchy, which Paredes calls "patriarcado colonial-neoliberal," is at the root of this imbalance (62, 70-71).[62] Thus, to regain equilibrium and wellbeing of all living things in a community the dismantling of patriarchy and the capitalist neoliberal system that sustains it is needed for the whole community to thrive.

But balance is not limited to the human world; it also includes plants, animals and the cosmos as a whole. Feministas comunitarias believe humans are connected to all forms of life and so if the earth is exploited, then that also creates an imbalance that has a negative effect on all humans, but especially women. Lorena Cabnal, a Maya-Xinca feminista comunitaria expands on this idea, with the concept of territorio cuerpo, or body land. Territorio cuerpo is an Indigenous ecofeminist theory that "alludes to a cosmological interpretation and a politic that acknowledges how bodies have a relation and being in the network of all life" (Sweet & Ortiz 2016, 2). Cabnal argues that the acts of violence against the land and women are part and parcel of the same patriarchal, colonial-capitalist system that views women and the earth as exploitable and available for the taking. The massive extraction of natural goods from Indigenous lands, she states, is commensurate with the attack against Indigenous women because the wellbeing of the

[60] Paredes states, "Las mujeres somos la mitad de cada pueblo, una mitad que cuida cria, protege y va a parir a la otra mitad que son los hombres." ["Women are half of the community, the half that cares for the children and the ones that will birth the other half of the community, which are the men"]

[61] I acknowledge that naturalizing childbirth as an inherent part of being a woman is problematic and can be a potential source of gender oppression. My interpretation of Paredes' quote is that we must acknowledge that women are performing the reproductive labor of a community and must be respected.

[62] Feministas comunitarias recognize that patriarchy existed before the colonizers arrived in the Americas. They refer to this as entronque patriarcal, roughly translated as patriarchal roots. Paredes explains, "la opresión de género no sólo vino con los colonizadores españoles, sino que también había una propia versión de la opresión de género en las culturas y sociedades precoloniales, y que cuando llegaron los españoles se juntaron ambas visiones…" ["the oppression of gender did not manifest with the Spanish colonizers, there was also a version of gender oppression in pre-colonial cultures and societies, and when the Spaniards arrived, both visions came together…"] (72).

land is in direct relationship with the wellbeing of women's body (Cabnal, "Feminismos" 23). Thus, feminismo comunitario tackles the issues that traditional hip hop feminism engages with, such as patriarchy, racism and capitalism, while speaking out against decolonization, as Mays suggests, but also advocates for the rights of the Earth as part and parcel of women's rights. As Cabnal asserts, "No tiene sostenibilidad política una propuesta feminista que no traiga la dimensión de la tierra" ("Especial"). [63]

As an Indigenous woman who staunchly defends women's rights and Indigenous peoples' rights and who acknowledges the importance of the land and its resources, I maintain that Mare's Indigenous hip hop feminism is grounded in feminismo comunitario, especially evident in her song "Mujer Maíz." This makes Mare's contribution to the world of hip hop in Latin America and Indigenous hip hop in Abiayala noteworthy. She disrupts the male dominated Indigenous hip hop scene in Latin America by bringing a female perspective that calls attention to the "patriarcado colonial-neoliberal" sustained by the current global neoliberal regime that wages an economic war on ordinary people and falls more intensely on Indigenous people, poor people and women. In fact, hip hop *indígena* in Latin America was born during a time period where many countries experienced the privatization of public institutions, the decimation of labor laws to attract more foreign investments and the dismantling of the welfare state and programs against poverty. The next section explores Indigenous hip hop in Latin America and the Oaxacan hip hop movement more specifically — the place where Mare began her career as a *rapera* —and considers how marginalized youth use hip hop to provide commentary to economic and political oppression.

[63] "A feminist approach that does not bring the dimension of the land does not have political sustainability."

From Hip Hop to Xip Xop – Globalization from Below

From the time hip hop hit the airwaves in Latin America, Indigenous youth identified with it, embraced it and produced their own music with their own regional flavor and sounds, sometimes in their own language. Hip hop groups like Los Nin (Kichwa from Ecuador), Bro MC (Guaraní-Kaiowá from Brazil), Slajem K'op (Maya Tsotsil from Mexico), and numerous others across the Americas record CDs, release YouTube videos, perform and promote their work on social media. They show the world that Indigenous people are not static but rather globalized and in constant motion, challenging the notion that Indigenous communities are far removed from modernity. Certainly not all Indigenous hip hop artists are the same, just like not all Indigenous people are the same. Political agendas, worldviews, life experiences and artistic vision may differ. However, the tendency among Indigenous hip hop artists in Abiayala is that most exhibit hip hop's rebellious spirit. They challenge the status quo, denounce racism, speak out against the injustices their communities face and celebrate their ancestry and culture. For example, Slajem K'op ("La última palabra" (The Last Word), Maya tsotsil rappers from San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, express in their bilingual song "Dialecto," that their ancestral language is something to be proud of and retained. They rap, "No perdamos nuestra lengua materna, nuestra armadura, es nuestra cultura, nuestra tierra/niño joven adolecente, piensa frecuentemente, el dialecto siempre estará presente…" (Slajem K'op).[64] Many Indigenous youth rhyme in their ancestral tongue to revitalize the language and entice young people to preserve it. Some have had to re-learn their parent's language to put it in their songs, like the Kichwa group Los Nin. But rapping in the colonizer's language does not make Indigenous rappers less authentic or less political, nor does it make their advocacy less potent. As Mays argues, "We should not value one form of Indigenous

[64] "Let us not lose our mother tongue, our armor, our culture, our land / adolescent kid, think constantly, this dialect will always be present ..."

hip hop over another just because the artists use 'traditional' teachings or rap in Indigenous languages" (25). Mare, for instance, does not rap in the Zapotec language—her grandmother was the last generation in her family to speak it—but she certainly advocates for her community and incorporates these values into her music.

Most importantly, Indigenous hip hop in Abiayala came into being as the effects of neoliberal doctrines were being felt throughout the continent. For those living in the periphery, the high rates of unemployment, privatization of public institutions and the implementation of austerity measures intensified their already precarious situation.[65] Spensy Pimentel, in his article on the Guaraní-Kaiowá hip hop group Bro MC, explains that when hip hop went mainstream in the United States in the 1990s and began spreading throughout Latin America:

> América Latina… estaba en una difícil situación por causa de las políticas económicas difundidas por el llamado Consenso de Washington, propagadas por organismos supuestamente multilaterales y dominados por el *establishment* financiero estadounidense, como el Fondo Monetario Internacional y el Banco Mundial. Eran los tiempos dorados de la doctrina neoliberal: privatizaciones en masa, recorte en el presupuesto, creciente endeudamiento de los gobiernos a causa de los procesos forzados de apertura económica. En las periferias de las grandes ciudades latinoamericanas… la juventud negra y mestiza vivía una realidad de desempleo, violencia y desesperanza. (227).[66]

The circumstances in which hip hop originated in the US were strikingly similar to those in Latin America, and in fact, are interconnected. Hip hop in the US was born in the late 1970s among the devastation of African-American, Caribbean and Latina/o communities in the South Bronx. Deindustrialization in the area led to the loss of thousands of jobs; government neglect led to an end to social services and educational opportunities. There was an increase in crime, the literal

[65] See Luis Martín-Cabrera's article, "Escribo Rap con R de Revolución: Hip-hop y subjetividades populares en el Chile Actual," to learn more about marginalized youth in Chile and their use of hip hop in the neoliberalism era.

[66] "Latin America ... was in a difficult situation because of the economic policies spread by the so-called Washington Consensus, propagated by supposedly multilateral organizations dominated by the US financial establishment, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These were the golden times of the neoliberal doctrine: mass privatizations, cuts in the budget, growing indebtedness of governments due to the forced processes of economic opening. In the peripheries of the large Latin American cities ... the black and mestizo youth lived a reality of unemployment, violence and despair."

crumbling and burning down of buildings, and overall urban decay that devastated these communities. The same capitalist forces that caused economic divestment in the South Bronx were part and parcel of a global economic restructuring project that also affected the economies of Latin America in the upcoming decades. In both regions, the youth who did not have a voice otherwise, found in hip hop a way to resist their marginalization and provide commentary on their political and economic oppression. Who would have thought that the culture of politically abandoned youth would become a global phenomenon called hip hop? Hip hop culture now represents what Jeff Chang calls "globalization from below." He explains, "As hip-hop grows ever more popular, it becomes squeezed in the uneasy space between commercial and economic globalization from above and borderless, cultural grassroots globalization from below" (64).

Hip hop in Mexico followed a similar trajectory as the rest of Latin America, becoming popular in the 1990s mostly as a result of increased migratory flows due to the displacement that the neoliberal economy caused. In Oaxaca, however, xip xop became more popular in the early 2000s, with an overt political agenda, as it became tightly linked to popular movements in the state of Oaxaca. It is spelled with an 'x' as a way to identify Oaxacan hip-hop specifically because of the 'x' in OaXaca. As the second poorest state in Mexico with a large Indigenous population, Oaxaca suffered greatly from austerity measures that worsened after the signing of NAFTA. One of the most notable results of this was the cuts in education which resulted in the 2006 teacher's strike, after demands for school uniforms, scholarships and an increased budget for school buildings were not met. The governor, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz responded with a violent attack against the protestors, sending in riot police, which consequently generated a huge counter movement from below with thousands coming out to protest demanding his resignation. Oaxacan youth took to the streets in solidarity with the teachers, and the xip xop scene, just beginning to

flourish in the city, became a political platform from which to speak out against government repression. The youth used xip xop to disseminate a political message through rap and graffiti art to provide commentary on state violence. In fact, graffiti art was a crucial platform for young people to express their political opinions, as the media was not representing the truths from below.[67] Mare's introduction to hip hop culture had already began at this point, starting with graffiti art.[68] At 16 she begins rapping and at 18 she joins OCG crew in 2003, then she went on to form Advertencia Lírika in 2004. Mare's lyrics reflect the influence of social movements from her home state of Oaxaca, one with a long history of resistance. It is not a surprise that these politics surface in her music and her grassroots activism.

Mare's Indigenous Hip Hop Feminismo

Mare's Indigenous hip hop feminism echoes her advocacy for all people, not just Indigenous people, and all women, not just Indigenous women. This is central to the principles of feminismo comunitario, that denying the rights of one part of the community is curtailing the potential of the whole community. In other words, no one is free unless we are all free, as many feminists of color in the US have also argued.[69] Paredes asserts, "La negación de una de las partes en la sumisión y el sometimiento, es atentar también contra la existencia de la otra" (87).[70] In songs like "Bienvenidxs" (Welcome), Mare conveys these principles. She raps, "Sigo buscando el bienestar y no lo veo/solo veo las huellas de la explotación y el saqueo/El desempleo

[67] Considering that many youth came from neighborhoods with little to no resources, with no cultural centers or other forms of artistic expression, they found graffiti as a way to let their voices heard. See Elizabeth Barnett's Master's thesis on Oaxaca street art, where she states, Oaxacan youth carve out "their own space, identity, and voice within the fabric of Oaxacan and Mexican society and politics. Art has not only become the means for youth to assert their voice in both national and international spaces but has also become a means to empower and mobilize a silenced and oppressed generation" (3).

[68] Hip hop consists of four elements: rap, DJing, graffiti, and breakdancing. Some also claim that the fifth elements of hip hop, the forgotten element, is knowledge.

[69] As the famous quote by Audre Lorde demonstrates, "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own."

[70] "The negation of one part of the community to submission and subjugation also threatens the existence of the other part" (2014, 87).

crece a diario y no es mentira/que los de abajo somos quienes estamos en la mira."[71] As a young person growing up in the 21st century in Mexico, Mare has witnessed the quality of life deteriorate under the neoliberal regime. As De Regil asserts, NAFTA transformed Mexico "into a net producer of the poor" (12). The wealth disparities that worsened under NAFTA have inevitably been followed by an increase in violence against women, an issue that Mare fervently denounces. In songs like "Y tú qué esperas?" ("What Are You Waiting For?") and "Vivas y Libres" ("Alive and Free"), she urges women to step forward and speak their truth and condemns the violence women experience in their daily lives. Indeed, violence against women in Mexico is an urgent problem that the government has been slow to address. The high rates of femicides are striking, with 50,000 killings of women since 1985, and little has been done to resolve this (*The Guardian*).[72] Likewise, in 2017 Oaxaca had the second highest rate of gender violence and homicide against women in the nation (Jimenez).[73] For feministas comunitarias, everything is related in the network of life. If women are dying due to violence, that has negative consequences for everyone, because all life is connected. Cabnal affirms in her discussion of territorio cuerpo, "Todo es relacional en la red de la vida. Si se acaban los cuerpos por el femicidio de la mujeres en países como en Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, México, se acaba la vida"[74] ("Especial").[75] Mare denounces this injustice in her music, expressing that women's lives have value; that they matter, and encourages them to stand up for this injustice.

[71] "I'm still looking for well-being and I do not see it / I only see the traces of exploitation and looting / Unemployment grows daily and it's not a lie/that those of us down here are the targets."

[72] "Mexico: Murders of Women Rise Sharply as Drug War Intensifies," *The Guardian*. 2017. https://www.theguardian.com

[73] Jimenez, Christian. "Ocupa Oaxaca Segundo lugar nacional en feminicidios." *El Universal.* 22 January 2018. http://oaxaca.eluniversal.com.mx

[74] "Everything is related in the web of life. If bodies are exterminated because of feminicides in countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico – then life is also exterminated" (2014).

[75] "Especial: Territorio, cuerpo, tierra." *Youtube,* uploaded by Eraverde (Universidad de Costa Rica), 29 January 2017.

Furthermore, the commodification of agricultural goods like maize has also been detrimental to women. NAFTA devastated the livelihood of many rural Indigenous that depend on cultivating and selling their crops for survival, creating a crisis and pushing many to migrate. According to Rogers, "Young men are the number one group leaving rural Oaxacan villages, leaving behind elderly men, women, and children" (162). Out migration left many women alone to fend for themselves, run the household and bring an income to support the family while their husbands work abroad (McEvoy).[76] Some are forced to migrate themselves, work for low wages in the cities, sometimes relying on sex work to survive, making them vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Mies and Shiva articulate that economic policies that lead to commodification of food and water lead to gender violence. They confirm, "an economics of the deregulation of commerce and of the privatization and commodification of seeds and food, land and water, and women and children degrades social values, deepens patriarchy and intensifies violence against women" (1 [2014]). Mare's "Mujer Maíz" brings these issues to the forefront, particularly the detriments of NAFTA on maize cultivation in Mexico. By connecting women to the maize plant, the concept of territorio cuerpo becomes clear—the body is metaphor for land, violence upon the land is also violence upon women.

Mujer Maíz and the Struggle Against Agribusiness in Mexico

"Mujer Maíz" expresses the harm that neoliberal doctrines like NAFTA have on the environment, economy and culture. One of the main themes of the song is the denouncement of genetically modified corn and its effects on farmers, the land and agricultural traditions. For instance, in the following stanza Mare raps:

[76] McEvoy, Jamie P. "Male Out-Migration and the Women Left Behind: A Case Study of a Small Farming Community in Southeastern Mexico." PhD dissertation, Utah State University, 2008.

Nuestra cultura muere en manos del invasor
La paciencia se acaba
Solo existe la agresión
Ahora juegan con la genética
terminan con la ética
Pensando en algo grande
Esa mierda por donde se hace expande
Quitándole al campesino su dinero
Violando y asesinando a nuestro suelo[77]

The results of genetic engineering of maize perpetuate the "invasion" Mare consistently addresses in the song. The invaders are the corporations but also the invading transgenetic seeds. These seeds are symbolic of the colonizing project as whole: foreign invaders taking over people's land is similar to the invaders introducing foreign genes into maize. Mies and Shiva suggest that this process is akin to the colonization of women's bodies, "Colonization of the seed reflects the patterns of colonization of women's bodies. Profits and power become intimately linked to invasion into all biological organisms," illustrating that women will be impacted the most as a result of the biological manipulation made by agribusiness (29 [1993]).

Additionally, the importation of genetically modified corn entering the country and contaminating the maize plant in Mexico is of major concern because it puts maize in danger. Biotech companies like Monsanto, for instance, want to import genetically modified maize seed for human consumption. While they have imported GMO seeds to grow yellow corn, mostly used for animal feed, studies suggest that maize contaminated with transgenes have reached fields in several states, including Oaxaca (Greenpeace). Government regulators speculate that contamination occurred "when farmers planted transgenic maize that was imported from the more than 5 million tons of maize that is imported annually from the United States" (Greenpeace 1). If contamination increases, more than 60 varieties of maize are in danger.

[77] "Our culture dies in the hands of the invader/Our patience is over/Only aggression exists/Now they play with genetics/ending moral ethics/thinking of something bigger/ that shit where it gets done is expanded/they take the peasant's money/raping and killing our soil"

Predictably, research confirms that transnational corporations (TNCs) and NAFTA have perpetuated the contamination of maize. A 2002 report by Greenpeace concluded that transnational corporations and NAFTA along with the failure of the Mexican government to protect its farmers and consumers play a role in the ongoing case of contamination (Greenpeace 2). They found that a small number of transnational corporations controlled the market for seeds and for pesticides and that they denied farmers the right to save seeds. The report states,

> Genetic engineering is a proprietary technology monopolized by a very small number of TNCs. Most of the seed and pesticide market is already in the hands of just four giants: Monsanto, Syngenta… Bayer…and DuPont. The TNCs that produce GE maize are these same companies. One commercial strategy of these companies is to deny farmers their ancient right to save, exchange and replant seed, as GE seeds are patented and cannot legally be replanted. (Greenpeace 3)

Not only that, according to Rogers' research, monopolizing seeds has deeper environmental implications. She reports, "A benefit of biodiversity and non-GMO is that the seeds (landraces) are better equipped to produce crops and resist environmental problems" contradicting the argument that transgenetic corn is better equipped to resist environmental challenges (4). Mare recognizes the environmental impact of globalization and holds corporations responsible as the culprit for the damage done. She rhymes:

> *Lugares sucios por la globalización*
> *No encontramos solución*
> *Grandes capitales*
> *Se extiende la invasión*[78]

As the "invasion" of more foreign investment in Mexico disrupts ancient food systems, it will be detrimental economically and it will be detrimental to the health of the land alongside the ancestral traditions of the people, as maize cultivation is deeply woven into the identity of the Indigenous community.

[78] "Dirty places because of globalization/we cannot find a solution/ the invasion by big capital increases"

In fact, maize is so crucial to the lives of Indigenous people in Mexico that disrupting their relationship to this plant—which polices like NAFTA attempt to do—is utterly violent. As Rincon Rubio et al. states, maize is so important that it can also be a resource used for political, economic and social control (1074). This sacred plant, maize, has been central to the lives of Indigenous peoples for centuries throughout Mesoamerica and is credited for the creation of grand civilizations.[79] Maize shaped the identity of what some call "maiz-based" cultures, cultures "that…are politically, socially, culturally, and ceremonially organized around maíz" (Rodriguez 4). Capitalism transformed the process by which people have access to maize, how it is distributed. Reduced to a commodity, maize is now something to buy and sell. Mare acknowledges that for her ancestors the violence under capitalism symbolizes a continuation of colonialism. The expropriation of maize is just another form of stripping people of their culture, a continuation of the violence and exploitation of colonialism. She sings,

> *Una historia injusta*
> *La que se escribe en nuestros campos*
> *No queremos mas explotación (estamos hartos)*
> *Nos han quitado tantas cosas a través de tanto tiempo*
> *Nuestras raíz y escritora*
> *Nuestra y de nuestros ancestros*
> *Cambiara muchas cosas pero no lo que llevamos dentro*
> *Somos hijas del maíz y lo llevamos en los huesos*[80]

Here Mare deploys Chacón's notion of "kab'awil," what she describes as a double gaze or looking forward and back towards the past and present, a pre-Columbian concept grounded in

[79] It is a daunting task to describe in depth the importance of maize for Indigenous communities in the Mesoamerican region because the history and the people's relationship to the maize plant is vast. Maize is so significant to the social fabric of the people that there are many lenses and approaches one can take when researching maize. Discussing all the complexities and offering an extensive historical, ethnographic, anthropological or scientific background on maize is beyond the scope of this essay. Thus, not including this information here is not to reduce the importance of maize, but to stay focused on the issues at hand that Mare brings attention to in her song, "Mujer Maíz."

[80] "An unjust story/the one written in our fields/We do not want more exploitation (we are fed up)/They have taken so many things away from us for so long/our roots and our writings/ours and our ancestors/Many things may change but not what we carry inside/we are the daughters of maize and we carry it in our bones"

indigenous ways of knowing, "to better understand resistance, a force that permeates the conceptual, spiritual, political and social realms" (20). In the above passage Mare reminds her audience of the historical sacredness of maize, the knowledge of the ancestors and her community's legacy, such as writing. She makes it relevant today by asserting that the knowledge of yesterday is deeply woven into her and her people's "bones." By saying "we are the daughters of maize," she suggests that maize is akin to the ancestors, that it is much more than a market product, and that it lives on in her body.

Aside from disrupting cultural traditions, policies like NAFTA deeply impact the material conditions of Indigenous people when transnational corporations profit from importing maize to its birthplace, Mexico. This increases the rate of poverty among rural farmers, many of whom are Indigenous. Heavily subsidized US corn imported into the country makes it virtually impossible for maize farmers to compete and thus unable to survive off the land to continue their agricultural traditions.[81] The price of maize fell to one quarter of its value within a decade in the 1990s and some two million farmers were forced to leave their lands (Gonzalez 128). According to a report by the Interhemispheric Resource Center, since the implementation of NAFTA, there was an increase in rural poverty, an increase in out-migration, an increase in the price of tortillas, international and national decreases in corn prices, and heterogeneity of impact among farmers—meaning that large scale farmers are impacted the least and subsistence farmers are impacted the most, many of whom are Indigenous (Henriquez & Patel 4). As a result, the rate of poverty

[81] It is important to note that the re-shaping of Mexican agricultural production did not start with NAFTA. It started with the so-called "Green Revolution" in Mexico between the 1940s-80s, and was spearheaded by the US to increase productivity in Mexico's agricultural sector because supposedly, agricultural productivity after the Mexican Revolution had fallen. The US helped fund this program and partnered with the Mexican government with the intention that this program would prevent social movements and would stem unrest and the appeal for Communism, clearly pointing to US imperialist endeavors in Mexico and the economic infrastructure in place to topple people's movements throughout the world. With this in mind, it is not surprising that this program benefited large-scale agribusiness not small scale farmers for reasons too numerous to name here. However, NAFTA intensified this process and its impact has been much more detrimental on small farmers in Mexico.

among subsistence farmer reached crisis proportions with an increase from 54 percent in 1989 to 64 percent in 1998 (Henriquez and Patel 2). The Rincón Rubio et. al study on Matlatzinca women in the community of San Francisco Oxtotilpan in the state of Mexico, found that Indigenous women are central to the cultivation and preservation of maize biodiversity and depend on maize to feed their families, and thus are most affected by these neoliberal economic policies. Furthermore, the study found that among the Maztlatzincas, women were the safe-keepers of the maize seed creating a direct correlation between the appropriation of the maize seeds and women's livelihoods and consequently their right to self-determination.

Mare's Indigenous hip hop feminism grounded in territorio cuerpo is palpable in "Mujer Maíz" because she feminizes the cultivation of maize, feminizes the plant and the rituals centered around it, making a direct connection between the land and women's body.

Mujer Maíz in Defense of Territorio Cuerpo

While the perpetuator of violence in "Mujer Maíz" is agribusiness and the victim is the land, which is personified as a woman, the resistance is also female. If the repercussion of controlling maize falls unevenly on Indigenous women who depend on it, then they are also the agents of change. The strong female presence in the lyrics and images in "Mujer Maíz" sends an anti-colonial feminist message of resistance that critiques the violence imposed by capitalist, neoliberal and neocolonial powers that disrupt the livelihood of Indigenous peoples, especially women. This is reminiscent, but also stands in contrast to, the 1949 literary masterpiece, *Hombres de Maíz* (*Men of Maize*) by the Guatemalan writer, Miguel Angel Asturias. In the novel, the male protagonist and Indigenous leader, Gaspar Ilom, is at the forefront of a rebellion in defense of maize against the planter class, or *maiceros*, as Asturias calls them. The novel narrates the conflict between the Indigenous community who considers maize sacred and the

growers who view maize only as a commodity. Gaspar Ilom —who attacks the corn growers who burn down the forest to plant maize as a commercial investment— is at the center of this fight. Yet in the novel women play only a marginal role in the defense of maize. In fact, the character Manuela Machojón, the wife of an Indian turncoat in the service of Colonel Godoy who represents the Ladino planters that want to crush the rebellion, is responsible for poisoning Gaspar to thwart the movement.[82] For Asturias, women are not only responsible for betraying the cause to defend maize, they betray the cause using poison — a concoction often associated with witches and witchcraft. On the other hand, Asturias sees men as the heroes and central to the struggle in defense of maize. For Mare, the female entity is the agents of change in the struggle for land, the right to grow maize and sustaining ancestral ways.

For example, the lyrics below convey that the *guerrera* [the warrior] here is female. She raps:

> *Mujer maíz que puedes hacer cuando ves a tus hijos repartiéndose el poder*
> *Aniquilando tu legado*
> *Dejando atrás nuestro pasado*
> *Aquello que con esmero haz cuidado*
> *Madre naturaleza*
> *Despierta con tu furia*
> *Destaca ya tu fuerza*[83]

Madre naturaleza (the Earth) is synonymous with the maize woman who is called upon to awaken her fury to fight back against the power disparities, the theft of land, resources and the annihilation of ancestral traditions. In Shiva and Mies' study on the degradation of the environment and its impact on women, they found that that the "impact on women of ecological

[82] Ladino is the name used to refer to non-Indigenous people who are white or mestizo or Indigenous people who have been "de-indianized." In other words, those who do not speak an Indigenous language and adhere to a western way of life.

[83] "Maize woman/What can you do when you see your children distributing power/Annihilating your legacy/Leaving our past behind/ That you have cared for fiercely/ Mother Nature/Awaken your fury/Bring forth your strength"

disasters and deterioration was harder than on men, and also, that everywhere, women were the first to protest against environmental destruction" (2-3). It is not surprising then that Mare calls on *madre naturaleza,* a female figure, to wake up and fight back.

Furthermore, she uses metaphors that make parallels between violence against the land and violence against women by using words like "rape" and "murder" when referring to the damage made upon the land. She rhymes, *quitándole al campesino su dinero/Violando y asesinando a nuestro suelo* ("Stealing money from peasants/Raping and murdering our land"), connecting the oppression of those who work the land (Indigenous people) with land exploitation, unavoidably leading to the oppression of women. For example, Rogers found that women saw the defense of land as an essential women's rights issue. In an interview Rogers conducted, Maria, a Oaxacan activist in the group Coordinadoras de Mujeres Oaxaqueñas 1º de agosto (COMO), said "Well, for indigenous women we consider that one (of the primary concerns) is land, the defense of the land, the defense of water, as it is one of the most prized treasures of all because the women say that they will never sell the land to anyone, not to any foreigner, not to any business, because the land is the thing that gives life and sustains us all, the children, and the women" (167).[84] This illustrates Cabnal's notion of territorio cuerpo as "un territorio en disputa por los patriarcados, para asegurar su sostenibilidad desde y sobre el cuerpo de la mujeres" ("a territory in dispute by the patriarchy to ensure it preserves its power of and over women's bodies") ("Feminismos" 22). Because women's material conditions are directly affected by land theft, contamination and exploitation, a power disparity exists that becomes palpable with the extraction of the Earth's resources and the appropriation of Indigenous land.

[84] The 1st of August Oaxacan Women Coordinators (COMO) is one of over 300 organizations that were part of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), formed during the 2006 uprising in Oaxaca to fight back against the repressive actions of the government.

This explains why these acts inevitably impact Indigenous women more intensely than they impact men. Thus, defending the earth against violence is defending women against violence.

Consequently, to deny women of their right to land and its resources means eliminating the people's ancestral relationship with the land, with their food systems and with their traditions, imposing another form of violence against them. Cabnal explains that for feministas comunitarias the relationship between the body and all the elements of the earth is a vital part of living life abundantly. A refusal to recognize this is inhumane. She asserts:

> Cuando nosotras empezamos a construir planteamientos de recuperación y defensa del territorio, cuerpo y tierra, primero reconocemos que el cuerpo de las mujeres ha sido expropiado históricamente y que es primordial para nosotras como principio feminista de mujeres comunitarias la recuperación de este primer territorio de energía vital que es el cuerpo. Segundo. Donde va vivir tu cuerpo? En el agua, en el aire? No, viven en relación con todos los elementos de la naturaleza y del cosmos, y para que tu tengas un cuerpo en relación con el agua, con las piedras, con el árbol, con el sol, con las montañas, tu cuerpo tiene que tener paridad de condiciones con este entorno, y un entorno sano y armónico para que se manifieste la plenitud de la vida. (qtd. in Gargallo Celentani 209)[85]

Cabnal advocates for a balance between the body and the earth, mirroring the feminismo comunitario notion that life in all its forms should be honored for all living things to thrive, including humans. Yet Cabnal's assessment also reveals an anti-colonial framework that challenges the belief that the Earth is not alive, that it should not be revered, and is only a commodity—a perception brought by Christian European colonizers and forcefully imposed on Indigenous people. Prohibiting the deification of the land, the wind, the clouds and many geographical features because it was considered idolatrous worked in conjunction with the

[85] "When we began to build approaches to recover and defend territory, body and land, we first recognized that women's bodies have been historically expropriated, and it is an essential principle for us as communitarian feminists to recover this first territory of vital energy, which is the body. Second, where will your body live? In the water? In the air? No, it lives in relation to all the elements of nature and the cosmos, and for you to have a body in relationship with the water, with the stones, with the trees, with the sun, with the mountains, your body must live in balance with this environment, and a healthy and harmonious environment so that life in all of its fullness manifests."

plunder of the Earth. According to Starhawk, once a Christian framework was imposed on people, the idea that the land was not sacred upheld the capitalist project that the Earth is a commodity. She quotes historian Lynn White, affirming:

> Historian Lynn White states that when 'the spirits in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, evaporated' under the influence of Christianity, man's effective monopoly on spirit in this world was confirmed, and the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature 'crumpled.' No longer were the groves and forests sacred. The concept of a sacred grove, of a spirit embodied in nature, was considered idolatrous. But when nature is empty of spirit, forest and trees became merely timber, something to be measured in board feet, valued only for its profitability, not for its being, its beauty, or even its part in the larger ecosystem. (6)

Indeed, numerous examples show the disastrous results of the lack of reverence for the Earth. Extracting its resources for profit led to the devastating effects of climate change. And while the maize plant is held sacred to Indigenous peoples throughout Mesoamerica, for agribusiness the only sacred thing about it are the profits made from its sale. Bonfil Batalla suggests that viewing maize merely as a product in the market does not serve the interest of the people. He writes,

> Frente al proyecto popular, abiertamente opuesto a él, se yergue otra manera de concebir el maíz... Éste pretende desligar al maíz de su contexto histórico y cultural, para manejarlo exclusivamente en términos de mercancía y en función de intereses que no son los de los sectores populares. Hace del maíz un valor sustituible, intercambiable y aún prescindible. Porque excluye, precisamente, la opinión y el interés de los sectores populares. (qtd. in Esteva 12)[86]

Mare echoes this assertion, reiterating in the song the significance and sacredness of maize for the people. She sings,

> *Es la fuerza que nos une la que viene de la tierra*
> *El maíz es mi semilla por la que gente pelea*
> *La injusticia de los hombres solo trae más violencia*[87]

[86] "In the presence of the popular movements, and openly opposed to them, there is another way to conceive maize ... It aims to untie maize from its historical and cultural context, to treat it solely in terms of merchandise and in terms of interests that are not those of the popular classes. It turns maize into a substitutable, exchangeable and even dispensable commodity, precisely because it excludes the opinions and interests of the popular classes."

[87] "The strength that unites us comes from the earth/Maize is the seed that people fight for/The injustice of men only brings more violence."

Mare reiterates an Indigenous hip hop feminism, one that understands colonization as part and parcel of a capitalist system rooted in patriarchy. Here she conveys that while the Earth gives strength and unites, the colonizers of yesterday and the capitalists today bring violence. They cannot see the land, the plants and the people as sacred because they are not profitable and maize is just another product to buy and sell. They "conquered" the maize plant through genetic engineering and the massive importations of maize into Mexico similar to the ways the colonizers conquered the people, and subsequently have conquered women.

Thus, part of the process of decolonization is to change the way we perceive the Earth and subsequently our bodies. Feministas comunitarias argue that the Earth, like the human body, is "un cuerpo viviente que siente," a living body that feels, and therefore a sacred entity (Cabnal "Especial"). A spiritual aspect to the notion that the Earth and our bodies are sacred echoes Paredes' assertion that part of the process of decolonization is to decolonize the conception of the body. She argues, "Para descolonizar el concepto y el sentimiento del cuerpo, hay que descolonizar de esa concepción escindida y esquizofrénica del alma por un lado y cuerpo por otro; es lo que ha planteado la colonia" (100).[88] The bruja-healer in the video in "Mujer Maíz" disrupts the divorcing of the spiritual from the physical and challenges the notion that the Earth is not a living and breathing body, which is why it should be seen as sacred — an important aspect of territorio cuerpo. As Shiva and Mies suggest, "The ecological relevance of this emphasis on 'spirituality' lies in the rediscovery of the sacredness of life, according to which life on earth can be preserved only if people again begin to perceive all life forms as sacred and respect them as such" (18 [1993]).

[88] "In order to decolonize the notion and feeling of the body, we must decolonize that split and schizophrenic conception of the soul on one side and body on the other; is what the colonialism has proposed"

The Bruja-Healer/ Maize Diviner in "Mujer Maíz"

As discussed above, the lyrics in "Mujer Maíz" convey an anti-capitalist, anti-neoliberal and anti-colonial message that condemns the interruption of maiz-based cultures by agribusiness, yet, the visuals in the video add a spiritual dimension to the song's message. They convey Cabnal's understanding that territorio cuerpo is about viewing the Earth as a beautiful landscape "que convive para proveer energía vital en la red de la vida. Y la red de la vida es el todo del todo"[89] ("Especial"). In "Mujer Maíz," this sacredness is celebrated in the form of ritual, represented by the bruja-healer who is simultaneously the maize diviner in the video. In this way, she honors those women deemed as "witches" by the colonizers who were persecuted and killed and their "knowledge, wisdom and close relationship with nature… destroyed" (Shiva and Mies 17 [1993]). Maize is not just a commodity to buy and sell, but also a mediator of magic.

Mare speaks back to the violence on the earth and women by making the maize woman symbolic of la Bruja, a witch, who reclaims her territorio cuerpo via the main character in the video. She is depicted as a woman hunched over with a white cloth draped over her body. Her face and body are turned away from the camera; all that is visible is the cloth over her body as if she were a mountain. Slowly she turns towards the camera and takes off the cloth, underneath we see the face of a young Indigenous woman wearing a long white skirt and a green blouse. In the background a painted beige concrete wall and a graffiti art mural features the face of a young Indigenous woman painted with black aerosol; the word *Territorio* is written underneath, pointing to the importance of land to women. The woman stretches the white cloth on the ground, sits on it, as though her body is now part of the land. She takes a handful of purple corn seeds in her hands and she lets them flow through her fingers onto the white cloth, symbolic of

[89] "that coexists to provide vital energy in the web of life. And the web of life is the whole of everything".

the earth. This image loops over and over throughout the video, interwoven with images of an elderly woman plowing the *milpa* (cornfield) and a younger woman shucking corn on top of a tin roof. We also see an image of an old-school outdoor horn speaker placed high on a post in a basketball court. These visuals convey that agricultural labor performed by Indigenous women in the maize cultivation process is prevalent and vital in all the stages of maize farming. It also feminizes agricultural labor, often invisible in many cultural texts, as maize farmers tend to be represented as male. Yet studies suggest that at the global level, women do the majority of agricultural work (Sachs 7). It also points to the reality faced by many women in Oaxaca due to the out-migration of the men in their family—they are left alone to care for the *milpas*. The horn speaker signifies women's voices speaking out in public spaces emphasizing that their voice needs to be heard and recognized.

The video shows that women are central to the cultivation process and honoring them means honoring the land where they cultivate their food. As Cabnal suggests, the relationship with the land and with the body is vital because, she states, "I do not conceive this body of a woman without a space on earth that dignifies my existence, and promotes my life in plentitude" ("Feminismos" 23).[90]

The woman letting the corn kernels run through her fingers in the video is symbolic of the earth and female maize farmers, as mentioned above, but she is also symbolic of a bruja-healer. Her actions point to the tradition of divination rituals that are practiced in Indigenous communities among healers since pre-colonial times. This mystical figure in the video holds the maize seeds in her hand in a ritualistic manner and alludes to the practice of divination by tossing the maize kernels, a common practice amongst Ben'zaa women and many other Indigenous

[90] Original: "porque no concibo este cuerpo de mujer, sin un espacio en la tierra que dignifique mi existencia, y promueva mi vida en plenitud."

women and men throughout Mesoamerica. In fact, divining with objects such as seashells, coconut, and coffee grains is common in many cultures across the world. Amongst Afro-Cuban Santeros, for instance, throwing coconut pieces or "darle coco al santo [offering coconut to the saints]" is one form of divination. They discern the messages depending on where and what side of the coconut the pieces fall, which is similar for Indigenous diviners in Mexico.

In anthropological and archeological studies there is also evidence of maize divination rituals by Ben'zaá women more specifically. In *Women's Rituals in Formative Oaxaca* by Joyce Marcus, she found that Ben'zaá women in the sixteenth century practiced *tiniyaaya niça*. This was the process of divination by casting maize kernels onto the surface of a water-filled basin then noted the number of kernels that remained in the surface. Other women would cast kernels onto the surface of a mat and others would blow air on the kernels that they cupped in their hands before casting them. Some would blacken the kernels over a *comal* (griddle) and then toss the kernels, deciphering the message depending on the amount of kernels landing on the blackened side. According to Marcus, much of the divination "was conducted by male professionals in the context of state religion" in the 16th century Ben'zaa community (12). It was done to "answer questions about the well-being of the ruler, the elite, and the community as a whole, and it was carried out in the context of temples by men called bigaña (priests) or colaniy (diviners)" (Marcus 12). Marcus states however, that Ben'zaa women conducted divination in their homes or dooryards. It was oriented towards the affairs of the family, finding the cause of illness affecting someone, selecting the name for a newborn baby, predicting the outcome of a pregnancy or marriage or whether a given day was favorable for a family activity (12). Marcus found that women continued to divine using corn throughout the 20th century, perhaps because they could practice it in the privacy of their own home, unbeknownst to the Spanish colonizers.

Similarly, Ruiz de Alarcón's 1629 report to the Mexican Holy Inquisition notes that maize divining was the second most important kind of fortune telling for the Mexica. He warns of the *ticitl*, the commonly "used [word] for what is expressed by our word 'doctor,'" a name he considers suspicious (157). He then notes that among the natives the *ticitl* means "sage, doctor, seer, and sorcerer, or, perhaps, one who has a pact with the Devil" (157). Maize diviners are among the *ticitl*, which he says, divine with maize kernels by spreading them on a cloth or throwing them in water followed by an incantation. The reasons for consulting a maize diviner, according to Ruiz de Alarcón is "to be the general remedy for things stolen, for missing persons, for sicknesses and their causes, for their cures and healings" (153). Describing this ritual with disdain, he remarks on the ignorance of both the diviner and the people who consult him or her.

> Note that the ignorance and blindness of these wretched people reaches so far that they consult such fortune-tellers in order to know who is a wizard or sorcerer… and these fortune-tellers are so audacious and without fear of God that they venture to judge that they are one. And they are believed like prophets — to the very great detriment to the peace and the health of their souls and those of other people… (155).

Spanish theologians like Ruiz de Alarcón believed that demons instructed Indigenous healers and herbalists and that divination paved the way for demonic intervention (Pardo 175). This often led to persecution and torture of many healers to stop them from practicing their craft. According to Pardo, "Healers and diviners… had to be dealt with by means of coercion because of their stubborn resistance to revealing the nature of their trade to the Spanish priests and authorities," revealing the violence imposed on people who practiced this profession and also the fierce opposition to the colonizers' attempt to annihilate their belief system (175). Furthermore, it was often women who were punished the most. In Alarcón's *Treatise*, he attests to arresting and punishing native men and women fortune-tellers but emphasizes that there are more women than men. He reports, "I have arrested and punished many Indian men and women

for this crime, although, having made a calculation, there have been more women than men. And these fortune-tellers are found in many provinces, because, on account of the name of seers, they are highly respected and highly cherished and very well provided with necessities" (148). Not only does this demonstrate the policing imposed upon native people by Spanish clergy, it also shows the uneven attitudes toward women, who were especially targeted. The reality, however, was that diviners were not evil Brujas whatsoever, but because this practice stood outside a Christian framework, it was looked at with disdain and suspicion and came with great consequences for practitioners.

By including a representation of a maize diviner Mare exposes the violence of colonialism and patriarchy and makes a strong anti-colonial feminist statement by honoring the oppressed female ancestors who survived centuries of inequities and challenged the status quo. As Irene Lara suggests, la Bruja "symbolizes power outside of patriarchy's control that potentially challenges the sexist status quo" (12). She explains that women's spiritual and healing knowledge has often been attributed to superstition and considered diabolical and primitive and adds that the demonization of Indigenous women who were spiritually and sexually powerful "justified the legacy of physical and psychological violence against women in las Amerícas" by European colonizers (14). Mare challenges this discourse in "Mujer Maíz" by putting la Bruja who is concurrently the maize woman and Mother Nature, at the center. She takes back the power that was forcefully removed from the land and from women due to the legacy of colonialism and now capitalism.

Additionally, using a Bruja-diviner in the video illustrates Mare's understanding of the power of women as healers and views them as the key to return a balance that has been lost. According to Yolotl Gonzalez Torres, healers toss maize to identify the causes of illness but also

to find the causes and how to heal *susto*. (225). Literary translated to "fright," *susto* refers to soul loss and is attributed to a frightening event that can cause the soul to leave the body temporarily. In Mesoamerican epistemology the soul is an integral part of the body. When *susto* occurs it means that an imbalance or trauma such as an injury or violation occurred and the body needs to be recalibrated. The late Elena Avila, a renowned Chicana curandera (healer) who wrote the book, *Women Who Glow in the Dark,* claims that for our ancestors, *susto* resulted from the "cultural destruction, enslavement, and rape that occurred during the Spanish Conquest of the Americas" (28). In Mare's work, the maize woman is la Bruja diviner that heals *susto*, the trauma caused by colonialism, capitalism and neoliberalism and the harm it has done to the people and the land. La Bruja diviner tosses maize because she seeks a message of healing to heal the disequilibrium the earth experiences. Capitalism has plundered its resources and has created an imbalance by bringing in genetically modified seeds, agro-chemicals and other technology that is detrimental to the earth and affects the cultivation of maize, which consequently results in violence against women. If, as Mies and Shiva argue, "the rape of the Earth and the rape of women are intimately linked - both metaphorically, in shaping world-views, and materially, in shaping women's everyday lives," then inevitably putting power in a female healer's hands who will find the cause and the remedy through the divination process to heal *susto*, is meaningful (10 [2014]).

The presence of the bruja-healer in the video also challenges Western ideas of healing and magic. On the surface divining and magic may seem like superstitious acts that are not based in reality. However, when one views magic, not in the traditional western framework, but as the "art of changing consciousness at will," one that "encompasses political action which is aimed at changing consciousness and thereby causing change," as Starhawk defines it, the purpose of

incorporating a Bruja as the central figure in the video that commits acts considered brujería becomes clear (13). Mare reveals that changing consciousness will be in the hands of women. Using a female figure symbolic of la Bruja to raise awareness about issues of land rights, maize and gender inequality challenges the dominant narrative that Brujas are bad women for challenging gender roles and unapologetically owning their power. This also points to the Indigenous women activists at the forefront of political movements for social change in Oaxaca. Despite their restricted gender roles in their respective communities, Indigenous women have taken more political responsibility to push back against agribusiness and neoliberal initiatives that aim to threaten their livelihood (Rogers). In a patriarchal society, their independence and assertiveness would perhaps deem these activists Brujas too.

Conclusion

Using Cabnal's notion of territorio cuerpo as my framework, and more broadly, feminismo comunitario, I argue that Mare's song and video, "Mujer Maiz," exemplifies an Indigenous hip hop feminism from Abiayala that reflects how the current fight for self-determination is tightly linked to the fight to grow maize. In this chapter, I discussed how the song critiques the impact of US economic policy abroad and the uneven power relations between the US and developing countries like Mexico, how this has impacted the livelihoods of Indigenous women, and how Indigenous women are central to the fight against agribusiness, hence the use of the female figure, Mujer Maíz, who is also a bruja-healer. Drawing on Mays's argument that Indigenous hip hop feminism is about decolonization, I expand on this and claim that Mare's hip hop feminism is an articulation that specifically speaks against "el patriarcado colonial-neoliberal" sustained by the globalization of capitalism. Specifically, I recast globalization as what Mohanty and Alexander call "capitalist recolonization," or the "racialized

and gendered relations of the rule of the state—both its neocolonial and advanced capitalist incarnations" (23). For Indigenous people globalization is a continuation of colonization, as Rauna Koukkanen affirms, "For many indigenous people, globalization is a euphemism for colonization or neo-colonialism" (218) Victoria Tauli-Corpuz echoes this assertion, stating that globalization produces "the continuation of colonization with the use of more sophisticated methods such as the World Bank, IMF, WTO and NAFTA" (qtd. in Koukkanen 218).

In "Mujer Maíz" Mare reminds us of the sacredness of women, the land, and the maize plant. As an Indigenous hip-hop feminist, her anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, ecofeminist message calls attention to the linkages between the violence of the land and the violence against women. Furthermore, "Mujer Maíz" is part of a long trajectory of oral narratives by First Peoples in Mesoamerica where maize plays a central role—creation myths, maize gods and goddesses like the Ben'zaa maize god, Pitao Cozobi, sculptures, engravings, paintings, songs, poetry and many other art forms. Yet Mare's rhyme is reflective of her times, she honors maize by using hip hop as a medium in her defense of it, to express her resistance to neoliberalism, to advocate for women's rights, and to display a deep desire to recover ancestral traditions. By including a representation of la Bruja, Mare honors the history of women healers who challenged the patriarchal status quo, those women who were persecuted for their knowledge and power. One could argue that Mare herself is a Bruja of words, using hip hop to conjure consciousness and cause change, challenging patriarchy in the world of hip hop and beyond with her word magic. Ironically, it is capitalist patriarchy and agribusiness that are very much culpable for the greatest sorcery of all—a complete lack of concern and destruction of living things. They have dispossessed millions of people from their land, imported maize contaminated with transgenes, extracted resources from the Earth as if it were not alive, and have created intense vulnerability

amongst women. It seems timely to say that we need more Brujas in the world now more than ever to fight against the sorcery of the global ruling class.

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Chapter 3: Brujas in the Time of Trump: Hexing the Ruling Class

"Yet like the machetes that slaves used for both labor and as weapons against other slaves and white slave holders, herbal remedies sometimes were transformed from means of curing to ways of killing."

--Karol K. Weaver *Medical Revolutionaries*

"I call upon you
To bind
Donald J. Trump
So that his malignant works may fail utterly
That he may do no harm
To any human soul
Nor any tree
Animal
Rock
Stream
or Sea
Bind him so that he shall not break our polity
Usurp our liberty
Or fill our minds with hate, confusion, fear, or despair
And bind, too,
All those who enable his wickedness
And those whose mouths speak his poisonous lies"

-- Michael Hughes "A Spell to Bind Donald Trump and All Those Who Abet Him"

"The history of fascism is not just the history of fascist repression. It is also the history of resistance. Witchcraft is the practice of building that resistance."

-- Yerbamala Collective

Public displays of witchcraft rituals around the world have made headlines since Trump's election. Practicing witch, Dakota Bracciale, interviewed by Michelle Goldberg from the *New York Times* asserts, "the calamity of the election accelerated interest in witchcraft" (qtd. in Goldberg).[91] Indeed, holding what they call "witch-ins," many women gather to protest Trump's bigoted policies and especially his sexist, anti-women, misogynist positions (Figure 8). A group called "Feminists Against Trump" called for a "mass hexing" to "cast magical spells of love and feminism to destroy the Great Orange One and the racism, xenophobia and sexism he feeds on"

[91] Goldberg, Michelle. "Season of the Witch." *The New York Times*, 3 Nov. 2017. *NYTimes.com*

(Dancyger).[92] Another group called Yerbamala Collective published numerous anti-fascist poems online to "destroy fascism with poetic witchcraft" (qtd. in Sollée 141). Queer astrologer and witch, Jaliessa Sipress wrote in an article for *Hoodwitch* about "what it means to practice witchcraft in the age of Trump. His presidency is 'a mere practice in veil– lifting… another opportunity to practice seeing in the dark, and revealing our political and social climate for what it really is only makes our work that much more important'" (qtd in Sollée 141). Even on an international level, healers gathered to conjure spells against Trump. According to Andrea Gompf, a group of sorcerers and shamans gathered on the coast near Lima, Peru to conjure spells to help Hillary Clinton win. Gompf quotes Peruvian shaman Juan Osco who exclaimed, "Donald Trump is very arrogant, he thinks that because he is a millionaire he can offend the human race, marginalize women, and hate certain groups. His karma is negative, and we've punished him with sand from the sea and salt, and he will not be president" (qtd. in Gompf).[93]

Many journalists and scholars are taking notice of these public spectacles. Kristen J. Sollée in her book, *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive,* documents this phenomenon stating that the day after Trump's inauguration,

> …women – and witches – gathered in protest. In marches across America and around the world, millions showed up for women's rights and social justice. Sign after sign alluding to witches and witchcraft were spotted by witch-identified activists and shared on social media. 'We are the daughters of the witches you failed to burn' announced one. 'Brujas against racism, sexism, ableism, transfobia, homophobia, and billionaires with shitty grammar' proclaimed another. (62)

In another article published by *Vox* titled "Each Month, Thousands of Witches Cast a Spell Against Donald Trump" reports on a movement of "resistance witches," a group of over 13,000

[92] Dancyger, Lilly. "How Donald Trump Is Making Witches and Christians Fight Again." *Rolling Stone*, 24 Feb. 2017, www.rollingstone.com

[93] Gompf, Andrea. "Forget FiveThirtyEight, Peruvian Shamans Have Already Predicted the Election Outcome." *Remezcla*, 8 Nov. 2016, www.remezcla.com

internet "neo-pagans, Wiccans, solo practitioners who self-identify as 'hedge witches,' longtime magical practitioners in various traditions, and committed activists" (Burton).[94] The article explains that these women come together each month since Trump became President to perform spells on Trump – "equal parts quasi-religious ritual and activist performance…" forming a collective known as #MagicResistance. Additionally, Goldberg writes about an occult boutique in Brooklyn that offers classes, curses, hexes and jinxes. It held three packed ceremonies to hex Trump.

Self-proclaimed brujas protesting Trump have also caught the attention of right-wing ideologues. The far-right US news website *Breitbart* published an article warning readers of "Feminist Witches" who are performing hexes on Trump and to beware of occultism as it is becoming more common (Nash).[95] In a report by the *Rolling Stone* titled "How Donald Trump is making Witches and Christians Fight Again," the author notes that Christian nationalists gathered to pray against "evil" witches using rhetoric that sounded eerily familiar to the inquisitor's handbook, the *Malleus Maleficarum*. The Christian Nationalist Alliance, "a right-wing group that believes America to be a Christian nation "founded by Christian men upon Christian tenets," tried to "out-magic" the witches with a day of prayer (Dancyger). Their call exclaims, "These sorts of perversions and inversions of our faith are common in the Satanic religions which seek to defile the Holy Word of God in their rituals" (Ambrose).[96] They use words like "devil," "voodoo," spiritual sickness," and "magical attack" throughout to describe

[94] Burton, Tara Isabella. "Each Month, Thousands of Witches Cast a Spell against Donald Trump." *Vox*, 30 Oct. 2017, https://www.vox.com.

[95] Nash, Charlie Nash17 Dec. "#MagicResistance: The Rise of Feminist Witchcraft." *Breitbart*, 17 Dec. 2017, www.breitbart.com

[96] Ambrose, Kevin. "Witches Plan to Curse Trump: We Will Counter with Prayer." *Christian Nationalism*, 23 Feb. 2017, www.christiannationalism.com

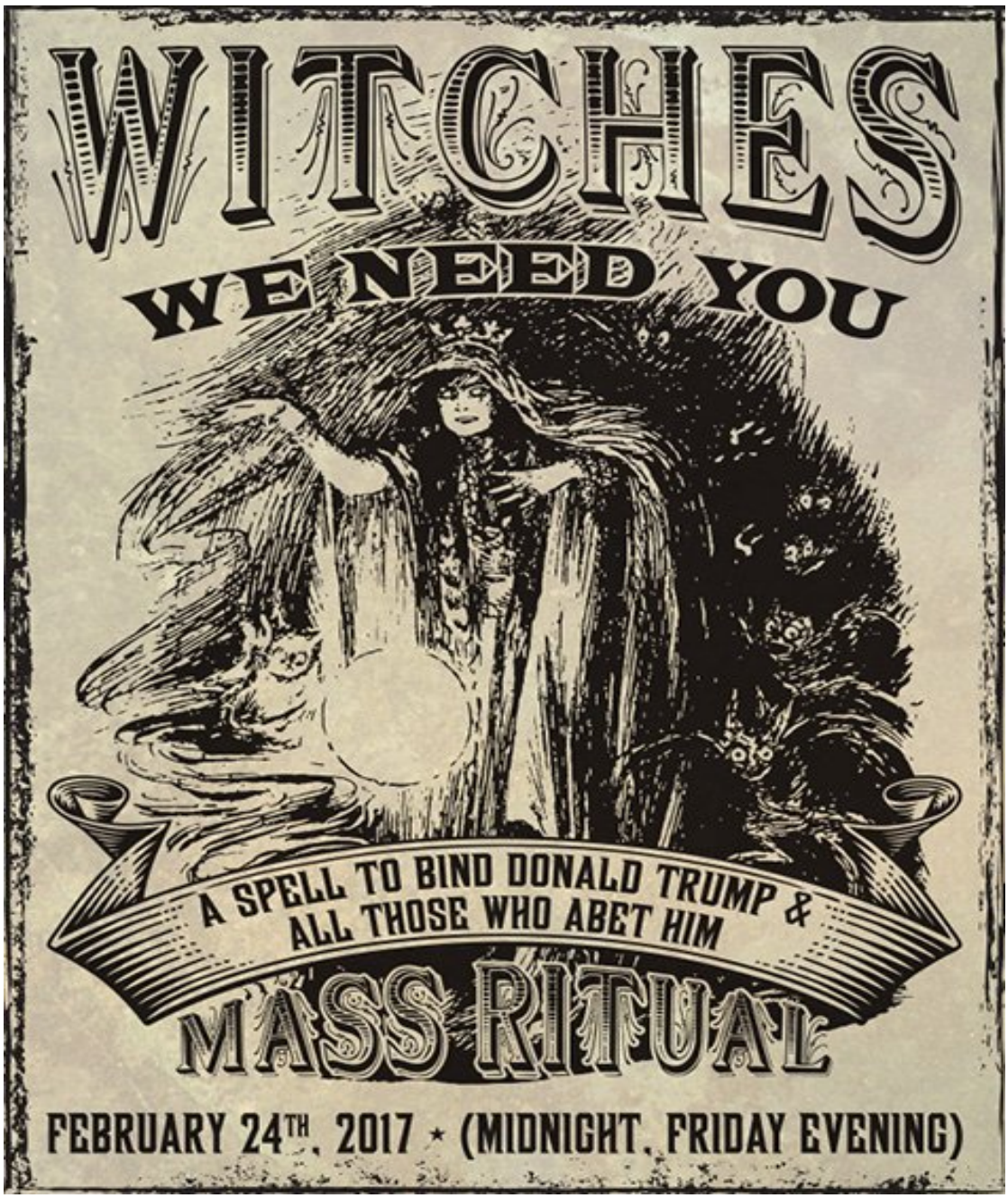

Figure 8: A flyer calling for a mass ritual to hex Trump
From *Bust*.com

the public hexing protests against Trump. While the shaming of women who practice the occult is not new, neither is self-proclaiming witch-hood as a form of protest. Second Wave feminist groups like Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, or W.I.T.C.H, were doing something similar in the 1960s. These self-styled "witches" critiqued patriarchy by doing Guerilla Theater. They put on witch-like costumes and make-up and protested in front of Wall Street, beauty pageants or bride fairs and other events they considered oppressive to women. Many of the participants were social justice activists in the Women's liberation Movement. This project was an informal, anarchist-type performance group that anyone could be part of at any time. Long before the second wave movement in medieval Europe, peasants would also perform spells against the feudal lords. According to the Center for Tactical Magic, "In the Middle Ages, the peasant class had no easy avenue of representation through which they could air grievances against their feudal lords. So somewhere between total subjugation and full-scale revolt, curses became a tactic of dissent. By discretely attaching hexes to the property of the feudal lord, the ruling authorities could be made aware of the growing social distemper" (Babcock).[97] Similarly, during World War II, a group of anti-fascist sorcerers held a "hex party" in Maryland with one aim in mind: "to kill Adolf Hitler by voodoo incantation" (Cosgrove).[98] As Trump and the Republican Party have set out to violate human rights and roll back the rights women have fought long and hard for, women are claiming the witch label again today, taking matters into their hands in many creative ways, except this time they are making use of the internet to engage in public hexing performances.

[97] Babcock, Jay. "How to Hex a Corporation." *Arthur Magazine*, no. No. 30, July 2008, https://arthurmag.com/2010/11/09/how-to-hex-a-corporation/.

[98] Cosgrove, Ben. "Putting a Hex on Hitler: LIFE Goes to a 'Black Magic' Party." *Time*, 4 Mar. 2014, http://time.com

In this chapter I focus on two public bewitchments against Trump — a Youtube video created by a Cuban immigrant and her friends, titled, "Brujas Hex Trump" and an e-zines (electronic zines) by an anonymous group of anti-fascist brujas scattered throughout Puerto Rico, Brazil, the US and UK who publish anti-Trump denouncements called Yerbamala Collective. Yeni Sleidi's video was one of few public hexes performed on Trump that went viral produced by Latina and Black women. Not drawing on Wiccan rituals also set it apart. The video is a homemade, one minute and fifty-four second Santería-inspired performance that illustrates a montage of images and clips of Brooklyn resident, writer and activist, Sleidi and her friends, as they perform a series of hexes against Trump during the 2016 presidential election. On the other hand, Yerbmala Collective (YMC) creates written spells using large 60 pt. Ariel font letters linked to Google docs about bringing down capitalism and fascism. These "spellbooks" are full of protest poems that they circulate on social media, paste on the walls of subway stations and hold as protest signs. While it is not clear if all members of the collective are Latinas, since they wish to remain anonymous, their name, "Yerbamala" alludes to the saying in Spanish "hierba mala nunca muere" (a bad weed never dies), reflecting the influence of Latin American culture. This expression refers to a bad person that never changes or bad or evil people live the longest. However some also interpret this as the unwanted "weed" that is always resilient and re-growing despite its being cut down time and time again — meaning that those "unwanted" or marginalized people, such as Brujas, do not go away despite their repression. In some of the few interviews with the YMC, the discussion of their project reflects a framework that seems to have been influenced by Latin American Indigenous beliefs.[99]

[99] While it is important to highlight an exclusively Latina project, Yerbamala Collective makes interesting interventions that I think are important to emphasize in this chapter even if I cannot verify that they are made up exclusively of Latinas. The international nature of their work illustrates that it is not driven by identity politics but rather a global movement of solidarity, one that is becoming increasingly important as the growth of right-wing,

Most importantly, however, and what I wish to highlight in this chapter is that the creators of both the video and the anti-fascist e-zine are examples of young millennial women who use digital media to challenge patriarchy, the ruling class and the Trump administration by recuperating, reclaiming and remembering la Bruja and disseminating their ideas via the internet. As Sollée asserts,

> While attempting to survive and resist an administration that supports inhumane, discriminatory policies, disregard subjective reality, and promote "alternative facts," many witches are uniting in the physical and digital realms against the rise of the new Christian theocracy. This fight is on the Internet as much as it is on the ground, against the fake news stories spewing distortions and inflammatory lies meant to instill fears of the demonized Other —much like the *Malleus Maleficarum* and similar tracks did in the early modern era. (141)

Indeed, the digital world gives those who have been historically disempowered a platform to produce texts that push back against the lies and violence imposed by the ruling class. In Katie Fustich's article, "Why is Digital Witchcraft so Appealing to Young Women?" she notes that witchcraft has become remarkably popular in the past few years and the online world is "integral to their practice." According to Fustich, teen girls are using the Internet to cast spells with emojis, they are creating blogs with incantations and using the digital world as a safe space because they can remain anonymous, as many young women even today feel judged by family and friends for stepping out of the spiritual "norm." Others who identify as queer find that witchcraft acts a "digital shelter" to help them deal with bullying (Fustich).[100]

Not only is it notable that young women and girls are using the digital realm to engage with witchcraft, but also noteworthy is the fact that Christianity is becoming less attractive to young people, which is indicative of the weakening of the dominant culture's religious ideology

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fascist governments grow on a global scale and impact people on an international level.

[100] Fustich, Katie. "Why Is Digital Witchcraft So Appealing to Young Women?" *Pacific Standard*, 28 Oct. 2016, https://psmag.com/

(Pew).[101] Fustich says that as "Christianity increasingly dwindles in popularity with young Americans, the occult is offering girls a safe, flexible, and feminist-friendly alternative." Historically, witchcraft has positioned itself as an alternative to patriarchal religions and is a spiritual practice that has always been associated with women and not built upon the suppression of women, thus it is attractive to many young feminists. Not only that, many young people and particularly young women are moving away and turning towards non-western spiritual practices from Africa and Indigenous Latin America. In an article in *Splinter,* Luna Malbroux argues that Blacks in the US are trading in church for African spirituality. She states, "But even though more young black people are leaving organized religious institutions, that doesn't mean we're not spiritual. Steadily, it seems like when we move away from the Christian church, we move towards less organized spiritual practices based on traditional African spirituality."[102] While non-western spiritual practices are nothing new among communities of color, digital technology and social media have given young people new tools to disseminate and share their spiritual practice and/or integrate this spiritual practice with technology. These practices are merely a reminder of the brujas of the past who also used religious rituals against the white ruling class.

Reclaiming these practices is also evident in a number of cultural texts by women of color, particularly novels. For this reason I analyze the work of contemporary Brujas alongside a novel by Afro-Puerto Rican author, Dahlma Llanos Figueroa titled *Daughters of the Stone* (2009). The novel, with its magical realist undertones, takes us through the lives of five generations of Afro-Puerto Rican women. It is divided into five sections dedicated to each

[101] According to a Pew Research Study there has been a drop in Christian affiliation among adults of all ages but is particularly more pronounced among young adults. This trend is seen across gender, race/ethnicity and among college graduates and adults with only a high school education (Pew).

[102] Malbroux, Luna. "Why More Young Black People Are Trading In Church for African Spirituality." *Splinter*, www.splinternews.com.

woman's story, starting in the mid-1800s with Fela who was stolen from Africa to work on the sugar plantations, Mati who was born enslaved and later becomes a powerful healer, Concha who suffers from mental illness for rejecting her roots, Elena who migrates to New York during the great Puerto Rican migration of the 1950s, and Carisa, the narrator, who comes full circle, turning to her African and Puerto Rican roots for wisdom and strength. While the five female characters in the book are worth examining, I will focus my analysis on Mati, the curandera (healer) in the novel, because her actions are a 19th century mirror of the "Brujas Hex Trump" and Yerbamala Collective projects in the 21st century. Mati is a powerful woman but at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy, an enslaved woman of color, who faces incredible odds. It is her magical abilities that make her powerful and she uses these against white elite men with social and political power, those who are seemingly untouchable —plantation owners — to reclaim what is rightfully hers and her people.

While the texts differ greatly on multiple levels — from genre, to time period to socioeconomic experiences —their point of intersection is particularly fascinating, especially in the wake of a Trump presidency. The texts are about women who have historically been at the bottom of the social hierarchy and use brujería on those who have historically been on top — wealthy, elite, heterosexual white males. In other words, women of color are using magic to defeat the greedy that build their wealth from the oppression of others. Whether the witchcraft many women are performing publicly against Trump today is metaphorical or real and whether one text could be read as a performance and the other drawn from true historical events, at the core both texts aim to challenge a white supremacist, heteropatriarchal system of rule that does not value the lives of oppressed communities —people of color, the poor, queer, disabled, and in the case of the novel, enslaved people. La Bruja in both texts challenges, mocks and makes

vulnerable those in positions of power and critiques the white ruling class and the impunity under which they operate. By centering the focus on la Bruja the texts challenge white supremacy and gender violence alongside a history of European colonization in the Caribbean and the imposition of Western and Christian worldviews that have negatively impacted women, particularly those branded as Brujas.

Lastly, both texts illustrate the ways Afro-Latina and Caribbean feminists repurpose la Bruja to recover the collective memory of Afro-Caribbean female healers and spiritual leaders of the past, women who were condemned and persecuted for their medical expertise, relationship to the natural world and practice of non-Christian religions rooted in African ways of knowing. Thus, I consider this a reflection of one of feminismo comunitario's conceptual frameworks, *memoria* or memory, which Julieta Paredes, explains is "la que nos enlaza con las antepasadas, es esa forma de la vida que se ha dado en estas tierras que es irrepetible…" (116).[103] Furthermore, Paredes explains that *memoria* "nos habla de dónde venimos, qué problemas, qué luchas se dieron en medio, cómo así las mujeres estamos donde estamos, nos habla de como antes, también, hubieron mujeres rebeldes" (117)[104] La Bruja is the quintessential figure of a rebel woman and her resurgence in literature and other forms of cultural production is reflective of the need to remember those women that came before to challenge the violent forms of sexism made worse in the neoliberal moment. Aside from this, the texts illustrate feministas comunitaria's desire for balance within communities and the collective good of all, not just women, but all members of society and the land. Now, more than ever, it is vital to resist against this imbalance between the ultra-rich, heteropatriarchal ruling class and the rest of humanity.

[103] "that which connects us to the ancestors, it is that form of life that manifests in these lands that is unrepeatable…"

[104] "it speaks of where we come from, what problems, what struggles took place in the between, why women are where we are, it tells us that before there were also rebellious women."

Neoliberalism, Trump and the Attack on Women's Rights

Scholars and political commentators argue that Trump's election represents the culmination of decades living under the neoliberal regime in the United States. Many thought that a millionaire, real estate mogul, bigot, an admitted sexual predator, someone with endorsements by the KKK and a buffoon like Donald Trump, would never become president of the United States. Many wondered how this could have happened? Naomi Klein explains in her book, *No is Not Enough: Resisting Trump's Shock Politics and Winning the World We Need,* that neoliberal economic policies led to a far-right president. She contends that white supremacy and fascist movements are far more likely to become more threatening "during periods of sustained economic hardship and national decline," such as Germany, which she says became "ripe for Nazis" after being devastated by war and economic sanctions (97). Economic decline was perpetuated by continuous tax cuts to corporations, privatization of public institutions, cuts to social programs and outsourcing of US jobs to developing countries. This created a dearth in economic growth, leaving working people unemployed or underemployed and looking for a way to survive on low wages with high costs of living. The process of "accumulation as dispossession," as David Harvey calls it, includes the deregulation of banks, lack of government intervention into the market, and holding the government hostage by big business if they did not create laws that benefited them, resulted in the undermining of the role of government. Klein affirms this assertion, stating "Trumps political career would have been impossible without the degradation of the whole idea of the public sphere, which has been unfolding over decades… And it could never have happened had that message not been followed up with decades of deregulation that essentially legalized bribery, with outrageous sums of corporate money flowing into politics" (41).

Indeed, the pro-business and neoliberal agenda of the Democratic Party and its failure to side with working people disillusioned many voters. The "hope" that the Obama election brought quickly fizzled out when the Democratic majority in Congress his first two years in office revealed that he and his "elite backers were more interested in restoring the capital to its pre-2008 'business as usual'" (Selfa 113). Indeed, as Selfa states, Obama left office with "a majority of the US population enduring lower standards than when he moved into the White House" (118). It is not surprising then, that when Obama's former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, ran against Trump in the 2016 election, most working people saw it as another four years of austerity and Wall Street coddling. The Democratic Party has shown that it is not opposed to the same economic agenda as that of conservative Republicans; their strategy is to merely make the current system more inclusive without real distribution of wealth. During the campaign trail, Hillary Clinton did not challenge the inequalities that the system produced. As Klein notes, the Democratic Party and Clinton in particular were out "to make that system more 'inclusive.' So, yes to marriage equality and abortion access and transgender bathrooms, but forget about the right to housing, the right to a wage that supports a family… the universal right to free healthcare, or anything else that require serious redistribution of wealth from top to bottom and would mean challenging the neoliberal playbook" (92). Not only that, when the self-proclaimed Democratic Socialist, Bernie Sanders, ran against Clinton during the primaries on an anti-Wall Street platform, the Democratic Party quickly sabotaged his campaign, demonstrating that the Party was more interested in demobilizing the Left than in challenging the bigotry and hate mongering of Trump to conserve the status-quo.

Trump's anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, xenophobic message also included a nationalist agenda that opposed free trade claiming he will bring back manufacturing jobs. This resulted in

two dreadful choices for traditionally working-class voters, as Charlie Post argues, they "were faced with the choice between a neoliberal who disdained working people and a right-wing populist who promised to bring back well-paying manufacturing jobs. Many stayed home and a tiny minority shifted their allegiances from the first African American president to an open racist and xenophobe" (29). And while Clinton, the "lesser evil" of the two, won the popular vote, the Electoral College —a vestige of slavery — made Trump the winner.

Although Trump's right-wing politics are certainly not new, critics note that his rhetoric has opened a Pandora's box of the worst ideology openly promoting and perpetuating hate. His overt unapologetic racism, pro-rich, anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and pro-war politics combined with his disregard of climate change, is downright dangerous for everyone but especially ordinary working people. As journalists have made clear, under Trump Congress passed a massive tax cut to the wealthy, a very unpopular move and one that Trump supports, which means that social programs that benefit the poor will be cut to make up for the lack of revenue. Not only that, the violence against immigrants is only getting worse with immigrant children being separated from their parents at the border and put into detention centers. All the while, economic, climate and political refugees that attempt to apply for asylum are being kept from setting foot on US soil, a policy that violates international law. Lastly, as television commentators have made abundantly clear, Trump's overall support for the alt-right has justified the actions of neo-Nazi groups who have literally killed people, and points to his lack of humanity and white supremacist ideology.

Aside from this, journalists have also underscored that Trump is an openly sexist, anti-women, anti-LGBTQ bigot. As of now nineteen women have accused him of sexual harassment and are calling for a congressional investigation. He has called for a ban of transgender people

serving in the military and his second in command, Mike Pence —a conservative Evangelical Christian — wants to rollback many rights women and the LGBTQ community have fought vehemently for, including abortion. Pence has been favorable to the white conservative Christian movement, as *The Atlantic* reports, "Evangelical leaders across the country point to his record on abortion and religious freedom and liken him to a prophet restoring conservative Christianity to its rightful place at the center of American life" (Coppins).[105] With the nomination of conservative judge, Neil Gorsuch, Trump moved the pendulum towards a conservative majority Supreme Court, and later he also nominated another conservative judge, Brett Kavanaugh, who is openly against abortion and endorsed by many anti-abortion and conservative religious leaders and who was recently been accused of sexually assaulting two women. This moves us closer to the overturning of Roe v. Wade, a Supreme Court decision that gives women the constitutional right to abortion. If this were overturned it would be disastrous for women, LGBTQ people and the community at large. Already the Supreme Court ruled in favor of an anti-abortion rule that "crisis pregnancy centers, which discourage women from going through with abortion procedures, will not be required to supply unbiased information about abortion to clients" (Paul).[106] And just recently, Alabama passed a near total abortion law, banning abortion at all phases with no exceptions for survivors of rape and incest. Currently twenty-seven states are considered "abortion deserts," meaning that people must travel for more than 100 miles to get an abortion and some states require a 72-hour waiting period, creating additional barriers. It is no surprise that women are on the defensive, fighting again for reproductive rights and other basic reproductive care, battles that have been fought for and won by activists from previous generations.

[105] Coppins, McKay. "God's Plan for Mike Pence." *The Atlantic*, Feb. 2018. www.theatlantic.com

[106] Paul, Kari. "Abortion Could Be Banned in Some U.S. States within 2 Years under New Supreme Court." *MarketWatch*, 2 July 2018, www.marketwatch.com

The move towards a more oppressive patriarchal regime is commensurate with the establishment of an unequal economic system, as has been the case in the past. For instance, in the 16th and 17th century witch-hunts in Europe, Federici found that under the rise of capitalism, a genocidal attack on women occurred via the witch-hunts. She states, "It is generally agreed that the witch-hunt aimed at destroying the control that women have exercised over their reproductive function and served to pave the way for the development of a more oppressive patriarchal regime. It is also argued that the witch-hunt was rooted in the social transformation that accompanied the rise of capitalism" (14). While these are two vastly different sociopolitical periods it points to a similar phenomenon— that economic inequality also equals gender inequality. The move towards neoliberal economic policies, for instance, has lowered the quality of life for ordinary people, but women have been especially vulnerable under these conditions. As Andrea Flynn states in *The Washington Post*, "Economic inequality in the United States is greater today than at any time since the Great Depression, and that inequality is deeply racialized and gendered."[107]

Already women in the US fare worse than in other developed countries and under Trump it will only intensify. A UN report affirms that discrimination against women is graver in the US than in most developed nations, and found that women of Color, LGBTQ women, older women and women with disabilities were especially vulnerable (Grobe). Violence against women has been a historical problem, but under the Trump presidency, it is clear that his little regard for women's wellbeing and safety compounds the issue. The fact that his administration has proposed cuts to programs that could affect the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and cuts to the National Domestic Violence Hotline is only one example of this lack of value of women's

[107] Flynn, Andrea. "Perspective | The Supreme Court's War on Women Is Also a War on Workers." *Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com

lives. The poor treatment of women that already persists on a global scale, due in part to an economic system that values women only for their reproductive and social labor, certainly makes matters even worse for women. Additionally, the gender pay gap has not decreased, women continue to make less than men for the same work and some studies suggest that the wage gap has gotten even wider in recent years. A workforce analytics company named Visier found that "women earned 79 cents for every $1 earned in 2017, compared with 81 cents in 2015" (Glenza).[108] On a global scale, "the US fell from the 28th spot in 2015 all the way down to the 45th place in 2016," according to the World Economic Forum's annual global rankings on the economic gender gap (qtd. in Klein 93). Of course, this gender wage gap impacts women of color more directly.

Undoubtedly linked to economic inequality, the attack on women's rights explains why the rise of mentions of the "witch" is a current phenomenon worthy of exploration. Feminists have challenged the recent anti-women wave of ultra-conservatives that came out of the shadows when Trump was elected. By embracing la Bruja, a figure that in the past was demonized by dogmatic right wing patriarchal demagogues, so-called Brujas today are defying the limitations put on them.

Brujas of Yesterday, Brujas of Today

Claiming witch-hood today is not only a luxury that women in the past did not have, it is an honoring of those African and Indigenous women who could not claim their own spirituality or religious practices in public. Supposed Brujas of the colonial era were simply a construction created by the colonizers who feared the non-European "Other" and used it as an excuse to repress them. As Raquel Romberg asserts, "Colonizers carried their fears of maleficia and

[108] Glenza, Jessica. "Pay Gap Worsened for Women under 40 over Last Two Years, US Study Finds." *The Guardian*, 10 Apr. 2018. *www.theguardian.com*, www.theguardian.com

witches among other items in their cultural baggage . . . The colonization of the Americas coincided with the major phase of European witch trials. The *Malleus Maleficarum* preceded Columbus's first voyage by just five years'' (31). Persecution against "witches" was not uncommon throughout the Caribbean during this era. Romberg notes that in Puerto Rico in particular, persecution of witches was deeply tied to the island's colonial history where the dogma of the Church prevailed. The first bishop of the island, Don Alonzo Manzo was appointed "Inquisidor General de las Indias" in 1519 (Romberg 32). People accused of witchcraft were brought from surrounding islands to be tried in Puerto Rico and in fact, the very first *quemadero,* or place of burning, in the Americas was on the island of Puerto Rico at a place known as "el charco de las brujas" (Puddle of the Witches) located in the Lincoln School in Old San Juan (Romberg 32).

Many young women of color today embrace the witch as a form of resistance against a colonial past that created false narratives and racist stereotypes against African and Indigenous peoples. If, as Irene Lara asserts, "In las Américas, where she is associated with 'superstitious' and 'primitive' Indian and African beliefs and practices, la bruja is also a racialized cultural figure"; to identify as a witch is to identify with a non-western belief system that rejects the tenets of white supremacy (12). Indeed, to renounce Christianity and western belief systems in general and engage in Brujería-type acts is an act of resistance dating back to the colonial era. During this era in the Americas scholars note that witchcraft was a conscious form for Indigenous people to resist against the colonizers. According to Irene Silverblatt, "in the consciousness of the colonized, witchcraft, the maintenance of ancient traditions, and conscious political resistance became increasingly intertwined" (qtd. in Federici 231). Similarly, in the Caribbean Barbara Bush suggests that retaining African cultural traditions, including religious

practices, played a prominent role in slave resistance and in providing enslaved people "a strong sense of group autonomy and the will and strength to survive" (153).

The trend in reclaiming la Bruja illustrates the polarization of the country since the Trump election. The centrist position of many politicians, mainly Democrats with their lukewarm opposition and corporate backing, is not strong enough to stand up against the right-wing agenda of hate, corporate power, and state violence. A growing white supremacist movement emboldened by Trump drew a clear line between right and left. The contemporary Bruja movement reflects this polarization by drawing a clear line not between political parties but between good and evil; some would call it life and death. However, it is clear that these Brujas correlate evil with right-wing, conservative, racist ideals that advocate an inhumane agenda, an agenda of death. As Callie Beusman states in her article, "Is It OK to Hex a Nazi? How Anti-Fascist Witches Are Mobilizing Under Trump," describing the group Yerbamala Collective's ideology, "they see the festering beliefs that ushered Trump to power as a form of dark magic, or at least an obvious symptom of spiritual decay."[109] She quotes an anonymous witch in the collective, "The Trump administration operates within an existing colonial-capitalist ideation of 'freedom,' as in 'Make America Great Again'… These were dark spells that continue to be fed by white supremacy and fermented ignorance. We are pointing to this old curse. Our spells run on these circuits so that they can break these spells" (qtd. in Beusman). Indeed, when young Brujas are performing hexes on a white supremacist, wealth-hoarder, bigot and sexist like Trump, the aim is to challenge this power with good, in this case "good magic," which is grounded in left-leaning political ideology. Brujería is a timely response to this evilness as it puts into question who the true evil ones are.

[109] Beusman, Callie. "Is It OK to Hex a Nazi? How Anti-Fascist Witches Are Mobilizing Under Trump." *Broadly*, 4 May 2017, https://broadly.vice.com

The "Brujas Hex Trump" video and the Yerbamala Collective e-zines are two examples of the upsurge in interest in the occult. The video is a montage of images and performances whizzing quickly by. It takes the viewer from spell to spell with punk music playing in the background, where conjuring takes place mostly in the domestic sphere and is juxtaposed with religious images related to the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, Vodou symbols and illustrations from the 1600 in the *Malleus Maleficarum*, such as women engaging in witchcraft. Regardless if it is meant to be a performance or actual spiritual practice, it speaks to a changing ideology of the younger generation of women who are resisting mainstream Christianity — a religion that has traditionally upheld patriarchal ideas of women—and are looking to their own cultural roots as a form of spiritual fulfillment or as a form of resistance against the dominant norm.

While the "Brujas Hex Trump" video does not necessarily illustrate Santeria rituals, Sleidi, the creator of the video, first got the idea to make the video after talking to her Santera mother. She told *Jezebel* that she was inspired to do the video after having a conversation with her mother, who she often witnessed performing spells for protection for her and her siblings (Lodi).[110] She told her that she wanted to put a curse on Trump as a joke but that her mother took it seriously and told her about the Ice Queen spell. She states, "As a joke I asked her how I could curse him and she took that seriously and told me to ask the Ice Queen to freeze him and because she was so serious about it I took it seriously" (Chasing News).[111] Sleidi admits that not everyone who worked on the video necessarily believes in the supernatural; however she says that what they all have in common is the belief that Trump and the GOP are horrible (Lodi). Santería is the creolized manifestation of the Yoruba religion, which comes primarily from the

[110] Lodi, Marie. "Brooklyn Witches Are Doing Their Part to Defeat Donald Trump By Casting Hexes on Him." *The Slot*,www.theslot.jezebel.com. Accessed 2 Oct. 2017.

[111] Chasing News. *I Put A Spell On Trump*. *YouTube*, uploaded by Chasing News, 4 Nov. 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5k0riG-lSUU.

southwest region of Nigeria and from Dahomey, Togo and Benin. The people from this region who were kidnapped and sent to the Caribbean islands played a dominant role in the creation of Santería — Cuba's most popular Afro-Cuban religion (also known as Regla de Ocha) where the Yoruba deities, or orishas, are syncretized with Catholic saints called "santos."

Santería is a tool used by some to subvert power hierarchies and challenge long held Christian conservative ideals about the "Other," Christian beliefs that marginalize and are intolerant of non-Western religions and beliefs, especially those of non-European people. One of the reasons Sleidi produced the video was in solidarity with Mexicans who Trump has targeted during his campaign through derogatory comments that extend to all Latina/os. She said that because her family members are also immigrants from Cuba, Trump's "misguided attack on Mexican immigrants hit close to home" (qtd. in Lodi). Sleidi explains, "Even if the hexes don't work," she says, "the video shows Mexicans that they've got plenty of good people on their side" (qtd. in Lodi). Attacking Trump via Santería-inspired witchcraft is one way to challenge his racist rhetoric and that of the Christian Right that endorses him. In some ways brujería is more accessible, as it allows people to participate in politics outside of the realm of official institutions. No voting booths are necessary, no identification card is needed and citizenship is not required. Could brujería be more democratic form of political participation?

Aside from this, the "Brujas" video disrupts the status quo by reversing the historical silencing of under-represented women and transferring this silencing on to the oppressor with spells— a major theme throughout the video. The video displays a number of spells performed on Trump to silence him. We hear the word like *silencio* or "speak no evil" throughout,

Figure 9: Screen shot from "Brujas Hex Trump" video created by Yeni Sleidi
From *Youtube.com*

alongside images of Trump's face with his mouth taped closed (Figure 9). In fact, the video opens with this spell, also known as the "name-in-the-freezer" spell, where a series of steps are taken to "freeze" Trump's actions. The women in the video write Trump's name on a piece of paper, crumble it and put into a glass that is filled with water and put into the freezer. A hand over the closed freezer door invoking the Ice Queen presides over the freezer and we hear a female voice say "Ice queen, freeze this evil man." In the next scene we see the glass cup with the frozen liquid taken out of the freezer and a woman looks at the camera and says "Adios Trump," while a woman standing behind her bursts into the classic "evil laugh." It is not clear whether the Ice Queen spell is used amongst Santeria practitioners or not, but it is certainly common in African-African conjure tradition to freeze someone's words or activities or to get someone out of your life. In another scene a Latina dressed in black smashes a piece of fruit on a table with a number of *veladoras* around her (tall votive candles with religious motifs). She brings down a knife several times on the fruit. Then she holds the fruit in both hands, looks at the camera and says, "Let no evil words be spoken." The next scene is the same woman standing in front of the camera holding a piece of black yarn with a knot tied in the middle, she pulls it violently and yells "silencio!"

The video exhibits what Performance Studies scholar Richard Schechner calls "make belief" versus "make believe." "Make believe," he says, makes a clear distinction between what is real and what is pretending, while "make belief" intentionally blurs the boundary between "the world of performance and everyday reality" (35). The Trump-hexing Brujas perform spells to enact what they want viewers to accept as real, in this case that these spells will actually prevent Trump from winning. On the other hand, there is an element of "play" and "ritual" in their performance. "Play" refers to performing something that is not for real while "ritual" implies

something that is performed over and over again to bring something into being. In Performance Studies theory to play is to fool around and is not entirely serious, it "can subvert the powers-that-be, as in parody or carnival…" (Schechner 79). Indeed, "Brujas Hex Trump" is an amalgamation of both the real and the make believe, the lines are blurred to make the viewers think that perhaps there is a possibility that these spells will work. To the contrary, a ritual is serious and, as Schechner states, "we know when we are performing [rituals]" (45). Often identified with practicing religion, rituals "give form to the sacred, communicate doctrine, and mold individuals into communities" (Schechner 45). However, rituals are also a way to connect, to build community, to remember and build solidarity (Schechner 77). In performing these spells, the Brujas who hex Trump in the video enact rituals together; they build community and are in solidarity with other marginalized people in the nation who understand the catastrophe of a Trump presidency. In blurring the lines between what is real and what is play, what is ritual and what is entertainment, these Brujas compel their audience to believe that the ritual will actually work. In fact, one can argue that the ritual did work. If it were not for the Electoral College, Trump would have certainly lost the election to Clinton, who received 2.8 million more votes.

Ultimately, the video shows that young women who belong to a historically underrepresented group use technology to bring visibility to their outrage and their opposition to a more intense level of silencing by of the ruling class and its institutions. By making a public video of this anti-Trump hexing ritual it brings these voices out of the margins and brings the historically marginalized Bruja, forced into hiding historically, out into the public sphere. In fact, the "Brujas" video is an in-your-face unapologetic performance that subverts power relations by "fooling around," as mentioned above. This "what-are-you-gonna-do-about-it" attitude, a declaration that says, "I'm a bruja, *y que*? (or what?)" is an overt shunning of the hegemonic

Christian norms that demonize non-Western religions.

Furthermore, the Youtube video pays homage to those women who could not openly practice their ceremonies and rituals, as it takes the viewer from spell to spell conjured mostly in the domestic sphere, not in an institutional religious space like a church. The domestic sphere is a space where many women performed rituals and ceremonies, prepared herbal concoctions and helped women give birth behind closed doors to prevent persecution. By contrast, posting the video in a public domain like Youtube where hundreds if not thousands can access it, it is as if these young Brujas were sticking their tongues out at all the institutions such as the church and colonial powers that oppressed their female ancestors and forced them underground because practicing their healing craft posed great danger. As Sollée asserts, "In Europe and America during the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, even a whisper of the word 'witch' spelled trouble" (79).

Similarly, Brujas in the Yerbamala Collective use the written word as a form of hexing and disseminate their work online albeit anonymously. Their "Statement on Anonymity" in one of their e-zines states: "The purpose of the anonymity for YMC has been to protect the identity of those who might get targeted under fascism" but add that they leave it up to the individual to decide whether or not they want to remain anonymous since it is important to have names attached to the work of marginalized groups (YMC Coloring Book). These millennial Brujas are staunchly anti-fascist, anti-capitalist, feminists who speak out against Trump and the rise of the Right. Beusman, who was able to get an interview with them via email describes them as "a group of occult-leaning queer theorists and activists, interested in creating art that interrogates and subverts the crushing logic of capitalism, colonialism, racism, and heteropatriarchy—which, I guess, is its own kind of magic." Their short slogans written in large font could be interpreted

as spells, poems, motivational memes or political propaganda (Kopfstein).[112] Though they resist clear-cut definitions of their work, spells or even witchcraft, they state in an interview, "We want a contagious art project against fascism"(qtd. in Beusman). Furthermore, at the end of each e-zine/spellbook they urge others to join the resistance by crafting Antifa (anti-fascists) poems. They state, "FORGET EVERYTHING YOU'VE LEARNED ABT POETRY//YOU'VE GOT REAMS OF BEAUTIFUL WORDS IN YOU THAT LIVE TO DESTROY YOUR OWN CHAINS//WRITE WTH ONE GOAL: DESTROY FASCISM WITH POETIC WITCHCRAFT" (Our Vendetta).[113] Hence, their project can be perceived as a creative response against the Right.

On their Tumblr page they have posted four e-zines thus far: "Our Vendetta: Witches vs. Fascists," "Burn it All Down: An Antifascist Spellbook," "The Yerbamala Coloring Book," and "Sanctuary Summoning Spellbook." The e-zines are disjointed, meaning that they do not reflect a common thread or theme throughout. The tone of each "spell" is strong, non-apologetic and angry accompanied by a constant denouncement against Trump (which they refer to as DT), the far right, capitalism and colonialism (Figure 10). However, there are moments in between these denouncements where they speak positive words towards marginalized groups such as queer, disabled, trans-gender, and are very sympathetic towards Antifa.[114] For instance, in the following spell they ask for the protection of Antifa: "WE CAST A SPELL TO PROTECT THE IDENTITY OF ANTIFA / MAY OUR SPELL BE YR MASK" ("Santuary Summoning"). They summon social justice advocates of the past, such as trans-gender activists, Silvia Rivera and

[112] Kopfstein, Janus. "Meet The Anti-Fascist Witches Casting Spells To Destroy Trump." *Vocativ*, 24 Feb. 2017, www.vocativ.com.

[113] Because Yerbamala Collective writes in all capital letters in their work, I will cite their work using all capital letters when quoting directly from their e-zine to represent their writings accurately. Also, because they use shorthand at times that mirrors the shorthand used in text messages, it can be difficult to quote correctly in lower case letters.

[114] Antifa is a left-wing militant movement that uses direct action to fight against right-wing, fascist, white supremacist groups.

Marsha P. Johnson, and anti-fascists historical figures such as Spanish poet Miguel Hernandez who was opposed to the Franco regime in Spain: "WE CALL UPON THE ANCESTORS, MARSHA P. JOHNSON, WE INVOKE THEE/ WE CALL UPON THE ANCESTORS, SYLVIA RIVERA, WE INVOKE THEE…," they write ("Burn it All"). Like "Brujas Hex Trump" the aim of Yerbamala Collective is to bring down Trump and all right-wing movements through poetic spellbinding. In their "Anti-Fascist Spellbook" they write, "WE BIND YOU FROM THE HARM YOU WILL CAUSE WE BIND YOUR LIES & PROMISE TO BREAK THEM," speaking to Donald Trump. They also wish for the breaking down of ignorance as is stated here, "WE SUMMON FORTH AN UNBINDING OF CLOSEDMINDS AND UNDOING OF FEAR NOW THAT WE SLEEP UNDER A MASSIVE ORANGE EYE" ("Burn it All"). Their words summarize the anxieties that many people feel today under the Trump regime. Watching a large percentage of the population believe the lies of this administration even as corruption scandals unfold each day and their support for the inhumane policies of the administration is indeed chilling.

Not only that, Yerbamala Collective also expresses their disdain of capitalism and neoliberalism in their spell-poems. For instance, in one of their e-zines they exclaim, "CONFLICT IS PROGRESS/RESISTANCE IS WITCHCRAFT/SHOW UP FOR THE END OF CAPITALISM/YOUR ANGER IS RIGHT" (Our Vendetta"). In another instance they declare resistance against Trump, who they refer to here as "the Cheeto" but also conflate him to neoliberalism and colonialism. The statement reads, "RESIST THE CHEETO BUT RESIST THE CAPITALIST 2 RESIST NEOLIBERALISM/ RESIST COLONIALISM ("YMC Coloring Book").

As previously stated, it is not clear exactly how many Latinas are in the collective or

which statements are written by Latinas and from where, but what is certain is that the Puerto Rican women are very vocal and make their presence felt in each e-zine. Their spell-poems speak strongly against the neoliberal and colonial project in Puerto Rico and against the economic austerity measures on the island and they call on protecting the island and its people in their struggle. For instance, in one e-zine they speak in support for the student and teacher strike in the University of Puerto Rico and write spells to give strength to that movement. They exclaim, "BRUJXS SOLIDARIXS CON LXS ESTUDIANTES EN PIE DE LUCHA EN LA UPR ¡CANDELA!" they exclaim.[115] Another one says, "WE SUPPORT THE STUDENTS WORKERS & PROFESSORS ON STRIKE IN PUERTO RICO/MAY YOUR STRIKE BREAK ALL OUR CHAINS/MAY YOU BREAK THE WILL OF STRIKE BREAKERS/MAY YOU END THE REIGN OF THE CONTROL BOARD & ALL THE VULTURE CAPITALIST BACKED BY DT" (YMC Coloring Book). This refers to the student and teacher strikes in Puerto Rico and the protests against the looting of public education on the island, a catastrophe that occurred before hurricane Maria but has only worsened in the aftermath of the storm. In 2017 the government drafted a plan to increase tuition for University of Puerto Rico students in an attempt to cut costs — a neoliberal strategy to deal with Puerto Rico's perpetual economic debt crisis and recession since 2006. The students responded with a protest that shut down the school for two months. More recently, there was a 2018 May Day Teachers Strike against austerity measures that proposed to close several hundred schools, lay off several thousand teachers, cut pensions and convert public schools into privatized charters. The police responded violently to protestors. In another one of YMC's spell-poems, they strongly denounce the PROMESA bill by attributing it to fascism. They declare "FASHTRASH CRAFTED THE PROMESA BILL/ FASHTRASH CALL FASCISM 'SURVIVAL'"("Sanctuary Summoning

[115] "Brujas in solidarity with the students in the struggle at UPR! Fire!"

Spellbook"). The Puerto Rican Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act, or PROMESA, is a legislative plan to restructure Puerto Rico's massive debt by implementing budget cuts, impacting the public education sectors severely. These cuts to education are only one of many violent neoliberal policies imposed on the Puerto Rican people by the United States. The oversight board, locally known as "la Junta" created by PROMESA is made up of seven voting members appointed by Obama. These non-democratically elected members have the power to decide how to solve the island's fiscal and financial problems by promoting austerity. The creation of the board reflects what Harvey calls the "management and manipulation of crisis" where "debt traps," as a "primary means of accumulation by dispossession" represent "the fine art of deliberative redistribution of wealth from poor countries to the rich," for they will privatize pieces of Puerto Rico's natural resources, land and infrastructure to pay off the supposed debt (162). Ironically the seven board members, three Democrats and four Republicans, consist of people with business ties and conservative political ideologies who promote austerity measures and make a whopping $625,000 in salaries paid for by Puerto Rican tax payers (Lopez-Santana).[116] It is no wonder that YMC Brujas ask for protection and healing of the island against this evil. They state in the same spell-poem, "YOKAHU, PROTEGE A PUERTO RICO Y A TODAS LAS ISLAS DEL CARIBE" and "AYUDANOS A SANAR CON SOLIDARIDAD" ("Sanctuary Summoning Spellbook"). Yokahu (also spelled Yukajú, Yocajú, Yokahu or Yukiyú) is the masculine spirit of fertility in Taíno mythology who lives in the sky watching over the Taíno people. Taínos are the original peoples of the island of Puerto Rico or Borinquen, as the Taíno people call it. Indeed, these young Brujas do not call on a Christian god for protection of the Puerto Rican people. For why would they ask the god of the colonizers to

[116] Lopez-Santana, Mariely. "A Controversial 'oversight Board' Could Take over Puerto Rico's Hurricane Rebuilding Effort." *Washington Post*, 30 Nov. 2017, www.washingtonpost.com

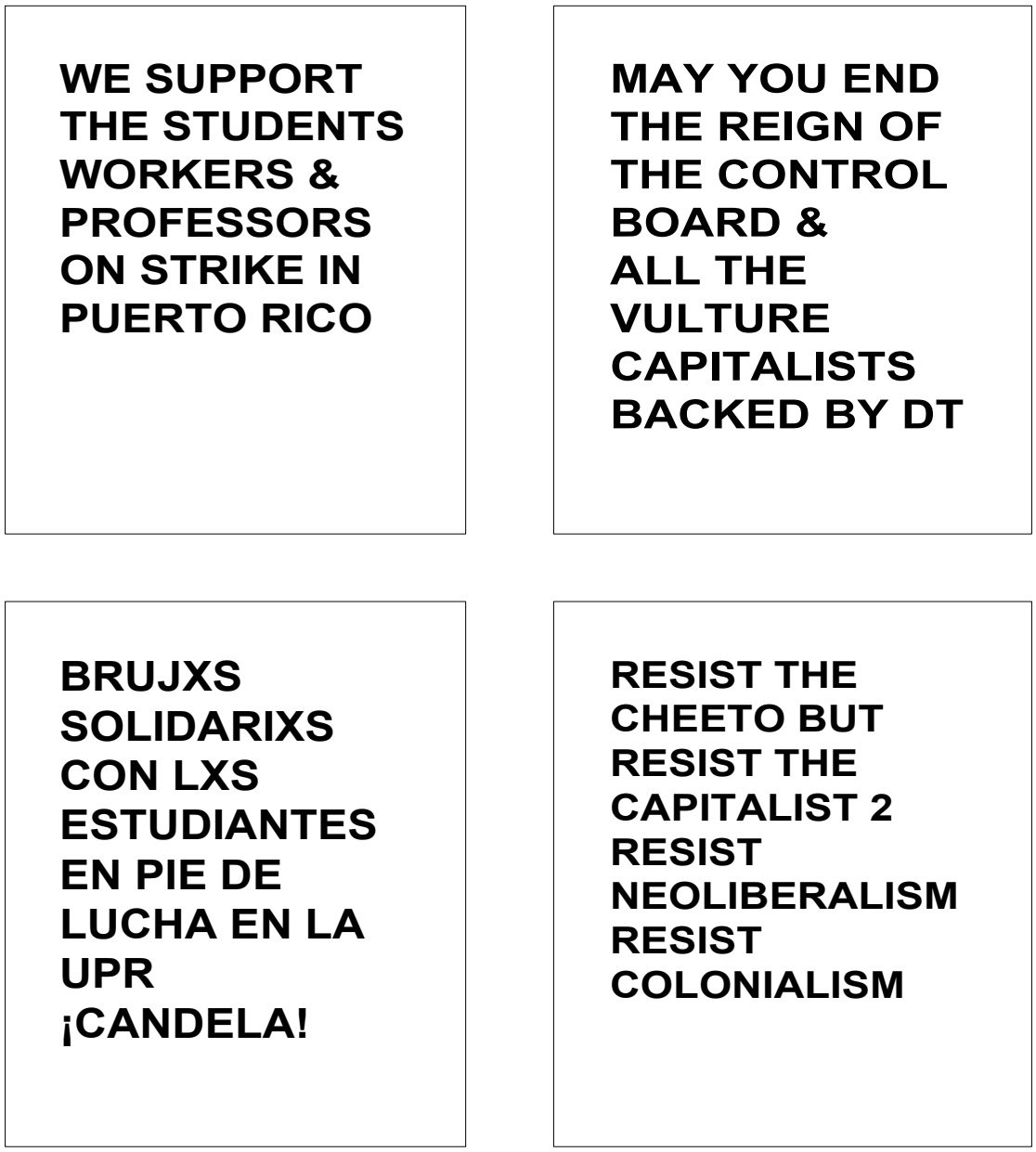

Figure 10: Four pages from Yerbamala Collective's "YMC Coloring Book"
From yerbmalacollectivetumblr.com

save the island if it is them who have brought much harm to its people? They call instead on the gods of the island's first peoples to protect them from the harm of the neo-colonizers, the neoliberal vulture capitalists.

The Trump-hexing women who perform spells against him and the conservative, right-wing, capitalist class is a symbolic attempt to stop or return the evil to the evil-doers; an attempt at stopping a great imbalance from occurring to disrupt the power that has been established and gone unquestioned for centuries.

Daughters of the Stone: *Poisoning & White Fear*

Performing spells or concocting herbal potions to poison or hex the ruling class, of course is not new. Enslaved people performed these on whites in the planation era, a topic widely discussed and researched. Caribbean novelists in particular are inspired by these accounts and have written acclaimed literary pieces centered on this phenomenon. One of the most well-known novels is Alejo Carpentier's, *Kingdom of this World* (1949), a story based on true events about the Haitian slave rebellion. It features the legendary Macandal, a fugitive slave who escaped to the mountains and imposed terror on whites and blacks alike by poisoning hundreds of people and animals in an attempt to weaken the plantation system. Despite not having any political or economic power, Macandal's ability to terrorize the plantation class is noteworthy and has gone down in history as one of the most strategic actions against slavery. While, Carpentier's book has been widely acclaimed by critics and academics, it omits the role that enslaved women played in insurrections and poisoning campaigns in Haiti. It is the old woman, Maman Loi who teaches Macandal how to use the herbs in the novel, yet she plays a marginal role in the narrative while Macandal is central. Narratives and historical accounts often focus on enslaved men as the leaders of uprising even though enslaved women played vital roles in slave

insurrection throughout the Americas. Queen Nanny in Jamaica and Cécile Fatiman in Haiti are two examples of enslaved spiritual leaders that played leadership roles as military strategists in their communities but also led spiritual ceremonies following African traditions in preparation for rebellion. In the fictional realm, novelists like Jamaican author, Marlon James, highlights the vital role that women played in slave resistance in his novel, *Book of Night Women* (2009). Here he focuses on a group of enslaved women on an 18th century plantation in Jamaica that play a leadership role in planning a rebellion but they also are the ones on the plantation who are knowledgeable of the plant and spiritual worlds to poison and to hex the whites. In this powerful story, James disrupts the narrative of the male enslaved hero and celebrates women's roles as rebels and front-runners of the resistance against the planter class. The Afro-Puerto Rican novelist, Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa in *Daughters of the Stone,* has had much less acclaim yet makes a noteworthy contribution. As a female author of color, her book highlights the resistance of enslaved women in Puerto Rico through the character of Mati and Fela, a narrative that is often understudied and left out of Puerto Rican history.

The novel begins with the African born, Fela, the first of the five generations of women, who is kidnapped from Africa to work on the sugar plantations and who uses supernatural powers to push back against her forced bondage. She is sold and taken to the Las Mercedes plantation to work as a needlewoman after being raped by her previous own, a sugar planter. Fela tries to ask for help from the planter's wife, hoping that as a woman, she would defend her in solidarity. The planter's wife, so deeply offended that a slave woman would address her, ordered her tongue to be cut out to keep her from spreading tales about her husband and sold on the auction block. From the time she arrives at Las Mercedes, Fela uses her powers against the evil overseer, Romero. She freezes his hand in midair when he tries to whip her, for instance, and it is

clear throughout that she follows the spiritual traditions of the Yoruba people.

The orishas play a central role in the decisions that Fela makes, including allowing Don Tomas, the plantation owner, to sleep with her so that she could conceive Mati and fulfill her promise to the goddess Oshun, the orisha associated with water, love, fertility and sensuality. Fela and her husband Omi make a pact with Oshun before being kidnapped in Africa and must appease Oshun by conceiving a child. They never fulfill their promise because slave-traders raid their village and they are sold into slavery. Before she and her husband Omi were separated they performed a tribal ceremony where they poured the essence of their unborn child into a special stone, hence the title of the book. Fela carries with her the stone from Africa and waits for the chance to finish what she and Omi started, which explains her decision to allow the plantation owner to have sex with her after he courted her for some time. While enslaved women like Fela oftentimes had no choice but to succumb to the white men's desires in order to survive, in this case Fela made the choice to appease the orishas, going against the idea that enslaved women had no agency. It is a gesture of control over her own body, privileging the demands, not of a white slave owner, but of the traditions of her African ancestors.

Mati is conceived because of the pact Fela made with Oshun and inherits the powers that Fela holds. Born a slave, Mati eventually becomes heir to the plantation. A widower with no children of his own, Don Tomás leaves the plantation to Mati and frees all of his slaves. Upon his death, however, Don Tomás' fellow *hacendados* (white elite men) and the town priest, burn his will and claim all of his assets due to greed and fear that this would set a bad precedent. They allow the slaves their freedom and give Mati the Big House but do not give her the land. Mati uses her curandera knowledge to confront the the *hacendados* and puts spells on them.

The men that stole Mati's land represent a ruling class that gain wealth by exploiting,

lying and stealing. Even after taking all the necessary legal steps, these men still betray Don Tomas, who leaves Mati all his property, and rob Mati of it. Llanos-Figueroa highlights the corruption and greed of the ruling class through the three characters that Don Tomas asks to be witnesses to his will and testament —men he says were of "unquestionable reputation" (89). A doctor, Rigoberto Calderón, an attorney, Don Anselmo Alvares, and a priest Padre Bartolomo — men whom Don Tomas himself did not think highly of; he just needed men who were powerful and would not be challenged. "They sported a veneer of civility that shielded greed and absolute self-interest," thought Don Tomas (90). He pays these men a large fee to ensure his will would be implemented and respected, "But in the end, it did not matter what Don Tomas had written down. Papers could burn and so they did. Lawyer, doctor, and priest, all of whom were slave owners themselves, had too much to lose with the disruption of order that Tomas's plan would wreak up them" (90). When he finally dies, they claim there was not a will left among his belongings. Unbeknownst to them, Don Thomas had already given Mati the papers. However, the avarice of the wealthy is glaring. These are men who already own an abundance of wealth, own slaves, land and have power, yet they still go to great lengths to cheat and steal to gain more wealth. According to a study done at UC Berkeley, upper-class people behave more unethically then do lower-class individuals. The study states, "upper-class individuals were more likely to break the law while driving… more likely to exhibit unethical decision-making tendencies… take valued goods from others…like in a negotiation… cheat to increase their chance of winning a prize… and endorse unethical behavior at work than were lower-class individuals (Piff et al 4086). While the plantation economy is different than the capitalist economy, the unethical behavior displayed by the men in the novel is no different from the most powerful and wealthy today.

Trump and many of the 1% ruling class in the US and globally have also proven to be thieves and opportunists caught in scandals, corruption and theft, just like the three men represented in the novel. Trump is the epitome of the unethical ruling class whose family has gained wealth by dishonest means. The Trump wealth was built by drawing from this very same formula. His grandfather, Friedrich Trump, acquired his money in prostitution, booze, and land theft, capitalizing from the Yukon gold rush at the turn of the 20th century. He built trailside restaurant-bars that happened to also function as brothels to exploit miners who wanted to strike it rich in the Artic. He was an immigrant from Germany who set up restaurants throughout the Pacific Northwest, British Columbia and Alaska following the miners. Gwenda Blair, who does research on the Trump fortune, says he created "his own private gold rush by mining the would-be miners."[117] Blair reports that he advertised food, booze and "private rooms for ladies," code for prostitutes, capitalizing on the largely male population in the area. She notes, "he was deploying the Trump formula of giving customers still in search of their first nugget something they could enjoy on the spot—a bar, gambling facilities and separate areas, curtained off with dark velvet, for what were known as "sporting ladies." If that were not enough, he often filed false claims and built businesses on land he did not purchase or legally own (Blair). When grandpa Trump finally left Whitehorse, Yukon in 1901 with a fortune he "ended up funding the Trump family's first residential real estate investments in the New York area, later carried on by his son Fred and grandson Donald" (Pearson).[118] Trump, of course, has denied this history, although Blair is a legitimate journalist and author of several books, a multitude of articles and a professor at Columbia Journalism School.

[117] Blair, Gwenda. "How Trump's Grandfather Made a Fortune in Canada." *Politico Magazine*, 24 Aug. 2015. *www.bloomberg.com*, www.bloomberg.com

[118] Pearson Obiko, Natalie. "How Trump's Grandfather Made a Fortune in Canada." *Bloomberg.Com*, 26 Oct. 2016. www.bloomberg.com.

Because the seed does not fall far from the tree, Trump's father, Fred, followed suit in his own real estate dealings. He was a low-income housing profiteer, taking advantage of the post-war Federal Housing Authority (FHA) who issued federal loans and subsidies for urban apartment blocks in New York to remedy a housing shortage in the city and to make affordable housing available to the newly arrived military veterans. He built a real estate empire on taxpayer money, eventually leading to an investigation ordered by President Eisenhower in the 1950s for corruption of the builders, which included Fred Trump, for profiting from the FHA. He overestimated the costs to build by $4 million. This got him government approval to charge more in rent, prices that stayed in place even after the excess profits were revealed (D'Antonio).[119] If that was not enough, Fred Trump was more than happy to embrace the FHA's guidelines for "avoiding inharmonious uses of housing," which meant renting homes in white areas to Blacks (Kaufman).[120] According to Kaufman, court records show that charges were brought against both Trump senior and junior in 1973 and 1978 for "racially discriminatory conduct by Trump agents." Needless to say, Trump junior has proven to be cut from the same cloth as is shown in the policies he is implementing, the corruption scandals, nepotism and handouts to his wealthy friends.

These are just a few examples that illustrate how wealthy people like the Trumps acquire their wealth unethically. Just like plantation owners and slave traders could make a fortune from the suffering of others, capitalists today do the same —a significant theme in both the novel and the digital brujería texts. Like the plantation owners in the novel, the ruling class today seem to think that the rules do not apply to them. These extreme power disparities between the haves and

[119] D'Antonio, Michael. "Ike Didn't Like Donald Trump's Dad at All." *The Daily Beast*, 23 Nov. 2015. *www.thedailybeast.com*, www.thedailybeast.com

[120] Kaufman, Will. "Woody Guthrie, 'Old Man Trump' and a Real Estate Empire's Racist Foundations." *The Conversation*, 21 Jan. 2016, www.theconversation.com

have-nots are why those with little power use other means, like spells, magic or herbal potions to subvert these disparities. An example of this is the Maya Tzotzil women in the Highlands of Chiapas who use songs and spells to express their fears, desires and longings in the form of prayer. These conjurations, which they claim were given to them by the ancestors, are compiled in the book, *Incantations: Songs, Spells and Images by Mayan Women* by Amber Past with the help of Xalik Guzman Bakbolom and Xpetra Ernades. The text is full of beautiful songs and spells expressed in poetic metaphor that are only familiar to women and illustrate how Tzotzil women— people who have very little power in their own communities and in the world at large— utter these conjurations to subvert the silence imposed on them.[121] These healers, seers, poets, midwives and ordinary women pray to *kajval*, the spirit they define as "Our Lords and Protectors: the Earth, the Moon, the Sun, *Cristo*, the Virgins, the Saints," to extend their lives, to protect themselves from evil, to attract a man, to prevent migration to the United States, to stop a violent husband, to mourn for a dead child, to ask for a good harvest, to express her sexual desires and many other lived realities manifested in their spells (Past 61). One incantation titled "Lullaby" by Petra Tzon Te'Vitz shows that domestic violence is commonplace in the life of Mayan women that it is even part of the lullaby they sing to their baby: "Go to sleep little baby, go to sleep/Your daddy's drunk/and if he hits me, I'm running to the woods…" (qtd. in Past 149). The lullaby works as both a song to rock her baby to sleep and also to ask *kajval* to not allow this violence to occur. Another one titled, "Prayer so my Man Won't Have to Cross the Line" by Xunka' Utz'utz' Ni asks *kajval* to not give her husband this fate because it would mean that she would also have to leave her home. She chants, "I don't want to work on a plantation/I don't want to go to someone else's house/I don't want to work far away…" (110). The

[121] According to Amber Past, women and men live very much apart from each other, with the exception of married couples. She explains that because of this distance between the sexes, "women have maintained their own cosmologies the men know nothing about" (74).

incantations in the book are akin to the brujas who hex Trump with poetry and performance, and show how spells and conjurations disrupt power disparities.

This reveals why challenging the role of the church is central in texts like *DOS* and in the work of the Trump-hexing brujas. In *DOS*, for example, Llanos-Figueroa critiques the church's role in the endorsement of the slave trade, revealing that the real wicked one is not the so-called "witch" who is actually a curandera, but the representatives and intermediaries of the church. Thus, it is no surprise that a novel about a powerful healer with a deep understanding of the magic in nature, the body, and African spiritual traditions, also exposes the hypocrisy of the church and its complicity with the colonial project in the Americas and the institution of slavery. Llanos-Figueroa's denouncement of the church is revealed through the character of the priest, Padre Bartolomé. When Padre Bartolomé met with Mati after her land was auctioned off he insisted that it was only because of him that she was able to keep the Big House and give Don Thomas' slaves their freedom: "With this act, the priest bathed himself in good conscience. He had upheld Christian teachings while securing his own and the other planters' interests" (94). In reality, the three men who Don Tomas hired to implement his will, including Father Bartolome, felt that Don Tomas was too humane to his slaves and coddled them too much and feared an insurrection if they were integrated with their own slaves. Furthermore, the priest tried to dissuade Don Tomas on several occasions from leaving his wealth to Mati, clearly going against the principles of Christianity of giving to the needy.

This is reminiscent of today's Christian Right that backs Trump even though his policies are inhumane and his tax break to the rich takes resources from the poor. This clear hypocrisy might explain why more young people are choosing not to be part of organized religions, and people of color in particular. As Malbroux states in *Splinter News*,

> Thanks to the Trump era, the hypocrisy of evangelical Christians has become obvious. There should be a gold medal awarded for the outrageous feats of mental gymnastics performed by "family values" champions who condemn the LGBTQ community one minute and vote for accused sexual predator Roy Moore the next. Or pastors who will shout from their pulpit about the dangers of idolatry one Sunday, then ironically lambast Colin Kaepernick for disrespecting the flag.

Indeed, the hypocrisy of the Church is becoming much clearer as the country experiences more economic insecurity with an increasing wealth gap and the number of needy people quickly growing. All the while evangelical Christians and other conservative Christian groups continue to vote for and endorse candidates that perpetuate inequality, not to mention Vice President, Mike Pence, who is a staunch conservative Christian and an advocate for corporate welfare and tax cuts for the wealthy.

Consequently, more and more people are turning to their ancestral traditions and drawing on their community's historical memory rather than worshipping the same god of their oppressors. In *DOS* Llanos-Figueroa warns against the dangers of the loss in historical memory and a disconnection from African ways, including spiritual traditions. She does this first by showing the mistrust that her own community has of Mati for practicing her ancestor's healing and spiritual traditions. She writes,

> Many of her people carried with them an unspoken or half-forgotten memory of the old African religions. They had a sense of the powerful healing force in nature and respected its use. But the old ones, the one who knew, the ones who were brought in ships, were almost all gone now. The younger ones, ladinos, no longer fully trusted the old ways. So they approached Mati with a silent hesitancy, a half-hatched fear. (105)

Mati carries the stigma of being a Bruja because she does not conform to the colonizer's religion. She illustrates that this mistrust is grounded in forgetting and wanting to fit in western society. In an interview Llanos-Figueroa asserts, "As the characters acculturate into western society, they struggle against traditional spirituality in an effort to fit in and confirm to new European modes

of thinking. In the colonized society they live in, the younger generation gravitates towards the ideas of the people in power" (qtd. in Georges 2). Llanos-Figueroa shows that the cost of this acculturation is high, as is seen through Mati's daughter, Concha, who refuses to embrace her mother's spiritual practice and rejects the old ways. She is teased at school because her mother is a curandera and observes how many in their community approach Mati with mistrust, often calling her Bruja. Thus, for fear of being further stigmatized by her peers she pushes these traditions away. When her daughter Elena is born, she does not want Mati to teach her the old ways of her people; however, Elena is very much attracted to her grandmother's medicine. But when Mati dies from a violent hurricane that hits the island, Concha has a mental breakdown, partly because of grief and partly because of the guilt she feels in rejecting her ancestral ways. Llanos-Figueroa explains that as the characters mature, "they realize that what they leave behind may have deeper significance and more lasting value than the illusion of belonging to a group that may never fully accept them. Their task, then, becomes one of finding ways to honor the old while meeting the challenges of the new" (qtd. in Georges 2-3). Indeed, one of the great harms produced by colonialism was to convince people to reject their traditions and beliefs in order to assimilate to the dominant culture, a phenomenon that continues to this day, one that many have argued, keeps marginalized groups from resisting their own oppression. This is analogous with Marx and Engels' argument that ruling class ideas are the ruling ideas of society (64). More specifically they state that "The division of labor… as one of the chief forces of history up till now, manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labour, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class… while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves" (65). While

they are focusing on workers, this notion applies to other scenarios where people internalize ideologies that lead them to not to resist their conditions of oppression. For instance, on the slave plantations, the planter class used religion to indoctrinate their slaves to make them internalize their oppressed conditions. Manuel Barcia notes that slave owners in Cuba, although not necessarily interested in investing in Catholic indoctrination, thought it was a good way to control their slaves, especially because it would discourage enslaved people from practicing their religion. He states, "Throughout the first half of the 19th-century, slave owners and authorities repeatedly complained about African beliefs in what they called 'witchcraft.' Although slave owners rarely made religious education a high priority, they considered the Christian indoctrination of slaves to be a very important matter" (Barcia 45).

The Brujas in YMC and in "Brujas Hex Trump" attempt to put a stop to the violence imposed by the ruling class system that perpetuates the oppression of marginalized groups partly by reclaiming old traditions that have been violently taken away from marginalized people. This symbolic attempt to stop these evil acts from continuing is akin to Mati's vengeance on the plantation owners who cheated her out of her land. When Mati becomes a well-known curandera for the poor and the rich, for blacks and whites alike, the elite families start to request her services. She takes this opportunity to gain vengeance on the men who stole her land and sets out to put a series of spells on each one of them causing them great illness. When Don Prospero Herrera y Torres fell "mysteriously" ill, his wife Doña Sara called for Mati. Don Prospero was the son of Fela's first owner and Fela's rapist. He was also the one who had bought the biggest piece of her land. When Mati made Don Prospero the proposition, to give her back her land in exchange for the elixir he yells, "*Nunca*! I will never… your land…? That is my land. *Presumida!* Where do you get the nerve to—?.. I bought it legally with my money. And I am

protected by the law" (113). She responds, "There is your law and then there is justice. Can you law protect your from illness, from death?…" At first Don Prospero did not budge, cursing her and saying she was crazy. 'You're the daughter of ten thousand *diablos* from the bowels of hell. *Bruja mala*…" (114). Calling her Bruja triggers Mati. Like many healers before her, she was wrongly accused of witchcraft for being a curandera. This makes her angry so she imposes a stronger level of pain with her magic. Llanos-Figueroa writes, "Mati froze. She appeared to grow several inches before his eyes. Her hands balled into stone fists at her sides, all her concentration going out to the man before her. His last words were choked by screams of agony as his body arched into a human bow on the bed. His arms were rigid, every nerve and muscle stretched to the limit of its endurance" (115). He finally gives in after this episode. "He was no match for her. There was no other way. He would give her whatever she wanted, just as long as she got out of his room" '*Sí, sí*. You will have… the land back,' he said quietly" (115). Mati does this with all the other neighboring plantation owners who took her land, withholding the cure until one by one they sign back her land in exchange for her magic elixirs, while making sure that they could not father any children after their "mysterious illness."

This is one of the most notable parts of the novel and one that had real material consequences during the slave era. The use of plant medicine to hex, harm and poison whites was not uncommon throughout the Americas and is widely documented in the Caribbean. As Karol K. Weaver states in her work on enslaved healers in Haiti, "Just like the machetes that slaves used for both labor and as weapons against other slaves and white slaveholders, herbal remedies sometimes were transformed from means of curing to ways of killing" (62). Indeed, it was one way to have control over one's life in a world where violence and risks were common; poison and sorcery was their secret weapons against slavery (Bush 76). Similarly, Diana Paton

notes in her work on enslaved Africans in the Caribbean, that the enslaved "were likely to use whatever means were available to protect themselves spiritually in a terrifying world. Such means drew on techniques of spiritual protection developed in Africa, gradually incorporating analogous techniques learned from Europeans, indigenous Americans, and other Africans in the Americas" (249). In addition, poisoning was a tool to revolt without the state intervening and repressing a rebellion. In Bush's words, "planters arguably feared secret poisoning more than collective revolt as they could not be protected from it by the militia" (52). Furthermore, planters generally believed that old women were more capable of poisoning because of their knowledge of herbs and plants (Bush 75). As an elder on the plantation, Mati certainly fit the profile. Also, her method mirrors Bush's assertion that it was easier to poison than to organize an outright slave rebellion, as these were less common in Puerto Rico than in other Caribbean islands. First because Puerto Rico had a small fraction of enslaved Blacks, never exceeding eleven percent of the islands population compared to ninety percent British and French Caribbean islands (Olmos y Parivisini-Gerbert 21). Puerto Rico also had a large population of *libertos*, freed blacks, and mulattos, which complicated the possibilities for slave resistance. It was easier to run away to maroon societies or flee to Santo Domingo or Haiti. Thus, Mati's hexes in *DOS* seems much more reflective of the island's history.

While the YMC and the "Brujas Hex Trump" women are not using poison or potions to physically harm their oppressors, there is a correlation between poisoning, hexing and magic. Paton explains that for enslaved African people, there was a connection between the material and magical aspect of poisoning. She states, "Substances referred to as 'poisons' were often described in terms that suggest that they were thought to work through magical means as well as through material toxicity" (240). She argues that poison was not looked at as simply having

physiological affects but "intimately related to the spiritual world" (248). Similarly, Jesuit anthropologist, Joseph Williams, who published a study of Jamaican Obeah and Haitian Voodoo in 1933, notes the correlation between poison and spiritual ceremonies on the Jamaican plantation:

> Before long it was discovered that a second cause of danger, this time a personal one to master and slave alike, was to be traced to the secret poisonings that were ever becoming more common. And yet many years passed before it was even suspected that there could be no connection between this state of affairs and Obeah, which was looked upon with amused toleration as foolish superstition and nothing more. But even when the rebellion of the 1760 disclosed the connection of Obeah and poisoning, and there was a set determination to crush the dread menace at any cost, it was not suspected that they were not dealing with witchcraft alone but a recrudescence of the old religious spirit in a new and more dangerous guise. (99)

YMC and "Brujas Hex Trump" women are working in vastly different worlds and under different conditions, their work does not have the same material consequences as poisoning campaigns had on the plantation. They will not weaken the capitalist system or stop the violence that the ruling class implements via policies, rules and laws. Nonetheless, their work suggests something similar — that the images and words they produce can influence the way we imagine a better and just world. Not only that, it is an act of ritual, whether their work is performance or an actual ritual. As Schechner argues, "The purpose is the most important factor determining whether a performance is ritual or not. If the performance's purpose is to effect change… the performance is a ritual (71). Similarly, Schechner notes that rituals "are used to manage potential conflicts regarding status, power, space, and sex. Performing rituals help people get through difficult periods of transition. Ritual is also a way for people to connect to a collective, even mythic past, to build social solidarity, to form a community" (72). Indeed, for both groups of Brujas, the intention of their spells is not for individual gain but for the good of all, it is an act of

solidarity so that all people may live free of oppression. It is also a defiance of the status quo. Like the community ceremonies, hexes and poisoning that were performed by enslaved people in the plantation era to feel free, these millennial Brujas also want to imagine a better world for themselves and their people. Both cases mirror Bush's argument that witchcraft or sorcery is an indication of tensions in society experiencing change, "where it has a cathartic quality, allowing people to express feelings of hate and anger. Although it can be a source of division and conflict, it frequently restores cohesion and strength" (77).

As a result, whites lived in fear of African religious ceremonies on slave plantations throughout the Caribbean and prohibited the practice of these practices precisely because it made them feel free. Rebellion and resistance were linked to the religious practices of enslaved people and thus a threat to the plantation system. As Paton asserts, "White authorities were particularly frightened by Africans' use of esoteric spiritual knowledge. In the middle years of the century these white fears crystallized in each society when heightened activity by enslaved people seemed to threaten the slave system" (Paton 235). Many priests and priestesses performed ceremonies before rebellions to prepare people for warfare. Tacky's rebellion in Jamaica is a notable example of this. An Obeahman performed a ceremony before the uprising to instill fearlessness and confidence. Similarly, Cécile Fatiman, a Haitian Mambo (vodou priestess) along with Dutty Boukman, a hougan (vodou priest) performed the well-known ceremony at Bois Caiman before a slave rebellion that served as a catalyst to the 1971 slave revolt in Haiti. Bush points out that traditional African religions "lent itself quite well to organized rebellion," it brought people together and under the possession of spirits "orders to rebel could be given" (74).

Overall, acts of rebellion enacted by enslaved women against the master class are notable and must be acknowledged as such and it was the retention of African cultural knowledge that

gave them the courage and strength to take such risks. As Bush suggests, "the African cultural heritage of the slave women… fired her rebellious spirit, frequently bringing her into conflict with the laws and values of the master-class" (52). While the work of YMC and "Brujas Hex Trump" does not necessarily have material consequences in the way that poisoning does, its aim is to remember the rebellious spirit of the female ancestors who stood up to their oppressors, held on to the traditions of their ancestors and passed them on from generation to generation.

Digital and Literary Brujería: Politicizing Magic

While digital texts like "Brujas Hex Trump" and the YMC e-zines may seem vastly different then traditional literary texts like *Daughters of the Stone*, they both seek to democratize the ability to tell and disseminate perspectives that are often left out of the dominant narrative. At the core, they both create critical debate and discussion about the links between women's experiences and resistance and colonial rule, capitalism, imperialism, and more recently, neoliberalism. Linking a traditional literary text like a novel with digital texts that engage with similar themes albeit different time periods, also illustrates that the struggles to resist are being reclaimed and repurposed by feminists today to challenge age-old hierarchies of power, patriarchy, western religion and the impunity under which the ruling class continues to operate. Novels and digital technology alike are both used to create space in the public sphere for marginalized voices and to imagine an alternative future where all people can thrive and be free.

Some would argue that the novel might be a more legitimate genre to tell these stories while others consider the novel is limited to an educated class of people. It is true that the novel at one point was a genre for the bourgeois public, but today it plays an important role in democratizing stories for the general population. According to Channette Romero,

> Literature played an important role in the creation of the bourgeois public in the eighteenth century, and contemporary writers see the potential today for creating a

> politicized literature capable of mobilizing readers. These contemporary novels…attempt to establish an open dialogue among disparate members of the public and their divergent values. Contemporary women writers of color seek to reconstitute the public sphere to form fuller, alternative democracies. (30)

The works of many women writers of color have indeed increased visibility to the struggles of this community. For instance, in an interview, Llanos-Figueroa explains that "In the patriarchal, plantation society of Puerto Rico, Afro Puerto Rican women were the most voiceless" and maintains that in her experience these women never stopped expressing themselves verbally and non-verbally, "They were the wisdom-keepers who spoke constantly to each other and their children and their families… Publically, however, they were seldom given the opportunity to raise concerns or speak their opinions" (qtd. in Georges 2). *DOS* is an important recovery project that undoes this silence and brings to the surface the historical violence against Black women in the Caribbean who often have the least visibility and the least power.

Not only that, literature is an important medium for women of color to assert their presence as knowledge producers in a world that constantly devalues them. Romero suggests that "Literature by contemporary writers of color fuses oral stories within the novel form to encourage and empower readers to imagine themselves as "free" by demonstrating their ability to actively produce, rather than to merely consume, knowledge" (33). One way to do this is through "utilizing spirits and other beliefs held by people of color to envision spiritually inspired 'relations,' political alliances that collectively resist injustice (Romero 6). In some ways YMC and "Brujas Hex Trump" attempts to do the same, albeit digitally.

For young women and girls, the Internet is a democratizing space to be defiant and embrace brujería. Similar to Romero's argument that contemporary writers of color use the novel to "deprivatize reading, to use it to inspire social critique," scholars have also argued the same of the Internet as a democratizing space (7). Many claim that the Internet is where freedom of

expression can be experienced, and do-it-yourself media producers gain public access and enable the growth of what Henry Jenkins calls "participatory culture." Jenkins et al. defines participatory culture as "a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations…" (3). One form of participatory culture is "Expressions," that is, "producing new creative forms, such as digital sampling, skinning and modding, fan videomaking, fan fiction writing, zines, mash-ups," which is what many young digital witches like the "Brujas Hex Trump" women and YMC are engaging with (Jenkins et al 8).

While still highly contested, some commentators argue that the Internet has also facilitated a shift from the third wave to the fourth wave, and digital brujería may be a manifestation of this (Munro).[122] While the usage of the Internet does not necessarily define a new era nor does it always translate to creating real change for women, Ealasaid Murno states it is becoming "increasingly clear that the Internet has facilitated the creation of a global community of feminists who use the Internet both for discussion and activism." For example, research shows that the number of women using digital spaces in increasing on a global level (Munro). According to Sollée, a Pew demographics research study found that women "were found to outnumber men on nearly every social media platform but Twitter" (138). She points out that women are driving the discussion on issues like rape culture, body positivity, gender bias, toxic masculinity and other feminist issues online, and explains that "Online spaces continue to foster feminist community and provide an invaluable platform for feminist politics" (139). This current phenomenon is distinct from the 1990s cyberfeminist movement that viewed the Internet as a utopia for gender equality and claimed that race, class and gender could be

[122] Munro, Ealasaid. "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?" *The Political Studies Association (PSA) Blog*, 5 Sept. 2013, www.psa.ac.uk/psa/news/feminism-fourth-wave.

transcended in the digital world (Fernandez and Wilding 21). The new generation of feminists are not just active on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, but are engaging in online activism by creating blogs, contributing to online news magazines, producing websites and even conjuring spells, as the Trump-hexing Brujas in the YMC and in "Brujas Hex Trump" video are doing.

Thus, writing and publishing a novel might not be as accessible to many young people as the Internet, but they are still sharing their stories through other means like digital media. In fact, youth are creating media at much higher rates today than ever before and are finding a space to build community, be creative and express their values and beliefs. As the Jenkins et al. study suggests, "more than one-half of all teens have created media content, and roughly one-third of teens who use the Internet have shared content they produced" (3). The current generation of young people finds that Facebook, Youtube, and Instagram are influencing their political behavior and civic engagement more than traditional institutions such as government representatives and other forms of politics. Loader, Vromen and Xenos study shows that youth today are "far less likely to become members of political or civic organizations such as parties or trades unions; they are more likely to participate in horizontal or non-hierarchical networks; they are more project orientated… and their social relations are increasingly enacted through a social media networked environment" (145). Although there can be disadvantageous to this, especially in the era of austerity, privatization and the attack on unions, the digital realm can make it easier to organize and push back against these neoliberal attacks or at least spread ideas, information and raise consciousness. An example of this is the collective spellcasting that took place alongside direct action activism after Trump was elected. Sollée notes that while activists organized online "in the name of social justice, thousands of self-identified witches, mystics,

occultists, and intuitives simultaneously connected through social media to hex and heal, as they set their sights on fighting racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia through any means necessary" (141). There are certainly limitations to this and these acts are more symbolic than anything else, but the visibility that the mass hexing got on the Internet sent out a clear message to the public that a significant number of women were rebelling against the status quo and everything that the Trump administration represents.

Parallels between the politics expressed through digital brujería and the work of women of color writers who draw on non-western spirituality in their literary work can be drawn as both politicized magic and creating a fictional world where there is power in the spiritual belief systems of the oppressed whose beliefs were ripped from them by the oppressor. As Romero suggests, "Fiction by women of color since the 1980s enlists the political potential latent in novels and the belief traditions of people of color, seeking to inspire readers with visions of resistance to injustice" (7). Whether it is performance, a spell, or a playful way to make a feminist statement, the YMC and "Brujas Hex Trump" also seek to inspire a resistance against the current evils of injustice unfolding under the Trump administration.

Feminismo Comunitario & Brujería

What *DOS* and digital brujería texts illustrate together is remembering; we must remember the female ancestors who were wrongly persecuted for witchcraft, that resistance towards the ruling class is intended for community wellbeing not for the gain of one individual, and ultimately that the act of using "magic" is an act to bring back balance to a world that is desperately unbalanced. The creative texts here point to the memory of the female elders, the healers, the so-called witches who resisted against gender, class and racial oppression. As one YMC member said in an interview, "Witchcraft is a name given to networks that have survived

despite innumerable repressions… The history of fascism is not just the history of fascist repression. It is also the history of resistance. Witchcraft is the practice of building that resistance" (qtd. in Beusman). Many young feminists are recovering the witch as a way to honor this resistance and in memory of the women who survived oppression. Similarly, Paredes states that part of feminismo comunitario is remembering and recuperating "toda la riqueza de conocimientos de nuestras ancestras que hoy tenemos que recuperar y por nuestra parte también producir otros conocimientos para el futuro feliz de nuestros pueblos" (118).[123] In *DOS*, for example, after Mati succeeds in winning her land back from the wealthy *hacendados,* she does not keep it for herself and her family, she gives it to the formerly enslaved people that worked the same land for generations:

> It took two years, but Mati finally got all her land back. The people at Las Mercedes prospered. They pooled their resources and worked the land for themselves. They sold their crops as a collective to ensure the best prices. Of course, the best markets were closed to them by the organized hacendados who held the lucrative contracts with the overseas buyers. So the Colectiva Las Mercedes started its own local markets in nearby town and sold to townspeople who had forgotten how to plant, sow, and reap and had traded land for city life. They worked hard and lived modestly but better than they ever had as slaves. They worked their own land, lived in their own homes, and answered to no one but each other. (116-117)

Mati does not simply become the new boss of the hacienda and keeps all the wealth for herself. As a feminist novel about empowered women of color and women resisters, Llanos-Figueroa echoes the argument feministas comunitarias make, that feminism is not exclusively about the rights for women, but about a balance that is achieved when all members of the community have equal rights, first and foremost women, who are often at the margins. Furthermore, in the move to pool resources together instead of growing and selling their goods individually, Llanos-Figueroa is imagining another mode of production, not one solely based on a capitalist model,

[123] "all the wealth of knowledge of our ancestors that we must recover today but also produce other knowledges for a happy future of our peoples."

but one based on cooperation and collaboration. It is through an equal distribution of wealth and land, reaping the benefits of their own labor in contrast to one family owning the land *and* the people who work the land, that balance is recovered.

The digital brujería texts differ greatly in that there is not an overt call for a redistribution of wealth like in *DOS*. However, the act of hexing a tyrant like Trump and denouncing fascism and capitalism in the spells of millennial Brujas is for the benefit the whole community, not just one group of women or people. Thus, the intention of the hexes is to protest for a more balanced world where the wealthy do not control the majority of the resources and to destabilize the power of a person whose policies will harm others profusely. In a sense, the digital hexing of the ruling class comes to represent an alternative Left.

Aside from this, the desire to recover the balance that is lost by subverting power relations and putting the wealthy in vulnerable positions is present in both texts. By balance I do not mean a balance between "both sides" of the political spectrum or ideologies or that both have a right to exist equally. The scale has always been tilted in favor of the Right in a capitalist society, which has brought inequality, racism and exploitation of the environment. I refer to the feminismo comunitario notion of balance; the idea that disequilibrium occurs if we negate one part of the community, which results in the denial of the existence of the other part (women). As Paredes asserts, "La negación de una de las partes en la sumisión y el sometimiento, es atentar también contra la existencia de la otra. Someter a la mujer a la identidad del hombre o viceversa, es cercenar la mitad del potencial de la comunidad, sociedad o humanidad" (87).[124] While this refers to denying women's existence as a vital part of the community, this can be applied to all marginalized communities and the earth itself. If we deny their existence than we also deny our

[124] "The negation of one part of the community to submission and subjugation also threatens the existence of the other part. Subjecting women to the identity of man or vice versa is cutting half of the potential of the community, society or humanity."

own existence. In other words, everything is interrelated. Thus, when I speak of balance I mean balance so the natural world could thrive and not perish due to climate catastrophe. I also mean balance in our bodies so we could be nourished and have access to healthy foods and healthcare. Finally, balance in the social sphere is also crucial so that all people have equal rights and live their lives free of oppression. Thus, balance here means for all people to have what they need to live a dignified life, wealth should be distributed equally and the earth should be cared for and healed. When one group hoards all of the wealth, takes the power and makes the rules, that imbalance brings catastrophe. When people of different classes, ethnicities and genders have shared power in a community, it is balance. Likewise, our bodies depend on balance to live, when they are nurtured with healthy foods, clean air and clean water. Similarly, the earth depends on balance to thrive. When it is exploited there are great environmental consequences. The source of climate change is certainly a result of this imbalance. Every living being depends on balance.

Hence, when curanderas are summoned to heal a body that is sick they are bringing back balance to that person. When Mati the curandera hexes the men who hoard the wealth and the land, it is to bring back balance. There is a point in the novel when she is asked not to hex the plantation owners because it is risky and her life can be in danger if she gets caught. Mati responds, "It's not a matter of revenge, it's a matter of balance" (104). Similarly, when young Brujas are performing hexes on what they consider to be a white supremacist, wealth-hoarder, bigot and sexist like Trump, the aim of the performance is to stop further imbalance and damage from occurring in our society and our earth. Ironically, throughout history the people who helped people heal— the healers, the medicine women and men, the midwives, the herbalists —are the ones who have been persecuted and the ones persecuting are the ones engaging in evil acts that

bring imbalance, engaging in genocide of innocent people, raping and exploiting human beings for greed, as was done by the colonists throughout the Americas.

Conclusion

DOS and the digital brujería texts explore the idea of so-called witches' battle between good and evil, between greed and generosity, between hate and love, in their creative work. From the perspective of African-influenced Caribbean religions and healing practices, hexing and poisoning rituals have often been employed by the powerless as a response to the great imbalance that they experience. As Adogame states, African healing practices consist of "a sustained ritual process of righting the disequilibrium generated by spiritual, natural, psychological, and social factors…" (qtd. in Villa 23). Indeed, "witches" serve as healers and balance-bringers against oppression in these two texts. If anything, they make the audience believe in magic and feel a little bit freer because of it. Witchcraft also gives people agency in the face of hopeless political change. When only two political parties who are not invested in creating substantial change for the 99% exist, brujería offers immediate action to structural inequality.

Chapter 3, in part, is currently being prepared for submission for publication of the material. Martinez, Norell. "Brujas in the Time of Trump: Hexing the Ruling Class," in *Latinas and the Politics of Urban Spaces.* The dissertation author is the primary investigator and author of this paper.

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Chapter 4: Cross-Border Childbirth, Neoliberalism and the Bruja-Midwife: Ancestral Knowledge as an Antidote to Gender Violence

"No one does more harm to the Catholic Faith than midwives. For when they do no kill children, then, as if for some other purpose, they take them out of the room and, raising them up in the air, offer them to devils."

-- Heinreich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger *Malleaus Maleficarum*

"women were persecuted for witchcraft and targeted because of their knowledge of the natural world and the body. To contain the rituals of midwifery was to contain the rituals of the culture that the women bore as culture carriers and reproducers of society."

-- Patrisia Gonzales *Red Medicine*

In previous chapters I examined manifestations of la Bruja as maize diviner, as curandera and as *hechicera.* In this chapter I discuss la Bruja as midwife. The midwife is a female healer whose work in assisting women give birth has been under intense scrutiny and demonized both in Europe and the Americas for centuries. During the European's witch-hunts in the 16th century she was referred to as a "witch-midwife" in the *Malleaus Maleficarum* and accused of eating babies and offering them to devil. In New Spain in the early 1500s the birth rituals performed by Indigenous midwives were considered devil worship, a menace to the church and thus, witchcraft. In the US in the early 20th century, the medical community considered the Indigenous midwife to be dark, dirty and evil and threatening to the legitimization of the obstetrics field. A number of policies that followed outlawed midwifery or greatly reduced the number of midwives serving women in all communities, but it especially impacted the presence of midwives in Black, Native American, Mexican and other communities of color. In the 1960s-70s a renewed interest in midwifery took place due partly to the Women's Movement. This era was known as the "white revival" of midwifery because mostly white women were able to reclaim the art due to the costly licensing and schooling requirements that many women of color were unable to access. Yet today, Chicanas are among a new generation of women of color working to recover their

ancestral traditions practiced long before the colonizers arrived, by learning the art of midwifery themselves.[125] Even though they do not call themselves "Brujas," they are reconnecting to the methods of care that were considered brujería by the colonizers, methods that Indigenous women have used since pre-colonial times and continue to be implemented today in contemporary Mesoamerica.

To analyze the Bruja-midwife in the Chicana community, I examine the documentary film *Catching Babies*. This 2011 film, directed by Barni Amed Qaasim and produced by Jennifer Lucero, focuses on a birth center and midwifery training school in the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez border called Maternidad La Luz. It narrates the birth stories of Mexican and Chicana mothers who deliver their babies at this birth center with midwives in training who work here. It follows four midwifery students: two Anglo women, one African-American woman and one Chicana *fronteriza* named Sandra Iturbe. Unlike her peers, Iturbe is local to El Paso, she speaks Spanish, and is learning Mexican and Indigenous midwifery traditions alongside Western medical practices to better serve the women in her border community. This film is one of a few birth documentaries with a focus on Latina women and Chicana birth workers on the US-Mexico border.[126] This is significant because the majority of birth documentaries largely exclude women of color who are birth workers and birthing mothers, and often lack an analysis of race and class. The film's focus on a Chicana midwifery student at this border clinic not only challenges the

[125] Native women in Canada and the US, as well as African-American women and Asian women are working towards recovering the traditions of midwifery in their own communities today.

[126] A recent 28-minute documentary was released in 2018, several years after I began writing this chapter. Titled "Birth at the Border" and produced by Ellie Lobovits, the film deals with similar themes as *Catching Babies* except it is much more focused on the politics of cross-border childbirth rather then on a birth center. In the film, two Mexican women from Ciudad Juarez cross the border to give birth and two Chicana midwives assist them. This is a significant contribution to the genre of birth documentaries since very few represent Chicana midwives and Mexican mothers. Unfortunately, I was only able to view the trailer. The film is only available for purchase at an exorbitant price and thus, I was unable to discuss it here.

historical erasure of Mexican midwives in the US, it also illustrates that to reclaim Indigenous ways of understanding birth has larger implications at the border under a neoliberal regime.

The fact that the documentary is filmed in the era of free-trade and at a geo-political site known for both its massive infrastructure of transnational corporations and for the murder and disappearances of hundreds of women, makes the themes presented in the film more telling. While the film does not overtly discuss the socio-political issues at the border region, nor does it explain why women are crossing into the US to give birth, it illustrates that Maternidad La Luz is able to serve low-income, Mexican women for an affordable fee because it is a midwifery training site. This birth center is one of many birth clinics at the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez border that serve as training sites for mostly non-local Anglo midwifery students and capitalize on the high volume of Mexican women who cross to El Paso to give birth. There is a direct correlation between the large number of migrant women at this border region, the maquiladora industry that recruits and employs them and the growth in birth clinics in El Paso. This phenomenon is commensurate with Sheryl Nestel's argument that these "clinics are contingent on transnational processes that make Third World women's bodies available for First World women's educational and professional needs," pointing to the importance of midwives like Iturbe, who are local and belong to the same community of women that they serve, a longstanding tradition among communities of color (76).

To examine birth at the border and the role of midwives, I use feminista comunitaria Julieta Paredes' concept of *memoria* alongside Mayan scholar, Emma Delfina Chirix Garcia, notion of midwives as *las cuidadoras de la vida y cuidadora del cuerpo de la mujer* (caretakers of life and caretakers of women's bodies). Paredes says that *memoria* "nos cuenta de los saberes de nuestras abuelas y tatarabuelas, valiosos aportes técnicos, biotecnológicos y científicos que

ellas hicieron a nuestros pueblos y la humanidad" (119).[127] She suggests that we must remember the technological and scientific contributions our female ancestors made to humanity. Chirix Garcia argues that *parteras* in the Kaqchikel community employ century-old healing and health care practices to care for women's bodies and care for life — techniques that are humanizing for women. These, she says, are a form of resistance against the dominant class that has continually oppressed Indigenous women, and perceives them as exploitable and expendable. From these perspectives, we can begin to understand the midwife, birth and women's bodies from a Bruja framework: perceiving pregnancy, birth and women's bodies as sacred and understanding the female body and knowing how to heal and nurture it.

In the context of the US-Mexico border, embracing the Bruja framework of birth humanizes women in the border region. In other words, the midwife's role in an era and geographical region that has deemed women's lives disposable is an antidote to this violence. Because of this, they have an important role to play as caretakers of Mexican women who cross the US-Mexico border to *not* give birth in one of the most dangerous cities in Mexico for women. La Bruja framework also challenges the perception of the midwife throughout history as either a superstitious, pagan, witch, or as evil, primitive and dirty —stereotypes that have been reproduced by patriarchal religions and western medical institutions. Instead, they should be viewed as *cuidadoras de la vida,* as caretakers of life.

Documentary Film, Women and the US-Mexico Border

Documentary film as a medium has been used not only to entertain, but to tell stories, advocate for a social cause, and shift perceptions about issues not often discussed in mainstream media. Its realist non-fiction account of reality and its purpose to express a neglected (or ignored)

[127] "tells us about the knowledge of our grandmothers and great grandmothers, valuable technical, biotenological and scientific contributions that they made to our peoples and humanity."

perspective is a useful tool to highlight the experiences of marginalized communities. Documentary as a form evolved over time with history, social movements and technology advancements. Thus, a variety of documentary styles exist, and these styles play a crucial role in conveying the message the filmmaker wants the audience to understand. In *Catching Babies,* the filmmaker uses a combination of observational, participatory and performative modes of representation to weave a story about a birth center, about the women who use its services and about the women who train there.

Direct Cinema as an observational mode of filming evolved with the technological advances in the 1960s in the US, Europe and Canada. Access to lightweight equipment, hand-held cameras, and live, synchronous sound, gave filmmakers the ability to enter private and public spaces and were no longer limited by large film crews and bulky equipment. Reality as it was happening could be filmed without dominating it. While subjects are aware of the camera, this style generally implies that the audience sees the film shots as if they were a fly-on-the-wall. In the 1970s feminist filmmakers used the observational mode of representation as a less intrusive one that allowed for more equitable relationship between the filmmaker and the subject. Unlike expository style documentaries, no voice-over exists, as observational mode is less didactic —something feminist film critics claim makes this style film less authoritative, less hierarchical and a more accessible method of storytelling when filming women's stories (Lesage 515). As Lesage explains, "such filming is not seen as the male artist's act of 'seizing' the subject and then presenting one's 'creation'…" (515).[128]

In *Catching Babies* the observational mode is used to convey to the audience the day-to-day operation at the birth center. The viewers witness births, midwives tending to women during

[128] Before the technology was available to record sound and image simultaneously, it was typical for a male to narrate the story in the film through voice-over to educate and explain things to the audience. This is known as expository documentary film.

labor and routine appointments. A midwife gives breastfeeding workshops to a group of women, and midwifery students study together during down time without any interaction with the camera or filmmakers. Thus, the birth center is much more than just a clinic where women come to receive reproductive services, but a place where women come together to learn, work, and build community. Furthermore, there are long shots displaying broad views of the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez port of entry; the camera shows the everyday lives of people moving through the border. Rarely do birth documentaries include shots of the region where women give birth (most are limited to the actual birth room, such as the home or the hospital room). Thus observational style functions to suggest that geographical location is just as important as what occurs within the walls of the birth center. But because there is no voice-over explaining to the audience the importance of geography and birth, the filmmaker allows the audience to learn by watching and observing (Nichols 211-12). In other words, the director leaves it up to the viewer to put the two together, which can be risky since this is crucial to the message being conveyed.

In addition to observational style, the filmmaker uses a participatory mode of representation. This means that the director interacts with her subjects rather than observing them. Indeed, the filmmaker relies heavily on the personal testimonies of women who use midwifery services at Maternidad La Luz and the student midwives who work there. Thus, if the audience does not pick up on critical information by observing and listening, the filmmaker fills this gap by integrating interviews throughout the film. This type of documentary genre is considered participatory because the director is making contact with individuals in a direct way enabling them to participate more actively in the events of the film. Bill Nichols suggests that this mode "inflects the 'I speak about them to you' formulation into something that is often closer to 'I speak with them for us (me and you)' as the filmmaker's interactions give us a

distinct window onto a particular portion of our world (180). The interviews with women from south of the border are mostly in Spanish with English subtitles. We learn through them their experiences and their perspectives on the birth center, their birth, their emotions and their bodies. While not all of the mothers interviewed speak Spanish, language gives us a clear indication of the demographic of women this birth center serves as well as the geographical location in which the film takes place. Furthermore, interviews with the local midwifery student, Sandra Iturbe, also makes clear that this is being filmed in the borderlands, and although there is no overt discussion of midwifery tourism (discussed below), the interview with the local, Chicana midwifery indicates the importance of this as it pertains to location. What these interviews capture would be absent had the director decided to make the documentary solely in observational mode.

As a media activist with connections to grassroots organizations throughout the country, the director, Barni Axmed Qaasim, is given access to the spaces and people she interviews. Her media projects center on filming the stories of marginalized communities and the work she does with human rights organizations throughout the Americas.[129] Thus, as a filmmaker she creates grassroots, albeit professional film projects that are community centered and her work is not considered mainstream. Hence, *Catching Babies* integrates the performative mode of representation to tell these stories. The performative mode emphasizes the filmmaker's involvement with the subject and the larger political or historical motivation. Performative here "draws more heavily on the tradition of acting as a way to bring heightened emotional involvement to a situation or role" (Nichols 203). According to Nichols "Performative

[129] For example, Qaasim film *Under Arpaio* (2011) documents the community's struggle against the racist laws and human rights violations of sheriff Joe Arpaio in Arizona. Her first film, *A Little Rebirth,* centers on refugees from the Somali diaspora in Phoenix, Arizona. The underrepresentation of these topics in mainstream media shows her connection to grassroots activism.

documentaries bring the emotional intensities of embodied experience and knowledge to the fore rather than attempt to do something tangible… it is to help us sense what a certain situation or experience feels like" (203). While Qaasim is not a mother or a midwifery student herself, she is a woman of color from a Somali community in Arizona. Her desire to document the stories of "those impacted by injustice" and her belief that they "are capable, strong and most qualified to tell their own stories," demonstrates her embodied investment in filming *Catching Babies* (Qaasim).[130] This illustrates what Nichols suggests performative documentary does, "It sets out to demonstrate how embodied knowledge provides entry into an understanding of the more general processes at work in society (201).

Through this process, Qaasim's documentary is an educational tool to raise awareness about the social, political, economic and cultural issues to an audience outside of educational institutions. In this sense, the filmmaker is an advocate for the community rather than simply an observer. There are wide critiques among feminists in film studies about the problems of documentary film as a method to represent women's issues. Many have challenged the truth claims of documentaries themselves stating that the non-intervention nature of documentary is constructed and mediated and that the camera's presence is not innocent (Waldman and Walker 7). Indeed the director's point of view is expressed — whether unconsciously or consciously — in the editing process, the camera angles, the music and narrating styles, and it is the director that chooses the film episodes and how to organize the film. With that in mind, however, when the documentary filmmaker's role is an advocate for the subjects they represent in these films, as in the case of *Catching Babies,* these films have the potential to educate and create change. Some documentary films raise awareness on issues in the world that we would not know otherwise because they are not discussed in mainstream media. As Lourdes Portillo affirms,

[130] Qaasim, Barni. *Barni | Envision Justice*. http://barni.me/

"The art of film can be used in the service of the unprotected" and more specifically she argues that documentaries "can take a stance and inform, activate, promote understanding and compassion" (qtd. in Fregoso 233). Low-budget documentary films like *Catching Babies* are especially important in the era of austerity, as the cuts in funding for the Arts and Humanities make it difficult to produce creative work, particularly if it is not in the interest of the ruling class to tell stories about marginalized people, such as Mexican women at the border.

Documentary films about this demographic and region bring to light urgent issues about gender inequality in border towns like Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana under the pressures of the current economic and political conditions of neoliberalism. *Catching Babies* is one of several documentary films that discuss the lives of women at the US-Mexico border. For instance, Lourdes Portillo's 2001 documentary *Señorita Extraviada* and Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre's film *Maquiliapolis (City of Factories)* released in 2006, highlight the issues women face on the Mexican side of the border. *Señorita Extraviada* focuses on the mass murders and disappearances of women in Ciudad Juarez, particularly highlighting the intersection between the maquiladora industry and the apathy of the Mexican government towards this issue. *Maquiliapolis* centers on maquiladora workers, their meager wages, work and living conditions, environmental racism and community organizers who go up against a powerful company. Both of these films demonstrate Lourdes Portillo's claim that these women personify "everything that is worthless in Mexico…" (qtd. in Fregoso 248). Exploring women's stories on the border via documentary film humanizes the women on the screen and in some ways, makes them immortal on film. The irony here is that on film they live forever while in real life their lives are disposable.

Films like *Señorita Extraviada*, *Maquiliapolis* and *Catching Babies* convey the impact of life on women at the US-Mexico border, illustrating what Cherrie Moraga calls a "theory in the flesh." "A theory in the flesh," Moraga declares, "means one where the physical realities of our lives — our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings — all fuse to create a politic born of necessity" (23). Indeed, documentaries such as these reveal that women's lived experiences are impacted by economic policies, capitalist endeavors and backwards ideologies about gender in the borderlands and the literal impact on women's flesh, their bodies and the realities of their lives.

Catching Babies, while not overtly discussing the political implications of cross border birth, depicts the results of neoliberal policies on women's bodies and how these follow women even when they enter the US side. While *Catching Babies* does not instill the same sense of urgency as films about feminicides and labor exploitation, the act of crossing over geographical borders to give birth mirrors the impact of the massive displacement and movement of women to the borderlands. Compared to the previously mentioned films, *Catching Babies* does not depict Mexican women's lives as precarious. However, it depicts another side of the same coin and that is that women's bodies are needed not just for physical labor but for another type of labor — childbirth— to serve the interests of midwives in training and the birth centers that rely on Latina women to keep these centers running. Thus, documentary films as a medium to tell stories about the border and women residing on the borderlands are useful for advocating for this community by bringing the audience inside communities with which they might not otherwise be familiar.

Lastly, while *Catching Babies* does not give a historical background of the persecution of midwives, it considers Indigenous birth traditions, traditions that at one point in history were

considered brujería. Making these birth practices the narrative is not only a crucial educational moment for the audience but it brings visibility to a forgotten past.

The Midwife as Bruja: A History of Persecution

The midwife, sometimes referred to in Spanish-speaking communities as *comadrona*, *partera* or *curandera-partera,* represents a centuries-old tradition of female medical care, not just in the Americas but many parts of the world.[131] Their contributions to the caretaking of women withstood the test of time, albeit they have had to fight to preserve and pass on this knowledge. The persecution of Indigenous healers in Latin America by Spanish colonizers had incredible consequences for the dissemination of medicinal knowledge. Midwives were amongst those whom the clergy found threatening due to their knowledge of women's bodies and their reproductive functions. Members of the clergy were responsible for propagating audacious claims against midwives, accusing them of being witches. The Dominican Inquisitors Heinreich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger dedicated several chapters in the *Malleus Meleficarum* to demonizing midwives. One was titled, "That Witches who are Midwives in Various Ways Kill the Child Conceived in the Womb, and Procure an Abortion; or if they do not they Offer New-born Children to Devils." It made claims that midwives were one of the biggest threats to the Catholic faith, they kill infants and offer them to the devil. "No one does more harm to the Catholic Faith than midwives," the authors state, "For when they do not kill children, then, as if for some other purpose, they take them out of the room, and raising them up in the air, offer them to the devils" (66). The authors also demonized midwives for preventing women from conceiving or made to miscarry (66). Midwives were often the only resource available to help women have control over their reproductive lives. They had knowledge of contraceptives, herbs

[131] Partera translates to "midwife" in Spanish. The verb "partear" means "to deliver." Curandera-partera translates to "midwife-healer," as will be explained in more detail below.

and other methods to produce abortions, which was deemed a threat to the status quo, a practice blamed on "witch midwives," women who killed and ate babies (Kramer and Sprenger 141). Federeci claims that it was necessary to condemn women who had knowledge of women's bodies during the transition to capitalism because there was a need, among other things, to reproduce the workforce. She states, the witch-hunts, "literally demonized any form of birth-control and procreative sexuality, while charging women with sacrificing children to the devil" (88). The so-called rituals that midwives performed were simply justifications to keep women suppressed.

This ideology was eventually imported to the Americas. The introduction of Christianity to the "New World," built an apparatus of repression that would especially target doctors, healers and Indigenous religious leaders, both male and female. In the mid 1520s an inquisitorial campaign began in the Americas that coincided with the Inquisition in Spain and other European countries. Deemed as devil worshipers, healers were subjected by inquisitorial courts to torture. The church was especially suspicious of women's activities in the realm of healing and midwifery. Noemi Quezada found that during the Mexican Inquisition, many midwives were included among the fifty-six of ninety-six persecutions (qtd. in Gonzales 77). This is evident in the 1553 book of sermons against witchcraft by friar Andres de Olmos. He makes claims that echo the Inquisitors' in the *Malleaus*, stating that the devil is the teacher of midwives: "Muchas cosas de aflicción, desdichadas, enseña el Diablo a las parteras, a las que dan a luz a los niños, de tal modo que coman, que sea comida su sangre" (69).[132] This illustrates the influence of this work almost a century later in the Americas in placing midwives into the category of "witch." Furthermore, in Inquisitor Ruiz de Alarcón's writing he denounces midwives for their birthing knowledge and the rituals that were part of the midwives practice. In his 1629 report to the

[132] "Many things of affliction and wretchedness the Devil teaches the midwives, those who assist in the birth of the children, such as that their blood be eaten."

Mexican Holy Office, he regards midwives as heathens and devil worshippers, arguing, “The midwives who come to help in childbirth use the ceremonies in their heathenism,” referring to the special healing rituals that midwives would perform when caring for a birthing mother. (qtd. in Gonzales 45). To the clergy these ceremonies signified a continuance of Indigenous spiritual beliefs and an understanding of the body. As Gonzales notes, "women were persecuted for witchcraft and targeted because of their knowledge of the natural world and the body. To contain the rituals of midwifery was to contain the rituals of the culture that the women bore as culture carriers and reproducers of society" (71).

But midwifery in Mesoamerica was a far cry from brujería. It was not simply a profession that women did to make a living, as is the case today, but was held in high regard and was inextricably linked to Indigenous spiritual belief systems. Rituals were performed during and after birth, as the *Florentine Codex* illustrates in over sixty pages of birthing rituals and knowledge enacted by Mexica midwives (Figure 11). Pregnancy and birth were seen through a vastly different framework. “Being pregnant itself, and giving birth itself, is a ceremony,” states Patrisia Gonzales (37). She affirms that birthing rituals were foundational to an Indigenous understanding of the world (45). Gonzales notes that for the Mexica birth “was a communal celebration in which the importance of the mother, midwife, and female forces were recognized” (45). In her research on birthing rituals Gonzales explains that these were so important that "they were recorded in pre-Columbian codices and visual texts: symbols of placenta, umbilical chords, birthing squats, and birthing trees. They depicted birthing spirits and guardians such as Tlazolteotl – the guardian of birthing women, midwives, healers and weavers – who depicted birthing while wearing ceremonial regalia” (45). Furthermore, the *tlamatlquiticitl,* or midwife,

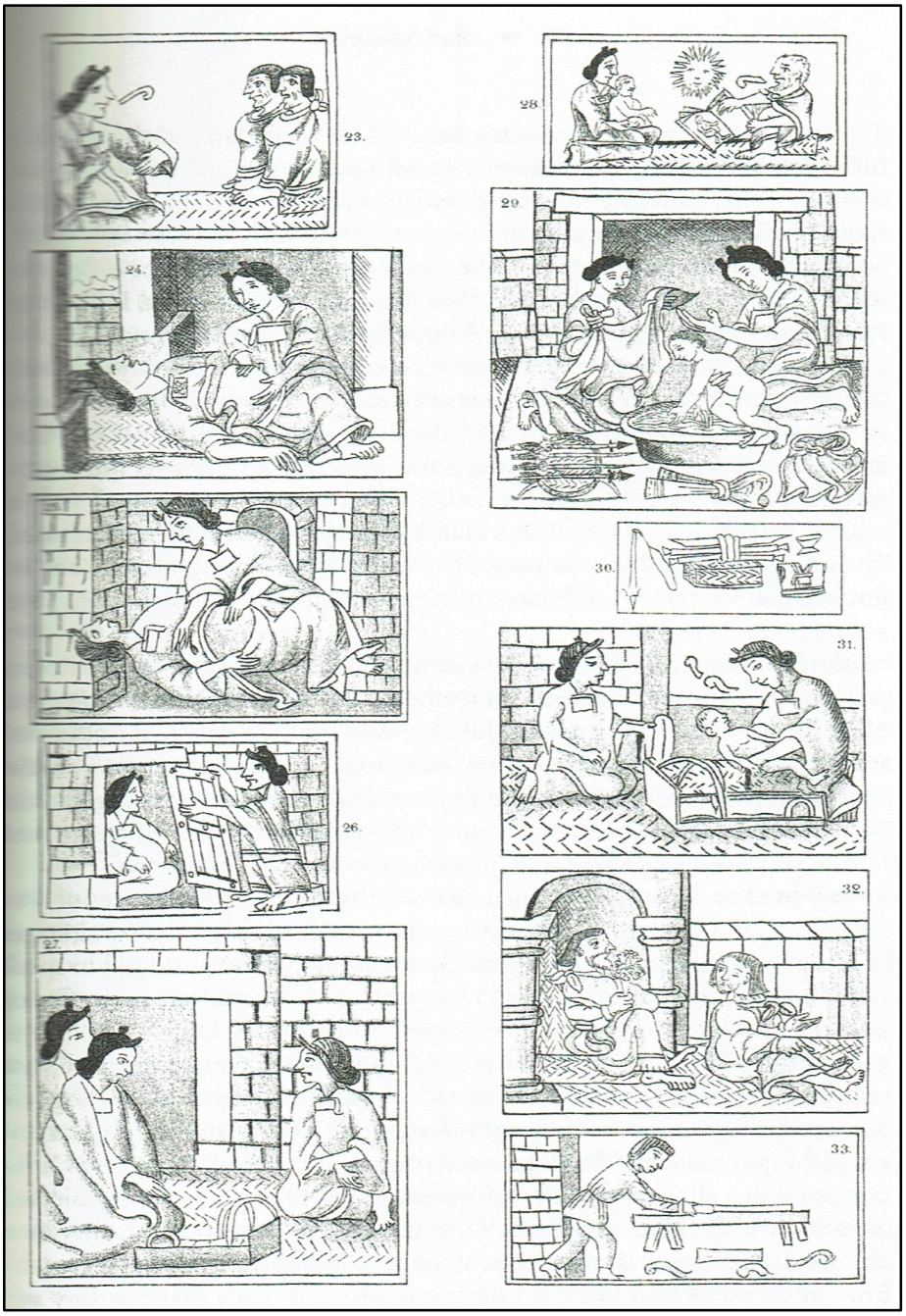

Figure 11: The midwife provides the mother with care, which includes massage, sweat baths, naming rituals, advice and prayers for the cradle.
Image titled "Instructions on birthing" in *Red Medicine* by Patrisia Gonzales.
Original image in the Florentine Codex.

was held in high regard, and was seen as an essential part of society and women of all social classes had access to the services of this key figure. She was not considered a Bruja nor was her work deemed suspicious. She, like most obstetricians today, would monitor the pregnancy by paying regular visits to the pregnant woman. She would advise her on diet and other habits and would perform procedures before birth to lower risks at birth, such as turn the baby if it was in the wrong position. As the birth approached the midwife would stay in the women's home to prepare the mother-to-be and the birthing room.[133]

Midwifery, of course, did not disappear after the colonizers arrived to Mexico, but the ceremonial practices associated with birth became synchronized. Like Indigenous midwives of pre-colonial times, they fused spirituality with medicine, but this time they used Catholic prayer and religious symbols to assist with care. One of the few texts about Mexican midwives in the US is the edited narrative of New Mexican midwife, Jesusita Aragón. In *La Partera: Story of a Midwife*, edited by Fran Leeper Buss, Jesusita speaks of this phenomenon. She describes having paintings of saints to whom she prays to when a woman is having a baby. She says, "when that lady is having a baby, I'm praying, but not loud. Praying for that lady to be OK, and for that baby, 'cause I learn to pray from my grandmother" (64). Jesusita was one of the last traditional midwives of the Southwest. In that region of US, Mexican midwives, or *parteras,* played a central role as folk healers who served the health and emotional needs of Mexicans from the rural villages in places like New Mexico and Texas — communities that lived there for generations preceding US annexation of Mexican territory. Many Mexicans lived in isolated, rural areas and did not have access to medical facilities. *Parteras* were referred to as *curandera-parteras* (healer-midwife) because of their ability to deliver births, but also to heal.[134] Gonzales

[133] Many of these practices are still implemented today throughout the Americas.
[134] *Curanderismo* is a diverse folk healing system rooted in Indigenous knowledge of healing, harmony with

describes a curandera as “a person who cures… in accord with the ancient pre-Hispanic Indigenous patterns, adding knowledge that has accrued for nearly five centuries since the Spanish conquest” (22). Although not all curanderas were midwives, most midwives were also curanderas because of their healing knowledge, their understanding of the properties of herbs and of the body, especially the female body. Jesusita Aragón explains in her narrative the many herbs and natural remedies she used to care for women but also the sick. She says, "My grandmother showed me how to use these things [herbal remedies]. When I was little. She learned them from her mother. Everybody knew them back then, and they teach each other. Yes, I know many things now. I'm partera, a midwife, and some people say I'm médica, the healer" (79). Felina Ortiz maintains that knowledge of herbal remedies was a vital part of the curandera-partera practice; it was a requirement to know how to use herbs and what each herb was good for (412). These practices are what led US medical doctors in the early 20th century to consider midwives “evil” and “primitive" and why the traditional midwives became threats to the field of obstetrics and gynecology.

Albeit not based on superstition but on racism, sexism and classism, the male dominated medical field in the US of the early 20th century perpetuated the narrative that midwives were dirty and ignorant. At the time midwives attended over fifty percent of home births even while hospitals had been established (Goode 54). Birthing at home or with midwives became associated with poverty and backwardness, while birthing at the hospital attended by a *male* physician was associated with white, middle and upper class society. Immigrant women of European descent, Black, Mexican and Indigenous women were still birthing at home, yet more women who were not upper class aspired to birth at hospitals because they did not want to be

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nature, spirit and self.

associated with backwardness. Major misconceptions about midwives, especially midwives of color, were disseminated, but this time in medical journals. Midwives were no longer accused of eating babies and sacrificing them to the devil, they were now viewed as ignorant, dirty and superstitious. For example, in article published in 1911 in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Disease in Women and Children* by Dr. Thomas Darlington stated, "Reports upon midwifery investigations made in several of our large cities, together with observations from those who confront the problem in the rural districts, prove conclusively that the midwife, with very few exceptions the country over, is *dirty, ignorant, and totally unfit* to discharge the duties for which she assumes" (qtd. in Goode 12). Another article, published in the same year, Dr. J. Clifton Edgar echoes this assertion: "midwives who, except in some rare instances, are *dark, dirty, ignorant, untrained, incompetent women*… she is *evil,* though a *necessary evil*, and must be controlled. We must save our women" (qtd. in Goode 12). Even while operating under a secular framework in the early 20th century, these words are akin to the witch-hunts; women labeled as witches were also said to be "evil" and "dark." And even as midwives were said to be "incompetent" and "untrained" medical doctors acknowledge that she is "necessary," as they could not and would not serve the rural population, especially poor women of color.

These misconceptions about midwives helped create a culture of male control of the birthing process that led to the medicalization of childbirth. The male doctor replaced the female midwife as the expert. Science and technology were seen as superior to the "primitive" medicinal knowledge of Mexican, Indigenous and African midwives. The act of "conquering" childbirth by male doctors and Western medicine was akin to the triumph over nature in the form of women, of the colonizer over the colonized.

This ultimately created unequal power relationships when the field of gynecology and obstetrics was established, which excluded women but also diminished the number of women of color practicing midwifery. First by establishing the American Board for Obstetrics and Gynecology, pregnancy and birth became something to be managed and monitored and associated with risk, and thus all midwives began to be shut out from the profession. Second, the passing of the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act of 1921 implemented a number of regulations to curb infant and maternal mortality rate and demanded cleanliness, "germ-free," sterile, and sanitary birthing environments. Part of the Act oversaw the issuance or denial of licenses to midwives, which required that midwives go through a formal training and be evaluated by a public health nurse. The Act also demanded that midwives take a written exam as part of the licensing process to practice; hence the number of *parteras* fell drastically. Ortiz explains that in New Mexico, a state known for having a long tradition of midwifery among the Mexican community, between 1945 and 1965, "the number of known curandera-parteras fell from a high 800 to under 100. In 1979, New Mexico promulgated regulations that required all practicing curandera-parteras to obtain formal education and pass the licensing examination… Because of literacy barriers, only 2 *curandera-parteras* even attempted the new state text required for licensing…" (416). Practicing midwifery without a license led to prosecution and arrest, consequently many women stopped practicing all together. Today, midwifery programs and licensing are costly. As can be expected, this bureaucratic process created a racially divided midwifery community in which African-American, Mexican and Indigenous midwives were marginalized and thus, a sharp decline in the practices of midwifery among these communities transpired.[135]

[135] According to Sociology and Education theorist, Randall Collins in *The Credential Society*, he argues that only

White women, however, were eventually able to reclaim the midwifery profession. This was most visible during the Women's Movement in the 1960s-70s, as it opened up new conversations about women's bodies and women's health.[136] A countermovement against medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth gained popularity. Women resisted the idea of being treated as a patient and birth as a disease during childbirth and "women began to reclaim authority over their own births, wanting to feel the sensations associated with labor and delivery" (M. Martin 19). "Ironically, though unfortunate," Goode states, "increasing scientific evidence confirmed as advantageous and safe the traditional practice of grand ["granny"] midwives (i.e. keeping women ambulant during labor and the use of herbal teas and oils) who were by this time passing on after having been subjected to marginalization and eventual elimination by the medical profession" (63). The move towards natural birth re-legitimized the profession of midwifery and the social revolution of the Women's Movement promoted the opening of freestanding birth centers and home births. At this point we begin to see what came to be known as the "white revival" of midwifery — a rise in midwifery practice mostly by Anglo-American women. Ina May Gaskin, "the mother of authentic midwifery" and advocate for women-centered birth methods, was a product of the "white revival" of midwifery.[137] Gaskin is credited for the "Gaskin Maneuver," a method for dealing with shoulder dystopia (when the baby's shoulders become stuck). She learned this technique from Indigenous midwives in Guatemala, illustrating the irony that Goode mentions above — that traditional methods that were once deemed

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because our highly bureaucratic society requires greater skills and longer years of schooling does not necessarily mean that our society is becoming more technologically advanced or has grown in its expertise of everything. He claims that it creates more barriers for people who do not come from an elite class to advance in their careers or to contribute to society in general and maintains that the gatekeepers are Anglo-Protestant elites that control the major professions and within these professional organizations they create new entry-level requirements inventing credentials that are supposedly needed because of increased skills of a particular profession.

[136] This technically began in the 1940s but became much more popular in the 1960s-'70s during the Women's Movement.

[137] Ina May Gaskin is founder of one of the first out-of-hospital birthing centers in the US called The Farm in 1971. She has written a number of books and is an authority in the field of natural birth.

"primitive" are now being re-discovered and considered effective. White midwives take credit for the knowledge and methods of midwives of color by naming these methods after themselves while making invisible the women and the places where these techniques are learned ("Reducing").[138] Although the number of midwives of color is growing slowly, the gatekeepers of midwifery organizations continue to be largely white. A report commissioned by the American College of Nurse Midwives in 2015 found that 91.62% of members who responded to a 2013 survey identified as white (DeLibertis 5). What does this mean for mothers who want culturally competent midwifery care? What does this mean for women who want to serve their community but cannot get through the bureaucratic and costly process? What does this mean when there is power disparity between the women being served and the midwives attending them? What does this mean when policies create a vulnerable and displaced population of women and a market is created to capitalize off their reproduction?

Neoliberalism, Birth Clinics at the US-Mexico Border & Latina Reproduction

The passage of NAFTA in 1994 between the US, Mexico and Canada brought major economic, political and demographic shifts to the border region causing the large-scale displacement of people. Many migrated to border towns in Mexico or crossed to the US. Women are among the thousands who migrate to border towns, a number that has grown due in part to the demand for cheap labor. The Border Industrialization Program (BIP), also known as the Maquiladora Program, implemented in the 1960s, urbanized the border cities of Juarez-El Paso and Tijuana-San Diego to "solve" the problem of rising unemployment along the border. This program accelerated the development of maquiladoras and attracted more women to the US-Mexico border for "women's work" that required "nimble fingers" and docility…" (Segura &

[138] "Reducing Fear of Birth in U.S. Culture." *Inamay.com*, 16 July 2013. http://inamay.com

Zavalla 12). This rise in migration by women to border cities created a lucrative market for freestanding birth centers (that also serve as midwifery training centers) at the border.

Because the economic conditions have worsened under neoliberalism, more Mexican families want their babies to be born in the United States to give their children the economic security they do not have in Mexico[139]. While birth centers provide a service for women who cross the border to safely and comfortably have their babies, it also points to the contradictions of a capitalist system that profits from the economic vulnerability of displaced people. Many of the female migrants who end up in these border cities are often poor, from rural areas in southern Mexico, and with little education. When they arrive at the border or migrate to the US they are vulnerable to violence, are easily exploited, experience racism, sexism and sometimes even death, as is the case of the hundreds of murdered and disappeared women in Ciudad Juarez. As Segura and Zavalla argue, the "borderlands between the United States and Mexico are rooted in the intertwined processes of neoliberal policies and economic restructuring in the United States and Mexico to create structural violence" (5). This structural violence manifests in the unequal power relationships between the two countries, and exhibits itself even in the process of giving birth, for these women are at the mercy of foreign, immigration and economic policies that

[139] As neoliberal economic restructuring creates more instability in Latin America and beyond, US citizenship has become a highly priced commodity that only money can buy. Yes, women are crossing the border to have their babies in the US (some cross because the quality of care is better, not for a path to citizenship), but more recently the demographic has shifted and wealthier women are crossing the border to give birth creating a new tourism market known as "birth tourism." It is now more difficult for poor women who live right across the border but easier for wealthy women across the world to gain access to prenatal services. In an article in *The Atlantic* by Alana Semuels states, "Cities such as Los Angeles and Miami that aren't that close to a land border now host birthing centers for the wealthy from around the world. *Rolling Stone* reported in August that some Chinese couples pay $20,000 to a service that puts them up in a "maternity hotel" in Los Angeles until they give birth, and those couples were buying a "middle of the road" option. (The total cost of birthing the baby, including flights and medical bills: $35,000)" (qtd. in Samuels). As the gap between rich and poor widens worldwide, alongside an immigration vetting system that favors the wealthy, accessing the Fourteenth Amendment now, like any other commodity, has a high ticket price. Yet there is little criticism or media attention on this phenomenon. Instead, poor Mexican women continue to be cast as the problem.

determine their quality of life, their work conditions and their mobility. As Alana Semuels suggests,

> Along the border, for many women the question of where to have their babies has been determined by giant, supra-national forces: the relative wealth and poverty of two countries, the relationships between them, and the immigration policies that dictate the terms of those relationships. And today, in an era of tightened restrictions and dramatic disparity in the opportunities available in Mexico and the U.S., what that means is that many Mexican women are desperate to give birth in El Paso...[140]

Having a child in the US is one way they can have some control over their family's future.[141] However, it should be noted that none of the women interviewed in *Catching Babies* stated citizenship as the reason to give birth at Maternidad La Luz.

Fertility, childbearing and sexual behavior are of great importance when it comes to the border. It is something to be controlled, policed and even profited from. The owners of the means of production in border cities in Mexico, such as maquiladora owners, seek childless women and avoid hiring pregnant women. Pregnant women are seen as "a drain" on the company's resources and as "having a potentially detrimental effect on production," which is why maquiladora managers insist on testing women for pregnancy upon hiring them (Williams 131).[142] If they are pregnant they are not hired, or they are fired if they are already employed. On the other hand, Mexican women who migrate to the US are also being policed for their reproductive choices. Latinas have been vilified for their supposed fertility, considered to be drains on the economy and manipulating the immigration system by having US-born babies as

[140] Semuels, Alana. "The Midwives of El Paso." *The Atlantic*, Feb. 2016, www.theatlantic.com

[141] It is not always the case that families come to the US to have their babies because of the benefits of US citizenship. Some midwives I have spoken to who work in the Tijuana-San Diego region have stated that some women they attend have expressed that they want to have their baby in the US because they want to be attended by a midwife and have a humanized birth because Mexico is known for having high Cesarean rates.

[142] As some human rights organizations have noted, this practice is illegal and violates national and international law (Williams 132).

their ticket to stay in the country.[143] As Leo R. Chavez suggests, "'Latinas' exist and 'reproduction' exists, but 'Latina reproduction' as object of a discourse produces a limited range of meanings, with an emphasis on 'over'– reproduction and on a fertility and sexuality depicted as 'out of control' in relations to the supposed social norm" (69). However, capitalism creates the conditions to market off of their reproduction. In Semuels' article, "The Midwives of El Paso," she suggests that the presence of birth clinics in El Paso have increased and that maternity wards in hospitals are now the cash cow of these institutions. She reports that before the federal government required emergency hospitals to treat patients regardless of their ability to pay, many would refuse to serve people who were not citizens. Now, she says, "they are recruiting foreigners and offering payment plans," because there is a demand and they can profit from that demand.

While birth centers like Maternidad La Luz are providing crucial services to Mexican women who cannot afford to give birth at hospitals or do not want to give birth in the hospital for fear of being denied services, the use of Mexican women's bodies to train future midwives, most of which are Anglo-American, speaks to the unequal power relations between the two parties. Semuels notes that the students who train at Maternidad La Luz are mostly white, middle-class women that come from all over the world to practice midwifery. The midwife center invites students to train at the center for a fee, those fees are used to subsidize the clinic and women are served at affordable rates. Power relations manifest themselves even in this seemingly symbiotic birth center/birthing mother relationship. The race and class dynamics re-surface partially due to the lack of diversity within the midwifery field. Viewing a patient not as a person but as a body with which to get proper training and gain a professional degree has larger implications in the birth room.

[143] For an example, see *Fox News* "Arizona Drops the Anchor on 'Anchor Babies.'" 28 January 2011.

Sheryl Nestel's research explores this phenomenon in depth. She suggests that Anglo midwifery students participate in "midwifery tourism" because "tourism" rather than "travel" "connotes a largely voluntary form of travel available to those whose citizenship status and financial resources permit them access to locations and populations deemed desirable" (141). She examines the promotional material used to recruit midwifery students and maintains that these are akin to travel brochures, as they render birth centers and birthing mothers located in developing countries such as the Philippines, Jamaica, Haiti, and Guatemala as exotic and desirable. She argues that midwifery tourism is "driven by a desire for a very specific 'other': the Third World mother…" adding that "Third World women's "bodies are viewed as natural resources" (142,149). Ultimately, she argues that an unequal exchange exists between white midwives in training and Mexican birthing mothers at these birth centers at the border, as her interviews with midwifery students reveal. And although many of the midwifery students are well intentioned she claims that "the relationship is… always already embedded in a transnational and local racial hierarchy" (153). But the use of women of color so that medical professionals can gain experience is nothing new. There is a large body of research that confirms that people of color have been subjects of experimentation in the most cruel and violent manner.[144] Women of color more specifically were victims of numerous reproductive experiments. James Marion Sims, a 19th century surgeon acclaimed for finding ways to repair vaginal injuries due to childbirth, for example, would perform surgery on enslaved black women without anesthesia (Grady).[145] In the 1970's hysterectomies were performed on poor Puerto

[144] In Harriet A. Washington's book, *Medical Apartheid*, for instance, she covers an array of abuses throughout history, starting with the slave era in the US and demonstrates how African Americans in particular were made to undergo painful experiments.

[145] Grady, Denise. "White Doctors, Black Subjects: Abuse Disguised as Research." *The New York Times*, 23 Jan. 2007. www.nytimes.com

Rican and black women to give inexperienced doctors an opportunity to practice their skills (Grady).

It is important to acknowledge, however, that midwifery students are not performing these forms of experiments on their patients, and the intention of their work is very different from the violence of racist medical field experiments of the time. For instance, Jessica, one of four midwifery students interviewed in the film, expresses anxiety about putting to practice her newly learned skills in class on the same day in the clinic. She states, "Like Pap class. Like you go to pap class, you learn to do a Pap, you do it and then you go to the clinic and then they tell you 'oh you had Pap class? There's a Pap, go on and do it'…. They're not expecting you to know it and do a really good job but they're expecting you to be brave enough to go in there and do it." In the interview, Jessica's body language and tone shows she is uncomfortable with these expectations, but she is required to do this as part of her training. It makes the viewer wonder if women are made aware that someone will perform a Pap smear for the first time on them to practice their skills? As Nestel's research shows, an unequal power relationship exists between white midwives and Mexican women due in part to the effects of neoliberalism. This suggests that although these birth centers/midwife training centers are accessible, would they be accessible if they were solely birth centers? Would they still offer the same services at low cost if Latinas were not used to train midwives? In other words, are Latina bodies welcomed and valued in these spaces only if they are useful for hands-on-training?

The main dilemma here is not that white midwives should not be serving Latinas at the border. Nor am I assuming that midwives of color would have more equitable relationships with Mexican birthing mothers merely because they are not white. What I argue is that in the neoliberal era, inequality and disparate power relations that already exist become even more

pronounced, especially in the context of the US-Mexico border. As Nestel suggests, we must disrupt the idea that poor and working class Mexican and Chicana mothers "freely choose midwifery care in the clinics because it is an affordable and desirable alternative'" and instead understand that they need these services "because it is a survival strategy in an environment that offers few options" (150). This is precisely why it is crucial to practice midwifery from a different lens, not just providing culturally competent care or diversifying the midwifery field, or simply employing technologies at birth that Indigenous midwives use —such as the *rebozo* (shawl) technique, a method that is now being "discovered" by US midwives — but changing the way in which we look at humanity as part of a larger network of life.[146] Of course, all of these are important and should be implemented, yet shifting unequal power relations and moving away from viewing Latina birthing mothers who cross the border as victims or bodies to practice skills on, requires a shift in the lens in which they are viewed; they must be viewed as equal human beings who have the right to access quality maternity care and give birth how and where they want to. Chirix Garcia's notion of the midwife as *cuidadora de los cuerpos* and *cuidadora de la vida* (caretaker of bodies and caretaker of life) disrupts these unequal power relations. This Bruja framework will be explored below.

Bruja-Midwives: Cuidadoras de la vida/Caretakers of Life

Chirix García's notion of caretaker of life reflects a cosmology that many Indigenous groups in Mesoamerica share and that is that all life is sacred. Gonzales states in *Red Medicine*, "the animating energy that is life and creates life is honored as sacred and powerful, giving order and manifesting throughout the universe" (xix). In speaking of the sacred, M. Jacqui Alexander notes, "Taking the Sacred seriously would propel us to take the lives of primarily working-class

[146] The *rebozo* technique is an age-old method used by Indigenous women in Mexico and Guatemala that helps position the fetus into the correct position. Today multiple workshops in the US are provided to teach birth workers techniques like these.

women and men seriously" (328). Ultimately, the role of the midwife, according to Chirix García is to care for life, to honor it, to take it seriously. It is these bodies that are being cared for by the midwife that have been marked as "Other" that Chirix Garcia says depend on humanizing social practices that promote life and wellbeing in people (156).

Chirix García's research on Kaqchikel women in Guatemala explains the practices of self-care and the role that the midwife plays in the Kaqchikel community. She says the midwife's role is crucial and that for the Kaqchikel, the midwife as a caretaker of women has extensive knowledge of women's bodies and understands how to nurture and foster wellbeing during childbirth and beyond. Furthermore, the midwife looks after, respects and values women's lives and reproductive health. Chirix García argues that understanding how to care for women's bodies is not just about keeping or maintaining traditions, as some anthropologist suggest, it is an expression of resistance, as the midwife engages in social practices that are humanizing and promote well-being in people, and especially women (156). In her words,

> La salud del cuerpo de las mujeres mayas comalapenses depende de algunas prácticas sociales humanizantes que promueven la vida y el bienestar de las personas pero, ante todo, del cuidado prodigado por las manos, el conocimiento y la sabiduría de las comadronas. Ellas han sido quienes han fortalecido el principio de cuidado entre las mujeres. El trabajo de las cuidadoras del cuerpo es más una expresión de resistencia que un mantenimiento de la "tradición," tal como ha sido percibido por los antropólogos modernistas. Esta resistencia reside en la reproducción y vivencia de prácticas ancestrales que promueven la vida. (156)[147]

Promover la vida, or to promote life, is particularly important when the women that the midwives are serving and caring for are from marginalized communities. For Chirix García, caring for Kaqchikel women's bodies is an act of resistance against the "colonization of the

[147] "The health of Mayan women's bodies of Comalapa depends on humanizing social practices that promote the life and well-being of people but, above all, of the care lavished by the hands, the knowledge and the wisdom of the midwives. They have been the ones who have strengthened the principle of care among women. The work of caretakers of the body is more an expression of resistance than maintenance of "tradition," as modernist anthropologists have perceived it. This resistance resides in the reproduction and experience of ancestral practices that promote life."

body," meaning that Indigenous women's bodies specifically have been reduced to objects of exploitation that should be controlled by men (158). In her words, "la colonización del cuerpo, implicó para las mujeres indígenas silencio, atropello, su uso como mano de obra barata, y vivir atadas a la servidumbre y al esclavismo..." (158).[148] Thus, when life is acknowledged as sacred it elucidates that people, human beings — this includes women — are worthy of living *una vida digna*, life with dignity.

Central to feminismo comunitario is the idea that everyone's wellbeing makes the community stronger; if a group of people are oppressed within a community it impacts everyone because of the interconnected of all life. Lorena Cabnal discusses the importance of acknowledging that like the earth, the body is a living being — *un ser viviente* — and should be honored and cared for, echoing Chirix Garcia's idea of an Indigenous cosmovision that the body is a living being with energies and feelings and with needs. She says, "Esta cosmovisión indígena percibe el cuerpo como un ser viviente, con energías y sentimientos, y con necesidades..." (150). Midwives as holders of this knowledge, as Chirix García explains, play a significant role in providing care in these communities; they understand the female body, have knowledge of plants that help women's reproductive health and offer a crucial service sometimes without compensation, not to mention the fact that midwives have historically served anyone in need regardless of their economic situation. In some Mayan communities today, midwives do not charge for their services and no one is denied for lack of funds (Carey 39). Lastly, in a capitalist society that is driven by profits rather than the social good, the midwife subverts the idea that it is profit that should be valued and not human life. Her role is commensurate with the feminismo comunitario notion of community. Paredes explains, "Una comunidad no es una suma de

[148] "The colonization of the body for indigenous women implied silence, outrage, the use of their bodies as cheap labor, and a life tied to servitude and slavery…"

individualidades, si no otro lugar dinámico, más que la suma. La comunidad nutre a quienes caminan con la comunidad, y ella, a su vez, es alimentada por el trabajo, el desarrollo y elaboraciones individuales y colectivas que se dan en su interior" (332).[149] She insists that to strengthen the community each individual should contribute their talents to the collective need (333). The midwifery profession that has almost always been woman-centered and woman-led, operating almost exclusively in a female world, has the potential to serve the community in profound ways if the way human life is viewed shifted.

This might explain why birth and birthing ceremonies continue to be performed by Indigenous midwives, because life is considered sacred. Viewing birth solely as a biological act is a Western framework imposed by the colonizers who had no respect for life, including the people or the lands they colonized. Without respect for life, there is no need to acknowledge the ones who help bring life into the world. Gonzales believes that birth "is a procession of celebratory actions, rites, offerings, and rituals that honor, give thanks to and function to protect the sacredness of life, the natural world, and Creation" (39). I consider this a Bruja approach to birth. Gonzales' claim explains why the colonizers found the midwife so threatening — because she ritualized birth, as Gonzales illustrates above. Although not all women want to have children nor do they want to be identified solely as child bearers or creators of life, these concepts are helpful to advocate for women who do want to be mothers to have access to a humanized birth and be assisted by someone who humanizes them as people. This is not just about copying the techniques of Indigenous women, but embodying the lens of caretakers of life to push back against the violence imposed on women's bodies.

[149] "A community is not a sum of individuals, rather another dynamic place, larger than the sum. The community nurtures those who walk with the community, and she in turn, is nourished by the work, development and individual and collective elaborations that take place within her."

One method through which Chirix Garcia claims that this is possible is through the temazcal, a sweat lodge, or what Kaqchikel people call *tuj*. In many Indigenous cultures throughout the Americas, the temazcal is used for health and spiritual reasons, for purification of the body when one is sick or for emotional and psychological ailments. The temazcal or *tuj* is not simply a vapor bath; it is a guided ceremonial ritual that follows a particular protocol. All the elements in the temazcal have meaning, from the heated volcanic rocks, the fire and the space in which it is held. It is a dark enclosed space; most of the time it is shaped like a dome to represent the womb. In the Kaqckikel tradition, the midwife leads a ceremony in the *tuj* where she invokes the spirit of the *tuj* and the fire so that they may give the woman health and avoid complications (Chirix García 153).[150] It is extremely useful as a healing space for women, especially with the assistance of a midwife, as has been the tradition for centuries. Midwives use the temazcal to prepare women for childbirth, and in some cases, it is used during childbirth. Chirix García claims that the temazcal allows for Kaqchikel women to love and be in tune with their bodies, alongside other therapeutic effects. She notes,

> Entre los kaqchikeles se guardan y se practican ideas, valores y creencias ancestrales que estimulan la asistencia de los cuerpos, y son las mujeres quienes sostienen el mantenimiento de estas ideas y practicas sociales. Desde la niñez y bajo el principio de cuidado se aprende a velar por el cuerpo y los cuerpos. El *tuj* o temascal es percibido como un espacio fisico y social que contribuye a satisfacer las necesidades corporales. (157)[151]

Chirix García explains that the women who receive healing from a midwife through the temazcal experience a feeling of wellness and liberation because of the special care that women receive, which is more meaningful when women have not been allowed a space for self-care in a

[150] Original: "Invocan a la dueña del *tuj* y también al fuego para que le den salud al cuerpo de la mujer y para evitar complicaciones…"

[151] "Among the Kaqchikel, ideas, values and ancestral beliefs that promote the care of bodies are retained and practiced, and it is the women who sustain the maintenance of these ideas and social practices. From childhood and under the principle of care, they learn to watch over the body and bodies. The *tuj* or temascal is perceived as a physical and social space that contributes to satisfy the bodily needs."

patriarchal society that oppresses them. She explains, "La reunión entre una comadrona y una mujer que recibe un cuidado especial es el encuentro entre una sanadora y una mujer que es sujeto de sanación, el encuentro de dos cuerpos femeninos" (155).[152] This *encuentro*, or encounter, is a healing ceremony, an honoring of the women's body.

I claim that in the film, *Catching Babies,* Sandra Iturbe embodies Chirix García's notion of *cuidadora de la vida* because she embraces the humanizing practices of care that Indigenous midwives practice with her own patients, mostly Mexican and Chicanas. For example, the film shows Iturbe taking part in a temazcal ceremony in honor of one of her clients from Maternidad La Luz, Cemelli, who is also her cousin. In this scene, the filmmaker interviews Iturbe and Carlos Aceves, the elder leading the temazcal where the ceremony is taking place. Iturbe and Aceves stand next to each other. Interwoven with the interviews are wide shots of the landscape, extreme close shots of the rocks in the fire, medium shots of the surrounding bushes and wide shots of the people who will participate in the temazcal ceremony interacting with one another. This scene reflects what Nichols calls, the "sense of bodily presence, rather than absence…" of the filmmaker on the scene'" (184). Subjects notice the presence of the camera, even the ones that are not being interviewed, creating a sense of community, as the filmmaker is allowed access to the ceremony, to view it and perhaps participate in it, while simultaneously she is being educated with the viewer about these tradition by the subjects in the film.

Iturbe explains that her family follows the Mexica temazcal tradition. In this tradition the volcanic rocks are called *las abuelas*, the grandmothers, whose purpose is to recover ancestral memory. Aceves, who is also Cemelli's father, notes that this temazcal ceremony will prepare the mother-to-be for birth. The intention for this temazcal ceremony in particular is to celebrate

[152] "The meeting between a midwife and a woman who receives special care is the meeting between a healer and a woman who is subject to healing, the meeting of two female bodies."

her pregnancy and to prepare her for the birth. He states, “The lodge is going to relax her and give her a sense of kind of what a child is going through by entering the temazcal, which is the womb of mother earth and she is going to re-enact the birthing process herself… This is for her to remember that she is not alone. She is part of mother creation and part of the human family.” Iturbe acknowledges that for her it is important to learn this tradition and that she is learning two different forms of knowledge to help women during birth: “It really means a lot to me to be able to learn about the tradition surrounding childbirth and the Mexica tradition and learning these ways and learning how to do ceremony around it. It’s these two different schools and different ways of looking at birth.”

The temazcal takes place in a dry field of dirt and grass but in the background wide shots show a house a long distance away and a big factory-like building or storage warehouse nearby, conveying that they may be in a residential and industrial site with empty fields or ranches in the vicinity. Although this scene is filmed in El Paso and not Cuidad Juarez, it is a reminder of the geographical location one cannot separate from the maquiladora zone just on the other side of the border; the land is one and the same but sweatshops where employment is distinctly gendered exist on the other side; sometimes bodies are found dead in those big empty fields. Yet to the north of the border, women unable to sustain employment in maquiladoras often work as domestic workers. According to Nestel, "At least 15-20,000 homes [in El Paso] hire domestic help and the majority of these workers are women from Cuidad Juarez..." (145).

Therefore, acknowledging the sacredness in all life, including *all* people, takes on a more profound significance at the US-Mexico border. In the context of neoliberalism, Chicanas like Iturbe who draw on ancestral memory in their midwifery practice, stand in opposition to the patriarchal powers that do not value women’s lives on both sides of the border. This is

augmented by the impact of neoliberalism, as it has created a circumstance where Mexican birthing women are being used for the professionalization of mainly Anglo women. Mexican women in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez are treated as objects and as disposable labor and their bodies are being violated with impunity in numerous ways. Aside from that, neoliberalism has also intensified the level of violence against women, more overtly on the Mexican side of border in cities like Ciudad Juarez and Tijuana. Poor women are used for cheap, flexible labor in the maquiladoras or the service sector, and are raped or murdered with impunity in cities like Juarez, as was discussed previously.

Thus, being cared for has a more significant impact at the Juarez border for expectant mothers. Rosalba Juarez, one of the mothers who is interviewed in the film, is asked why she chose Maternidad La Luz. She answered,

> At first I was getting pre-natal care in Juarez but it is very different [because] the questions they ask are different. They do not ask how the mother is feeling. They check you quickly and they don't take the time to understand you well. They don't care how one is feeling emotionally. Here the midwives are always asking if you are feeling well. If you are being mistreated - and that makes me feel safe, like they really care and are concerned for me. That is why I came back.

Living in a border city where women disappear, are killed, raped or beaten almost daily under a government that does not act, feeling safe, cared for and protected is noteworthy. For Rosalba it might be quite possible that she experienced abuse or at the least witnessed it, which is why these seemingly small gestures make her feel safe. Midwives provide this for their patients during one of the most vulnerable moments in their lives – pregnancy and childbirth. This is why Iturbe stands out from the other midwives interviewed in the film – especially because, as mentioned before, many women come from other places to train here without being conscious of the geo-political conflicts and uneven power relations that manifest at the border, not to mention

language and cultural differences – even if these women are providing a very important service for transborder birthing mothers.

For Iturbe the border region plays a significant role for her, as someone who grew up and was shaped by the border. She explains in the film, "The border is a very interesting place and I feel very privileged to have grown up here and to have been molded by my experiences here." Could this provide her with a more complex understanding and equitable relationship with the women she serves? She certainly views them as more than just "birth numbers," unlike some of the other midwives who were interviewed. In fact, her experience as a *fronteriza* has been fundamental in her decision to study midwifery. When asked her reasons for wanting to train at Maternidad La Luz, she responds: "I decided to study at Maternidad La Luz because I saw so many women from different parts of the world inspired to provide this service for women and they were coming here to my home and learning these wonderful skills. I just felt like it was time for more women of *this* community to start taking care of *their* people. Of the women here." The tone she uses and her emphasis on "this community" and "their people" demonstrates her understanding of the need to have culturally competent care by local women that understand the community they serve. On the other hand, when her well-meaning colleague Jessica answers this question the emphasis is on the benefits of getting a high number of births quickly. "You just get a lot of births really fast," she says, ending the statement with, "I just love being with women," illustrating Nestel's argument about "midwifery tourism" from an Anglo women's perspective. Those who participate in it want to fulfill their birth numbers quickly, while engaging in a "'discourse of global sisterhood' that allows them to deflect any implications in the North/South relations of inequality" (73).

Iturbe, like other students there, also trains at Maternidad La Luz to fulfill her numbers to eventually become a certified midwife. However, she is not a tourist, she is a local —significant precisely because of the geographic location — the US-Mexico border. Similarly, in the San Diego-Tijuana border region, a cross border collaboration between a Chicana midwife from San Diego and a Mexican midwife in Tijuana came about when several hundred Haitian migrants arrived in Tijuana in 2016, hoping to be allowed into the US. Knowing that women were in need of care, Parteras Fronterizas/Borderland Midwives offered their services free of charge and continue to serve migrant women in Tijuana today without charging a fee[153] (*Síntesis TV*).[154] Hence, birth workers like Iturbe and Parteras Fronterizas embody Chirix Garcia's notion of the midwife as *cuidadora del cuerpo* unlike midwives who work or study at birthing clinics at the border because there is a market. Many of the other midwifery students do not acknowledge the geo-political problems that arise at the border where they work and the implications of their midwifery training at that specific location. Nestel reports the attitudes of white Canadian midwifery tourists who trained at an El Paso birthing center: "Although they position themselves as the generous benefactors of women eager and grateful for contact, midwifery tourists... reap rewards well beyond those gained by those who service them" (150). Indeed, women of color midwives justify the importance of their work because they themselves understand the prejudice they have experienced in the world, especially in the medical world, and thus understand their work is in opposition to this. As Afua Hassan, an African American home birth midwife from Houston states, "using a midwife for in-home delivery could also help ease some of the anxiety among women who fear facing prejudice from medical practitioners... There is an inner

[153] Tema Mercado and Ximena Rojas García lead this project. See their website for more information: lamatriz.com/parteras-fronterizas/

[154] *Síntesis TV*. "Parteras Profesionales de EUA Ayudan a Mujeres Haitianas En Tijuana." 2017. *YouTube.* www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFK7GLmGXUI.

connection... [Our shared] experience is invaluable" (qtd. in Simmons).[155] This is why it is of upmost importance to diversify the field of midwifery and have similar models as the days of the past, when midwives served their own community.

Jesusita Aragón's story illustrates the importance of being from one's own community in the midwifery field. She explains in her narrative that she does not only offer maternity care but also offers support for women who were raped, who suffer from domestic violence and poverty. She admits that she does not want to charge high fees because she wants to help people and has compassion for their situation. She states, "I know how people can hurt. That's part the reason I don't charge too much... I want to help the people, they need help" (qtd. in Buss 74). Although this is one way Jesusita sustains herself, she approaches her work as a service to care for women, not profit from them. We see a similar phenomenon in the BBC show, *Call the Midwives*. Based on the memoir of Jennifer Worth, the series focuses on a group of nurse-midwives and nuns who serve poor women in the East London neighborhood called Poplar in the 1950s-60s. The midwives and nuns give quality maternity care to the women in this marginalized community but also play an important role in the community by helping families in dire economic conditions; they rescue women and children from abusive homes, and refer families to state resources. In other words, they show that by being integrated into the community and understanding its needs, midwives can offer a more humanizing approach that stands in opposition to "midwifery tourism."

In the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez region, being a *cuidadora de la vida* at the border means considering the levels of inequality and the social pressures that the border creates. This is not limited to the social damage, but the environmental damage that occurs at the border, as well,

[155] Simmons, Ann M. "Black Doulas, Midwives and Reproductive Health Advocates Step up in Response to Rising Black Maternal Deaths." *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Oct. 2017, www.latimes.com.

which inevitably ends up impacting the most vulnerable people. The terrible contamination in border cities along the US-Mexico border caused by the maquiladoras industry is but one example of this. According to a study done by Santos Gómez, a number of babies are being born deformed and women's reproductive health is negatively impacted. Furthermore, the amount of migrant deaths at the border and the overall lack of value for life that advanced capitalism has perpetuated creates worse conditions for women at the border, an increase in violence against them, and a greater sense of insecurity for women overall. Lorena Cabnal reminds us of the links between environmental damage and the livelihood of women's lives in her theory of territorio-cuerpo. She says, "Las violencias históricas y opresivas existen tanto para mi primer territorio cuerpo, como también para mi territorio histórico, la tierra" (23).[156]

Thus, the documentary depicting a Chicana midwifery student in the film that speaks about Indigenous birthing traditions can help us imagine another framework for midwifery practice. Unlike the more violent representations in early colonial texts by Inquisitors of midwives as brujas, or the demeaning depictions by male medical doctors, the midwife in *Catching Babies* insists that she is a caretaker of life and caretaker of the women's bodies, grounded in a concept that is really not a radical or ground-breaking idea at all – it is simply advocating to take care of all living things — and encourages us to view women fundamentally as human beings.

Catching Babies: Just Another Birth Documentary?

Catching Babies allows the viewer to see midwifery and birth in a different light. But is it really any different than other birth documentaries that have been produced in the US? Is it repeating the same narrative about birth, midwives and motherhood? If so, what differentiates it

[156] "Historical and oppressive violence exists both for my first body landscape, as well as for my historical landscape, the earth."

from the host of birth documentaries already produced in the US? Indeed, *Catching Babies* is similar to many birth documentaries produced in the US. It tells the stories of birth and midwives, it is directed and produced by women, like other birth documentaries, and it aims to challenge the "master narrative" of birth. Mary Alice Martin explains that the "master narrative" of birth in the United States is associating birth with a hospital where medical intervention is the norm, the laboring mother lays passively on her back and receives pain relief and hours later the baby is born. She critiques this narrative, stating, "This narrative assumes that the birthing mother is heterosexual, educated, and middle class. She is cisgender, white, married, and she is a legal citizen of the United States. All of these privileges grant her access to privatized healthcare" (7). Martin argues that this discourse is reproduced in media representations of birth, something many feminist scholars have written about claiming, "they instill a fear of childbirth and prime women to readily accept medical interventions that may not be entirely necessary" (Takeshita 344). Yet birth documentaries offer another vision by critiquing the medicalization of birth and the healthcare system that sustains it, and they celebrate the midwife as a birth assistant that counters the detached role doctors can play. These birth documentaries are tools to advocate for maternal health, midwives and alternative birthing options. Yet what has been produced thus far also reflects the dearth in conversations about race and inequality in the midwifery community and the lack of access that poor women, especially women of color or immigrant women have, to alternative births.

Generally, birth documentaries focus mostly on white midwives and white mothers and are directed and produced by white women. With the exception of *All My Babies*, a 1953 educational film that follows an African-American midwife from Georgia, most birth documentaries lack conversations about race and maternal health. Although *All My Babies*

centers on a Black midwife serving Black women in the South, the film has been widely criticized for its essentialist representations of Black mothers and for reproducing racist tropes of the Black "mammy" (M. Martin 38-39). Produced by George C. Stoney, a white man with an all white camera crew, in collaboration with the Georgia Department of Health, the film's purpose was to promote cooperation between folk midwives and the modern health system. However, scholars argue that although well intentioned, the film "participated in the racist rhetoric of the Jim Crow era American South" (M. Martin 40). It also hired actors to play the role of one of the birthing mothers, thus, veering from the documentary genre. Considering that the midwifery community prides itself on inclusivity, sisterhood and access to all women, there is a surprisingly lack of birth documentaries that address race, class and citizenship.

For example, birth documentaries like *The Business of Being Born* (2008) and *Midwife* (2014), center on making a sharp critique of the American birthing system, the pathologizing of birth, and the costly medical interventions. While the films are distinct in the message they want to convey, there are similar themes in birth documentaries like these. They both aim to educate viewers about birth options such as home births and water births and both include a number of voices such as mothers, medical professionals, midwives and homebirth advocates. The films also follow the work of homebirth nurse midwives, both of whom are white. *The Business* follows a midwife named Cara Muhlan who works in New York City. *Midwife* focuses its story on Sarah Bermeier, a Minnesota homebirth midwife, through the first year of her practice and offers the viewer a look into the legal system that makes midwifery illegal in some states. Both reveal that women must educate themselves to have a non-medicalized birth, ignoring the fact that there are many women who do not have access to information and resources to choose a home birth. One midwife notes in *Midwife* that women do not value birth workers and criticizes

them for choosing to go a hospital because it is more affordable. She exclaims, "they don't realize how profound this is going to be, becoming a mother. So they'll just... [say] 'my insurance covers hospital X and this doctor's the closest cheapest doctor and so I'll go that route and it's not until after the birth when things don't go the way you would hope or that it dawns on you that this is the biggest emotional, psychological rite of passage of your entire life that the midwives and the doulas are priceless." Takeshita remarks on this attitude common in birth documentaries like *The Business*, "it neglects to remark on the fact that every homebirther in *Business* is equipped with the socio-economic capital necessary to put together a network of information, supporters, and environments that help her achieve the 'natural' birth she desires" (339). Indeed, birth documentaries provide the viewer with a wealth of information about the medicalization of birth, but can unintentionally shame women who do not seek or cannot afford these alternatives.

In *Catching Babies*, we see similar tropes as the documentaries above. Mothers tell their birth stories, shots of laboring women or women giving birth in bathtubs and birth rooms are exhibited, and interviews with midwives and midwifery students are interwoven throughout. Similarly, the theme of heternormative motherhood is central, which can be a pitfall of birth documentaries in general, including *Catching Babies*. Takeshita argues that idealizing the notion of "maternal instincts" and naturalizing childbirth in birth documentaries is problematic and "undercuts feminist scholars' effort to reject biological determinism, an ideology that has legitimized women's social subordination for centuries on the basis of their reproductive capacity" (339). Indeed, birth documentaries do not often engage with these complexities and often exclude nuanced views of motherhood, including queer motherhood.

Yet despite these shortfalls, *Catching Babies* offers other distinctions that many birth documentaries lack. One of the most significant differences is that the film is directed and

produced by two women of color. Director Barni Amed Qaasim is Somali-American and producer Jennifer Lucero is a Chicana from Texas. Qaasim is a multimedia artist, filmmaker and social justice documentarian that grew up in Arizona. Lucero is from El Paso, Texas whose creative work in filmmaking, video production and playwriting focuses on women-centered issues. Both are from the Southwest region — a region with a large Latina/o population — and they bring a social justice lens to this project. They also almost exclusively focus on the voices of Mexican/Latina mothers from the El Paso border region. Most are migrant women from Cuidad Juarez. The position and purpose of the director and producer demonstrates an aspect of performative documentary that Nichols describes as "We speak about ourselves to you," instead of "We speak about them to us" (205). As women of color from marginalized communities themselves, the director and producer see themselves in stories of the women in the film and are in solidarity with their struggles, even if they themselves are not the subjects of the film.

Another difference is that midwifery students that are training at Maternidad La Luz are the central focus rather than the certified midwives at the birthing center. Considering that this birth center is a training center that is known for its fast track program (students finish three years worth of requirements in one year), it is appropriate that the filmmaker highlight the student's journey. They show the struggles the students face, not only in learning how to be a midwife but their struggle in having to learn Spanish, a requirement to work there in order to cater to the Latina clientele — the women who allow them to practice their newly learned skills on their bodies. In this "it's the journey, not the destination" type narrative, the filmmaker shows the vulnerability of being a student-midwife juxtaposed to the vulnerability of being a birthing mother, thus, putting the midwife and the mother on the same level and disrupting the hierarchies between patient and provider. Furthermore, it shows that the students who come from other

regions to train at that birth center need to adapt to the population they are serving. Furthermore, filming Iturbe's excitement in serving the women in her own community and growing up in the border region, underscores the geographical site is as important as the birth stories themselves.

As previously mentioned, *Catching Babies* highlights the story of a Chicana midwifery student who is a local from El Paso and her embrace of traditional Indigenous birthing practices. While not discussed thoroughly, the fact that this theme is brought up in the film helps viewers connect with an Indigenous past that was not completely disrupted, and particularly a past of persecution for practicing midwifery, traditions deemed brujería. In addition, the producers decide to interview Iturbe's father, Alfredo Iturbe. When the viewer is first introduced to him we hear him singing a Mexican ballad, "Sus Ojitos" by the famous Mexican singer and actor, Pedro Infante, while images of the border port of entry are shown simultaneously. Then we see him sitting next to his daughter Sandra in a living room, facing the camera. This Ciudad Juarez native wears a cowboy hat, a sports coat with a button-up shirt and jeans, the style typical of a northern Mexican *vaquero* (cowboy). After he finishes singing the song he begins telling a story of his grandmother, Chaveña, who was a midwife in a barrio in Ciudad Juarez. "Mi abuela se llamaba Juliana Reyes. En el barrio le llamaban la Chaveña," he says, "Pero ella era partera de muchos años atrás, casi desde que ella llegó a Cuidad Juárez hace muchísimos años. Las parteras de aquellos tiempos eran una tradición, no eran de escuela."[157] He then mentions for the first time to Sandra that his sister Chole also assisted births in their neighborhood and that she should talk to her. "Tu tía Chole, ella asistía a partos," he says, "y parece ser, no estoy seguro, que ha hecho partos. Necesitaríamos hablar con ella. Me dijo que te invitara que hablaras con ella sobre

[157] "My grandmother's name was Juliana Reyes. In the neighborhood they called her Chaveña, "he says," and she was a midwife for many years, almost since she arrived in Cuidad Juarez many years ago. Being a midwife at that time was a tradition, they were not trained in school."

algunas cosas."[158] Surprised, Sandra asks him why he never mentioned that to her before. "Papi, porque no me dijo esto antes?" This unique moment alludes to a time when midwifery was a tradition passed down from generation to generation, like in Jesusita Aragón's case, where she learned her skills from her grandmother starting at the age of 13. It also shows the community linkages with midwifery, that the midwife was traditionally from the same neighborhoods or villages, even in urban areas like these. The producers want to show that birth is much more community-centered. This is not to say that midwifery in white communities was not passed down from generation to generation, but that this is simply not discussed in most birth documentaries that happen to also focus mostly on white midwives. That the filmmakers spend more time on Iturbe's story than on the other students points to the desire to disrupt the white-dominated field of midwifery.

Lastly, *Catching Babies* is a useful educational tool to raise consciousness about birth among a population of women who may not have access to birth alternatives otherwise. Unlike middle class women who can self-advocate and can search for the best birth options, working class Latinas have limited options because of their class, their lack of citizenship and language barriers. *Catching Babies* makes alternative births seem more feasible to Latinas if they see themselves in these stories. Similarly, it can also make midwifery seem accessible to women of color who are interested in pursuing a career in midwifery. In this specific case, Latinas will see midwifery as a profession that has always been part of their community and not necessarily as a white-dominated field, as is often represented in birth documentaries.

Overall, *Catching Babies* embraces many themes, such as the border, birth clinics, midwives, cross-border births, and migration. While in some ways it is like other birth

[158] "Your aunt Chole, she attended births and it seems to be, I'm not sure, she's assisted births, we need to talk to her, she told me to invite you to talk to her about some things."

documentaries, in other ways it is vastly different and makes a great contribution to the discussion of unequal power relations at the border and reproductive justice in the migrant community.

Conclusion

Sandra Iturbe is among a growing number of Chicana midwives who want to provide a humanizing birthing experience to women at the border. In 2016 a new birth center called Luna Tierra opened in El Paso that does not simultaneously act as a midwifery training center and is run by bilingual Chicana midwives who implement traditional birthing knowledge in their work. But Chicanas are not the only ones aiming to recover birthing traditions in the US. African American birth workers are also creating networks and alliances across the country to help address maternal deaths and the racism many African American women experience in the medical system (Simmons). Diné (Navajo) women in New Mexico are working on opening the very first Native-run birth center to serve Native women in the region and provide culturally sensitive care, such as allowing families to practice traditional birth ceremonies (Miller).[159] In Canada, women of the six nations Haudenosaunee confederacy have opened a birthing center in Ontario to serve Native women in a region that does not provide comprehensive maternal care (Balkisoon).[160] This move towards reclaiming birthing traditions to care for women in their own community is also a form of decolonizing birth. As an activist and aboriginal midwife from the Secwepemc territory claims, "revitalizing indigenous midwifery is a declaration of sovereignty over women's bodies and autonomy from colonial governmental systems" (qtd in Pember).[161]

[159] Miller, Cynthia. "Nation's First Native Birthing Facility Planned in New Mexico." *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 29 Apr. 2018. www.santafenewmexican.com

[160] Balkissoon, Denise. "In Ontario, Midwives Help with the Rebirth of Indigenous Pregnancy Care." *The Globe and Mail*, 22 July 2018. www.theglobandmail.com

[161] Pember, Mary Annette. "The Midwives' Resistance: How Native Women Are Reclaiming Birth on Their Terms." *Rewire News,* 5 Jan. 2018, https//rewire.news.

Ultimately, the work that these women do illustrates that reproductive health is a human right and all women should have equal access to it.

Furthermore, cultural texts like *Catching Babies* and *La Partera* urge us to look back while looking forward to see what culturally competent midwifery care looks like in the US and why it is important that women who belong to the community serve the women from that community. Because of the current political climate today and the racist, anti-immigrant discourse that paints a distorted image of Latinas, it can end up having repercussions in the birth room. Changing the framework — not seeing birth from a capitalist perspective, where birth is a business, or a pathological perspective, where birth is an illness, and looking at birth from a Bruja perspective, where birth is a natural process that is sacred and is a ceremony— is a significant step towards reproductive justice.

This is not to romanticize the *partera*, or to claim that simply by employing Indigenous epistemologies and techniques or hiring midwives of color is the solution to inequalities in the birth room or to equal access to quality reproductive care. Diversifying the field and cultural competency training is just one of many elements needed in the fight for reproductive justice. Restructuring the healthcare system completely and implementing single-payer universal healthcare would give equal access to reproductive care to all women regardless of their economic status. This should include coverage for birth centers and home births so all women have this option if desired and not just middle and upper class women who can pay the out of pocket fees for an out-of-hospital birth. Furthermore, restructuring the economic system and moving away from free market capitalism to a more humane economic system that distributes wealth equally would also help resolve some of the disparities that occur in the birth room and in

maternal health overall. It would certainly impact the women in the US-Mexico border region in a positive way.

Yet, in these times of economic uncertainty, an increased violence against women, the Trump administration's targeting of women's reproductive rights *and* the attack against immigrants, a Bruja framework can humanize women of color in the birth room and help remedy some of the inequities that occur, even potentially preventing deaths. As research has shown, histories of racism and colonialism do have deathly consequences for maternal health. African American women have the highest maternal death rates in the country, followed by Native American women (Jones).[162] Latinas have the fourth highest maternal death rates in the nation (Jones). In fact, the US has the highest maternal death rates of all developed nations in the world, not to mention, the violence that birthing mothers experience in US prison systems (N. Martin).[163] In some states they continue to chain women to hospital beds during labor and birth (Clarke and Simon).[164]

Lastly, the documentary film form is a tool to advocate for the subjects in the film and to enable a wider audience to become aware of the issues that mainstream media will not cover, especially when the subjects are considered disposable. Historically, documentary films have been useful tool to advocate for women's issues, as was the case during the mid 20th century Women's Movement. Feminist issues such as reproductive rights were brought to the forefront by documentary filmmakers. Thanks to female documentarians such as Ana Maria Garcia who filmed *La Operación* and René Tajima-Peña's *No Más Bébes,* we will not forget the history of sterilization of Latinas in this country. Documentary film is a timeless visual reminder of this

[162] Jones, Rachel. "American Mothers Are Still Dying at Alarming Rates While Giving Birth." *Natural Geographic - Culture & History*, 13 Dec. 2018, www.nationalgeographic.com.
[163] Martin, Nina. "U.S. Has The Worst Rate Of Maternal Deaths In The Developed World." www.*npr.org*.
[164] Clarke, Jennifer G., and Rachel E. Simon. "Shackling and Separation: Motherhood in Prison." *AMA Journal of Ethics*, vol. 15, no. 9, Sept. 2013.

violent past from which future generations can learn. It is time to embrace a whole new understanding of birth, of women's bodies and of reproductive health in this country, one that is more aligned with Chirix Garcia's and feministas comunitarias notion of valuing life.

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CONCLUSION

"Casting spells with my cousins
I'm the head of this coven
I'm a shapeshifting bitch, you don't know who you loving
Better light you a candle
I heard the nighttime was black
And if you don't watch your step the greatest bitch will be back
I cast a circle in white and I can vanquish your spite
And if you hex me with hate then I'ma conjour the light
Your evil ways put no fight
I ain't no queen of the night
I'm a bruja, I'm a bruja, and I'ma dress in all white."
--"Brujas" Princess Nokia

In this study I have argued that the image of la Bruja in cultural production is a response to gender inequality, gender violence and the attacks on women's rights under neoliberal capitalism. I have shown that Chicanas/Latinas, Indigenous and Caribbean women reclaim the figure of la Bruja to resist the thwarting of Indigenous and African healing knowledge through various forms of cultural production. This knowledge is more relevant today than ever, as life in all its forms —humans and nature—has been reduced to exploitable and disposable commodities. While there is much discussion on cultural production produced in the neoliberal era across various contexts and disciplines, little scholarly work has been done on la Bruja as a cultural figure during the current political and economic time period. Journalists are certainly capturing this phenomenon, albeit few are putting it within this economic and political context, and even fewer focus specifically on women of color.

Contemporary books about witch covens, such as *Witches of America* by Alex Mar, are gaining popularity. Mar's memoir explores modern paganism and tells of her five years in the occult as both a journalist and an initiate. While the book demonstrates a revival of the interest in the subject of witches, it also reveals that the conversations about witches are dominated by

white women and focus more on European pagan religions. Critics are also mostly white and mostly reference the Salem witch-hunts in Massachusetts and Europe, but rarely mention the women burned at the stake in the Americas. In another example, Kristen J. Sollée's *Witches, Sluts, Feminists: Conjuring the Sex Positive* breaks new ground in her discussion on feminism and the witch as a cultural figure, but women of color are peripheral in her work. Although the book focuses mainly on contemporary manifestations of the witch in cultural production that are sex positive — a noteworthy contribution and one that should be expanded on— the historical context makes little mention of the witch-hunts in the Americas.

In this study I focused on marginalized cultural products that although important to the audience, do not attract too much attention from critics. It is important from a Cultural Studies perspective to study these under-examined texts by and about Chicana/Latina, Indigenous and Caribbean women because, as Lawrence Grossberg indicates, people with limited resources produce work that helps us understand "the structures of power and inequality in the contemporary world and the possibilities for challenging them" (8). I analyze feminist zines, Indigenous feminist hip hop, a documentary, a homemade Youtube video and an electronic spellbook/poetry zine that illustrate creative responses to challenge inequality. In chapter 1, I showed how altars and offerings are symbolic of a Bruja aesthetic and are deployed not only in visual art but as a framework in a community project like the Mujeres de Maíz zine, *Flor y Canto*. Their project is created in the midst of attacks against Latina/os in California during an economic downturn due to austerity measures. Thus, the altar is a politicized aesthetic to invoke the "unseen" through poetry and art in the zine. In chapter 2 I discuss the maize diviner as la Bruja in Zapotec rapper, Mare Advertencia Lirika's song and music video, "Mujer Maíz." The song uses the maize woman to make a sharp critique of a capitalist system that turned maize into

a commodity, dispossesses campesinos off of their land, contaminates the maize seed with GMOs and violates the earth. The maize diviner in the video is symbolic of a healer that repels the harm done by neoliberal forces. In chapter 3 I looked at the history of using hexes and poison against the ruling class by enslaved women to examine two digital texts about Caribbean women who use the Bruja trope to hex Trump, alongside the novel, *Daughters of the Stone* by Dahlma Llanos Figueroa. In the homemade Youtube video titled "Brujas Hex Trump," and the electronic zine series of spells/poems by anti-fascist Brujas in the Yerbamala Collective, young women perform brujería on Trump and right-wing conservatives as a response to the attack against women's rights. The novel focuses on an enslaved woman in Puerto Rico who uses magic and herbs against plantation owners as vengeance. Finally, chapter 4 deals with midwives and birth at the US-Mexico border. I examine the documentary *Catching Babies* about a birth center in El Paso that is both a training center for midwives and a low-cost birthing center that serves mostly women who cross the border from Ciudad Juárez. I look at the role of midwives in Mesoamerica, how they have been persecuted and wrongly accused of witchcraft in Europe and the Americas. Today reintegrating the practice of Indigenous traditions like the temazcal (sweat lodge) as a humanizing practice is important step to decolonize birth, particularly as a response to midwifery tourism and the disposability of women in the maquiladora region in Ciudad Juarez.

My dissertation project contributes to a growing interest in decolonizing spirituality, integrating themes of social justice with spirituality, and spirituality grounded in the knowledge of Indigenous and African cultures within the fields of Women Studies, Chicana/Latina Studies and Indigenous Studies. While Gloria Anzaldúa paved the way for the integration of such topics in academia, along with Cherríe Moraga and Ana Castillo, this topic continues to be marginalized in institutions of higher learning, what AnaLouise Keating calls "academic spirit-

phobia" (55). However, this body of work is growing among a new generation of scholars in interesting and nuanced ways. For instance, Christina García López's book, *Calling Back the Soul* examines narratives as healing work in Chicana/o literature. Similarly, the edited volume *Fleshing the Spirit* by Irene Lara and Elisa Facio and the forthcoming, *Voices From the Ancestors and Beyond: Chicanx/Latinx Decolonized Spiritual Expression* by Lara Medina and Martha R. González, illustrate the interdisciplinary approaches to spirituality and social and ecological justice from a women of color perspective.

This study, however, was not exhaustive and further investigation is necessary to fill the gaps in my research. Future studies could fruitfully explore this issue further by examining la Bruja in theater and fictional films. Also, as up and coming Latina rappers in Latin America and the US are using la Bruja to make political commentary, examining la Bruja in hip hop is necessary. For instance, Princess Nokia, a young Puerto Rican rapper from New York is re-empowering la Bruja with lyrics on social justice issues and powerful images of Santería rituals with Afro-Latinas at the center. Her song titled "Brujas" displays her unapologetic self-proclaimed witch-hood deployed to fight hate. Second, a look at radio media such as podcasts produced by women calling themselves Brujas is an interesting new form of expression, now becoming a popular way among millennials to make political critiques with little resources. Las Brujas Radio, for example, was founded by NoNo, a Salvadorian woman with Mayan ancestry and practicing Bruja and DJ. The radio show deals with themes of spirituality and healing alongside social justice issues such as transgender rights. Blogs are another current form of cultural production used by young women to engage with brujería that should be researched in more depth. For instance, Bri Luna, an Afro-Latina witch has a blog, *The Hoodwitch*, that is widely popular. She has over 400,000 followers on Instagram. While she writes about herbs,

tarot, astrology and spells she also discusses the roots of the healing art and botánicas in her neighborhood as sites of community healing.

While reclaiming la Bruja in the cultural realm is important, there are limitations to the possibilities of material change to resist oppression. Thus, further exploration of the connection between healers and social justice activism is crucial work that I did not specifically address in this study. There are real historical figures that were healers and played leadership roles fighting against oppression to better the material conditions in their communities. For instance, Teresita Urrea, also known as La Santa Cabora, a curandera from Sonora was credited for inspiring a rebellion of Tomochic villagers against the Porfirio Diaz regime in the 1890s.[165] Her influence as a healer inspired people to fight against oppression. Another example is the village healer in Rwanda, Zura Kauhumbi, who just recently passed away. She is known for saving dozens of Tutsis from genocide in Musamo Village. She frightened away soldiers that came into the village looking for Tutsis by threatening to unleash the spirits against them if they entered her home (Drury).[166] An in-depth look at la Bruja as an activist figure is certainly needed to fill this gap.

Finally, I conclude this project by sharing my own interests in this topic as it pertains to my female ancestral lineage. My great-grandmother on my mother's side, Maria, was a curandera. My mother told me stories about herbal remedies and natural methods she deployed to heal her and her siblings. My grandmother told me my great-grandmother was a partera too. Her understanding of the healing powers of plants was passed down to my grandmother and then my mother, although they did not have her level of expertise. I knew her as a child but could not

[165] I did not discuss Urrea here partly because I focused on a different time period and because a wealth of scholarship already exists and a number of novels have been produced on both sides of the US-Mexico border in her honor.

[166] Drury, Flora. "Obituary: Rwanda's Zura Karuhimbi, Who Saved Dozens from Genocide " *BBC News*, 22 Dec. 2018, https://www.bbc.com

communicate with her because she lost her voice after suffering a stroke. Though frail, her presence was intimidating; she had a strong personality despite being mute. When I asked why she could not speak, my grandmother (her daughter) told me that god took her voice because she was verbally abusive. *Era bien mala* (she was very bad), my grandmother would say. This mysterious woman captivated me, although I did not spend a lot of time with her because she passed away when I was young. I created narratives about her as an adult and made my own speculations about her life because I will never be able to ask her directly. In my made-up stories, she is a Bruja.[167]

But my great-grandmother Maria was angry and bitter. Nobody ever told me why; my grandmother never wanted to speak about it, but I speculate that she was forced into marriage, perhaps even kidnapped— as was common back then in Mexico — to a white rancher. He was tall and light-skinned, she was short, dark, with Indigenous features. My grandmother tells me she had Huichol (Wixarika) blood. She hated the ranch life and despised her husband and eventually moved to Guadalajara city with her two daughters. One day in a bout of anger she threw my grandmother and her sister out into the streets. They were in their early teens and were forced into sex work to survive. My grandmother, Elvira, would later meet my grandfather at a brothel. He was a railroad worker and frequented the brothels when the train stopped in Guadalajara. They fell in love and he took my grandmother with him to his hometown on the Arizona-Sonora border. Understandably, my grandmother never speaks of this part of her life; it is a "family secret." My grandfather's mother, Bernardina, was born on the Yaqui river in Sonora. My grandfather tells me she was Yaqui (Yoeme). She worked as a maid in a brothel in Sonora. She took my grandfather with her to work when he was a boy so he grew up around sex

[167] Subconsciously, this dissertation was inspired by stories I heard about her.

workers. In retrospect this experience allowed him to humanize sex workers enough to eventually marry one. They had twelve children together.

My father's family is from a rural region in Zacatecas in a small town outside of Nochiztlan, called Tlachichila. According to my father, the great-grandfather of the famous Chicano actor, Edward James Olmos, raped his grandmother Pachita.[168] Taking women against their will was not uncommon in rural areas like those where the nearest person was miles away and there were no authorities to call upon. My paternal grandmother, Consuelo, grew up on a *ranchito* in Tlachichila. The marriage between her and my grandfather was arranged. He resented this and would eventually leave her after they migrated to Tijuana to live and work in the United States. He left her for another woman and she raised eleven children on her own. She never remarried.

While not all my *abuelas* were healers, I share their stories for the first time publically because they illustrate how patriarchy impacts women's everyday lives, what they endure, how they normalize it, and the dysfunctional ways they often coped with difficulties under conditions of duress. Forced marriages, sex work, domestic violence, abuse, neglect, rape, single motherhood, plus the added pressures of poverty they had to endure, are the results of a system that does not value women's lives and the residue of colonial patriarchal structures. Yet my *abuelas* resisted in their own unique ways. My great-grandmother Maria's anger and bitterness was transformed in the moments she employed her healing remedies to help others, perhaps the only way she knew how to show love. My mother tells me that the only time she remembers her grandmother Maria showing love is when she was employing a healing remedy on her or her siblings. From a feminismo comunitario perspective, the memory of women includes

[168] I have not been able to fact check this allegation. My grandmother passed away and she is the only one that would know. After doing a quick Internet search, however, I found that Olmos' great-grandparents were from Zacatecas. Regardless, I am certain that if not him, another man violated my great-grandmother.

remembering the wisdom and knowledge of those that came before but also their struggles to fight for a better future.[169]

Implementing a Bruja positionality, as Irene Lara states, will help us remember that we are interconnected and that life should be cared for, nurtured and allowed to access the resources to thrive. Women especially are at the forefront of this struggle to challenge the oppression they have endured, the oppression their female ancestors endured. Furthermore, we need to implement a feminismo comunitario framework of life that recognizes that we are all a community and we need to care for each other in order for all of the community to thrive. Like la Bruja, we need to respect and care for the natural world, the animals and plants. However, being aware of our interconnectedness is not enough. As human rights activists remind us, demands need to be made, direct action needs to be taken, and policies need to be written to protect life. At a time when life on earth is at the highest risk, when scientists have proclaimed that we only have twelve years left before climate change is irreversible and animal and plant species are at risk of becoming extinct, when human beings are being put in cages and when a small percent of people own the world's wealth, we are reminded that the real evil in this world is not rooted in healing traditions enacted by defiant women; it is rooted in capitalist greed. Thus, a feminist anti-capitalist, decolonial understanding of life is necessary to heal ourselves and heal the world. La Bruja, with her healing remedies, her understanding of the body and plants, her awareness that we are all connected, her use of magic to change consciousness, is an important figure to reclaim because as feminista comunitarias remind us, all members of the community must thrive in order

[169] As is common among the poor and uneducated, my family looked to the church for comfort. For a part of my childhood my parents attended a conservative Christian church that I grew to despise. My disdain for organized religion emerged from the years I was forced to attend. That disdain drew an interest in me to look for what the church called "evil." Hence my interest in Brujas is the most recent manifestation of my rebellion against the Christian church.

for the whole community to thrive, or as Lorena Cabnal suggests, “sanando tu sano yo…(when you heal, I heal)” (“Especial”). Put another way, “None of us are free until all of us are all free.”

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