HEALING SELF, HEALING COMMUNITY: A CHICANA FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN ANZALDÚA'S AND CISNEROS'S WRITING

by

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DEDICATION

For my ancestors, especially my Popo, Juan; Güelita Leonila; Güelito, Abel; and Güelita Severa, who I know walk with me.

May this work inspire healing. I change myself, I change the world.

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I. AN INTRODUCTION TO CHICANA FEMINIST THOUGHT AND TRAUMA

I was first introduced to Gloria Anzaldúa in the spring of 2017 at the University of Texas at San Antonio. It was my fourth year as an undergraduate student, but only my third semester as an English major. I was fresh to the field of literature since my transfer from biology pre-medical sciences. In early January I took the MCAT and in late January I read the book that changed everything—*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. This book forever changed my life. I felt seen, truly seen—down to my psyche—in a way that I never have before. *Borderlands* awakened a spark in me that I did not know I had. At the same time, *Borderlands* also awakened memories that I had tried so hard to suppress.

In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa illuminates the ugly truth that history and dominant culture try to hide. I was given the language to name what my family and I have been through. Through this language, I was able to have conversations with my mother that she couldn't have with hers. With the help of this text, I was able to recognize that what I had experienced was not okay. With the help of this text, I was able to put distance between myself and an abuser that has left me with soul wounds. With the help of this text, I learned why the Catholic Church left a bad taste in my mouth. I am so grateful I met Dr. Sara Ramírez that semester and she was able to coach me through this tumultuous time in my life—whether she knew it or not. At the end of the semester when registering for classes for next semester was available, Dr. Ramírez told the class that we would be doing a disservice to ourselves if we graduated from the University of Texas at San Antonio without taking a class taught by Dr. Sonia Saldívar-Hull. So that summer I

took Chicana Feminist Writers taught by Dr. Saldívar-Hull, and we read texts by Sandra Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and other pivotal writers. I was introduced to the Chicana feminist literature world by Dr. Ramírez and Dr. Saldívar-Hull and never looked back.

Anna Nieto Gomez describes Chicana feminism, writing, "When you say you're Chicana, you mean you come from a particular community, one that is subject to racism and exploitation of centuries. When you say you are a feminist you mean you're a woman who opposes the oppression of not only the group in general, but women in particular…I support my community and I do not ignore the women in my community (who have been long forgotten). The feminist movement is a unified front made up of both men and women—a feminist can be a man as well as a woman—it is a group of people that advocates the end at women's oppression" (Nieto Gomez 53). Nieto Gomez also states that the Chicana feminism movement is a "movement of one that supports social, economic and political issues in regard to the position of women—bettering the position of the Chicana…Politically, it means equal participation, equal representation, and inclusion of issues which address her as a woman, as a Chicana in [the Mexican and Mexican American community]" (Nieto Gomez 53).

Norma Alarcón describes the different socioeconomic factors that Chicana feminist theory include, writing, "By including feminist and gender analysis into the emergent political class, Chicanas are reconfiguring the meaning of cultural and political resistance and redefining the hyphen in the name Mexican-American" (Alarcón, "Chicana Feminism" 249). She continues, "Chicana is still the name that brings into focus the interrelatedness of class/race/gender into play and forges the link to actual

subaltern native women in the US/Mexico dyad in negotiating points one and two, how can we work with literary, testimonial and pertinent ethnographic materials to enable 'Chicanas' to grasp their 'I' and 'We' in order to make effective political interventions" (Alarcón "Chicana Feminism" 254).

Saldivar-Hull states Chicana studies started as its own study away from Chicano studies when men weren't placing women correctly in history. She states, "While Chicano historians, political scientists, and literary critics working in the 1960s and 1970s accomplished much in their projects to record the suppressed Chicano experience, too often they made only passing reference to the roles of women in that history spanning the 19th and 20th centuries. If feminist scholars, activists, and writers—who have lived under the *o* in *Chicano*—had to rely on the historical record written by men and male-identified women, Chicanas' roles in history would remain obscured…As feminists, however, we lament that Chicanos have given only a cursory nod to the women who historically labored alongside them in the struggle against Anglo-American domination and exploitation" (*Feminism on the Border* 27).

This thesis will closely analyze the life and works of Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros, the women whose works resonate with my soul. I will use a Chicana feminist theoretical lens that considers the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, and class to argue that Anzaldúa and Cisneros illuminate traumatic experiences as specific effects of historical and intergenerational trauma in the lives of Mexican Americans. Both writers shed light on these instances of trauma to create new narratives that promote healing of the self and healing as a community.

Psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk states, “Trauma, by definition, is unbearable and intolerable” (1). Additionally, he states that trauma leaves an imprint on a victim when he explains, “We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present” (21). This insight is important because it explains that trauma affects a person in many ways, including the mind, brains, and body. Cathy Caruth explains that trauma is “not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature— the way it was precisely not known in the first instance— returns to haunt the survivor later on” (Caruth 4). This statement illuminates how trauma isn’t isolated to one event. Yes, one event causes soul loss, but the way trauma follows a person is also traumatic, as Caruth explains. These explanations will not come up later in the thesis, but they are important to understanding trauma.

For the purpose of this thesis, I use Yvette Flores’s definition of trauma. She writes, “Experiences of devaluation irrespective of their source and form result in soul wounds. When the essence of a person—his or her appearance, sexuality, culture, and language—are demeaned and devalued, the spirit suffers. Likewise, the hearts and minds of Chicanas and Chicanos who are marginalized and othered will suffer” (Flores 44). I chose to this definition versus other psychologists’ definition, such as Judith Herman’s that states, “Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe” (Herman 33). Herman’s definition of trauma defines trauma as

threats and violence to one's body and/or life, whereas Flores's definition considers trauma to be events that causes harm to one's spirit, heart, and mind that causes soul wounds. I have been put through experiences that Herman may not define as traumatic, such as experiencing sexism at church, but Flores would understand my experience as trauma because it caused harm to my soul. As I list in chapter two when I discuss different events when I experienced soul loss, not all of them would be classified as trauma with Herman's definition, but they certainly affected my mind, body, and soul and how I walk through this life.

I also work with Sara Ramírez's theory "subjects of trauma" that can be understood as groups of people who have been subjected to historical and intergenerational trauma that can be discussed as topics that serve as a starting point for discussions about these kinds of traumas (S. Ramírez 3). In addition, I use Nathaniel Mohatt et al. definition of historical trauma. They explain,

> Historical trauma can be understood as consisting of three primary elements: a "trauma" or wounding; the trauma is shared by a group of people, rather than an individually experienced; the trauma spans multiple generations, such that contemporary members of the affected group may experience trauma-related symptoms without having been present for the past traumatizing event(s). (Mohatt et al. 128)

I also use Mohatt's definition of intergenerational trauma, which is defined as, "Intergenerational trauma refers to the specific experience of trauma across familial generations, but does not necessarily imply a shared group trauma. Similarly, a collective

trauma may not have the generational or historical aspect, though over time may develop into historical trauma" (128).

Throughout the thesis, I make references to healing from these traumas. In these cases, I employ Gloria Anzaldúa's definition of healing, which refers to "taking back the scattered energy and soul loss wrought by woundings" (*Light in the Dark* 89). She explains further, "Healing means using the life force and strength that comes with el ánimo to act positively on one's own and on others' behalf" (*Light in the Dark* 89). I choose to use Anzaldúa's versus Herman's that states, "The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (133); I believe that different spaces of healing can occur internally before approaching healing with a "small fighting unit," which is the way Herman describes community healing (133).

Chapter Outline

In chapter one, I use a Chicana feminist theoretical lens to analyze Gloria E. Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Autohistoria is the genre of autohistoria-teoría. Anzaldúa explains, "Using a multidisciplinary approach and a 'storytelling' format, I theorize my own and others' struggles for representation, identity, self-inscription, and creative expressions" (*Light in the Dark* 3). Additionally, she offers another definition describing her writing as—autohistoria; she notes it is "a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one's personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized

autobiography or memoir; an autohistoria – teoría is a personal essay that theorizes" ("now let us shift," 578). Autohistoria is the category that can be compared to testimonio, and autohistoria-teoría is the pedagogy of autohistoria. I consider Anzaldúa's observations about history as a way explain the marginalization and feelings of cultural alienation that Mexican Americans experience while they continue to endure institutionalized state violence. The goal of this chapter is to connect Anzaldúa's autohistoria with historical and intergenerational trauma alongside my trauma to prove how Mexican Americans' negative experiences in the United States have been notably traumatic. I also analyze Anzaldúa's poetry to show how Anzaldúa further vividly illustrates instances of intergenerational and historical trauma which the Mexican-American community has been subjected.

In chapter two, I analyze Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* to show how she offers theories of healing to her readers. I understand theories of healing, specifically the spaces Anzaldúa describes as nos/otras and conocimiento, as the conscious spaces that a person enters to attempt to heal the self before attempting community healing. I argue that Anzaldúa demonstrates an attempt to heal from those traumas she presents in *Borderlands* by making sense of all aspects of her self. This chapter illuminates what healing means to Anzaldúa, how she heals, and the theories of healing she offers her readers (*Light in the Dark* 89). Anzaldúa creates theories of healing to attempt to heal the self before attempting community healing.

In chapter three, I analyze Cisneros's short stories, "Woman Hollering Creek" and "Never Marry a Mexican" to explore how historical and intergenerational trauma is

presented in Chicanx culture. I argue that Cisneros's fiction presents the reality of trauma and thus draws attention to cultural traumatic experiences Mexican Americans may face. I argue that Cisneros draws attention to cultural traumatic experiences Mexican Americans may face.

Chapter four takes a different approach through archival research. In this chapter, I analyze Cisneros's relationships with scholars Norma Alarcón and Sonia Saldívar-Hull. I consider Alarcón's and Saldívar-Hull's insight into the Chicano Movement; Alarcón's experience with racism and sexism from colleagues and academia; how their friendship has sustained Cisneros; and how their friendship has influenced Cisneros's prevalence in the Chicanx scholarly field. I apply trauma theory to Cisneros's life and friendships and posit that these scholars' shared trauma—inflicted by academia—is rooted in historical trauma. Cisneros's work paves a path for healing from this shared trauma as a community.

The epilogue offers insight to my traumatic narrative as autohistoria. I present some of my soul wounds and how I have chosen to heal my self and my community. The epilogue is an example of autohistoria because I write about some traumas that I've been subjected to, kind of like a testimonio.

I anticipate this thesis can contribute to scholarship on Anzaldúan thought and Sandra Cisneros's life and writing as well as trauma studies and Chicanx studies. Trauma studies within Chicanx studies is an emerging field of study, and I hope this thesis can contribute to its scholarship.

II. TRAUMA THEORY IN ANZALDÚA'S WRITING: HISTORICAL AND INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA AFFECTING A CHICANA NARRATIVE

Gloria E. Anzaldúa was a Chicana writer who wrote about her experiences as a Mexican-American woman. She is a pivotal writer in Chicanx literature studies. She was born in the borderlands of the United States and Mexico in 1942. Anzaldúa's writings include nonfiction, poetry, and two children's books. Anzaldúa creates theory to better understand life experiences as a person of color who has been through excruciating circumstances due to racism, colorism, capitalism, and heterosexism. Her work has represented people who have been otherwise ignored in the canon. Her work is so impactful that between 2005 and 2019, there was a conference in her name, and people from all over the world would meet for days to discuss her writing and its relevance today.

This chapter analyzes Anzaldúa's narrative in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* with a Chicana theoretical lens with social science literature within the Mexican-American. In this chapter, I use a Chicana feminist theoretical lens to analyze Anzaldúa's autohistoria-teoría in *Borderlands/La Frontera The New Mestiza*. I consider Anzaldúa's observations about history as a way explain the marginalization and feelings of cultural alienation that Mexican Americans experience while they endure institutionalized state sanctioned violence. The goal of this chapter is to connect Anzaldúa's autohistoria with historical and intergenerational trauma alongside my trauma to prove how Mexican-Americans' negative experiences in the United States have been notably traumatic.

Historical Trauma in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

Psychiatrist Judith Herman states that rediscovering history is a step towards understanding trauma. She says, "Like traumatized people, [individual victims] need to understand the past to reclaim the present and the future. Therefore, an understanding of psychological trauma begins with rediscovering history" (Herman 2). Historical trauma can be understood as a trauma experienced by a group of people who share a history of oppression and victimization (Mohatt et al. 128). Anzaldúa begins *Borderlands/La Frontera* by describing the Spanish conquest to illustrate how this historical traumatic event affected the Indigenous people who were native to the Americas and continues to affect their generations to this day. Anzaldúa traces the trail of trauma to the historical trauma that affected this group of people in the 1500s. The Spanish Conquest of native peoples in the Americas stole languages, religion, lives, and these losses are still being felt today. Anzaldúa connects with her family's as well as her past to make sense of how this history influences her in the present. She theorizes her experiences and can connect these theories to the lives of many other Mexican Americans.

Anzaldúa offers a history lesson of the original peoples of the U.S. Southwest within the first chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, stating,

> Our Spanish, Indian, and *mestizo* ancestors explored and settled parts of the U.S. Southwest as early as the sixteenth century. For every gold-
>
> hungry *conquistador* and soul-hungry missionary who came north from Mexico, ten to twenty Indians and *mestizos* went along as porters or in other capacities. For the [Natives], this constituted a return to the place of origin, Aztlán, thus making Chicanos originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest.

(*Borderlands* 27)

This excerpt illustrates the forced migration to which Indigenous people were subjected by Spanish conquistadors and missionaries. Anzaldúa uses "gold-hungry" to describe the conquistadors to show that they were motivated by financial gain. Additionally, the phrase "soul-hungry" suggests that the missionaries were not there for humanitarian purposes, but to convert Indigenous people to Catholicism. The Spanish colonizers viewed Indigenous people as pawns for financial and holy gain. This forced removal from both land and religion was traumatic for Indigenous people because it distorted their physical and psychic understandings of home. Forced migration is traumatizing because it erases the sense of home which causes psychological distress.

Flores discusses psychological distress caused by displacement in *Chicana and Chicano Mental Health: Alma, Mente y Corazón*, explaining,

> The erosion or absence of cultural protective factors, along with the changes of meaning systems (cultural, social, geographic) from migration (Falicov 1998), as well as the erosion of community and sense of belonging resulting from efforts to acculturate or assimilate, may generate greater vulnerability to mental disorders or emotional distress among long-term Mexican immigrants and Chicana/o individuals at particular point in the life cycle. (Flores 9)

This statement demonstrates that migration can cause physiological distress by erasing "community and sense of belonging" and "may generate greater vulnerability to mental disorders or emotional distress." The colonization of Mexico is an instance of historical traumatization because Spain oppressed Indigenous people in this region and committed crimes against them, such as genocide.

In the nineteenth century, the migration of Anglo people forced the Tejanos (native Texans of Mexican descent) out of their land. Eventually, the Anglo Texans and some Tejanos fought Mexicans in the Texas Revolution, and in the end, Texas seceded into its own republic. The United States-Mexico War began when the United States annexed Texas because the two countries could not agree about who owned which piece of land. The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ended the United States-Mexico War and accorded the United States the land of present-day Texas and California, and most of New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. The treaty stated that the affected Mexicans on the United States side could keep their land. However, Tejanos were forced out of their homes and were displaced.

Edén Torres remarks on Mexican Americans' traumatic experience of forced displacement, expressing,

> We did not choose to leave our homelands as many European immigrants have, nor elect to be absorbed into the dominant culture through forced assimilation, which is a kind of brutality against the spirit. Our indigenous ancestors made no request to be incorporated into two or three national states through violence. As Mexican settlers we did not choose to lose our language and culture, to be included (yet excluded) in the original social experiment known as the United States of America. (Torres 19-20)

Torres's use of diction—such as "did not choose," "nor elect," "forced assimilation," "made no request," "through violence," and "original social experiment"—emphasizes that these cultural changes were forced upon Mexican Americans. However, Torres recognizes that Chicanxs are not indigenous to Mexico when describing them as

"Mexican settlers." Additionally, the diction of "leave our homeland," "absorbed into the dominant culture," "brutality against the spirit," "incorporated into two or three national states," and "lose our language and culture" illustrates the traumatic effects of forced displacement.

Anzaldúa expands on this displacement in chapter one of *Borderlands/La Frontera* as she observes,

> Separated from Mexico, the Native Mexican-Texan no longer looked toward Mexico as home; the Southwest became our homeland once more. The border fence that divides the Mexican people was born on February 2, 1848, with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. It left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side, annexed by conquest along with the land. The land established by the treaty as belonging to Mexicans was soon swindled away from its owners. The treaty was never honored and restitution, to this day, has never been made. (*Borderlands* 29)

Anzaldúa illustrates a further instance of historical trauma by highlighting the displacement experienced by Mexicans living in northern Mexico and the traumas associated with displacement such as exposure to violence as a whole community. Her usage of "It left 100,000 Mexican citizens on this side," especially the verb "left," suggests that Mexicans felt abandoned by their motherland. Mexicans no longer belonged to their home anymore. The word choice of "swindled," "never honored," and "never been made" shows how Anglos have been dishonest about their intentions towards Mexicans' livelihood. Displacement compounded with deceit as the result of this treaty and its aftermath has had a negative psychological impact upon Mexicans and their

descendants. This division between the United States and Mexico was not only geographical but also psychological; Mexicans became "Americans" overnight by the political decree effected by war with the United States.

The cultural divide between Mexicans and White Americans can still be felt today. People who live in South Texas, which was formally Mexico, express that they feel "too American" (read: White) when they visit Mexico but "too Mexican" (read: not White) in the United States' White spaces such as public schools in affluent neighborhoods and even in White poor spaces such as the military.
Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* reminds us that Mexican Americans have been victims of historical trauma at least twice: once with the Spanish conquest of the Americas and again with the annexation of northern Mexico into the United States.

Intergenerational Trauma in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

While historical trauma is a trauma that a group experiences collectively and the trauma spans multiple generations, intergenerational trauma refers to a phenomenon that happens when a certain trauma and its symptoms follow a family for generations (Mohatt et al. 128). Nathaniel Mohatt et al. explain intergenerational trauma as "the generational aspect of historical trauma to capture the collective experience of trauma by specific cultural groups across generations" (Mohatt et al. 128). Mexican Americans have experienced intergenerational trauma because of the historical trauma their ancestors could not heal from. An instance of historical trauma becoming intergenerational trauma is Mexicans being exploited by the United States' economy. The United States Customs and Border Protection defines the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a "free-trade zone in North America; it was signed in 1992 by Canada, Mexico, and the

United States and took effect on Jan. 1, 1994" ("North American Free Trade Agreement"). This agreement between North America established free trade between its countries, which has negatively affected Mexican maquiladora (factory) workers. Elvia Arriola explains how NAFTA plays a role in Mexican people but especially women's exploitation:

> Women, especially poor women, continue to play a significant role in the work of global employment. American companies have been relocating to Mexico since 1965, and with the signing of NAFTA, cross-border trade has expanded, with new factories being built and jobs created. However, fewer rights for workers at the Mexican border have been guaranteed…Under NAFTA, wages and working conditions for *maquiladora* workers had gone from bad to worse. (Arriola 31)

Under NAFTA, Mexican factory workers are being exploited for free trade. Arriola researches maquiladoras' exploitation of workers (post-NAFTA) and finds that "it was clear that the main purpose for the poor treatment of the workers and low safety standards was to secure an easily discardable 'reserve army of labor'" (Arriola 32). These factories actively seek out women to employ because women are seen as "discardable."

Anzaldúa reflects on the maquiladora system before the signing of NAFTA. She observes how Mexico is economically dependent on the United States and how this has affected families, saying,

> Currently, Mexico and her eighty million citizens are almost completely dependent on the U.S. market. The Mexican government and wealthy growers are in partnership with such American conglomerates as American Motors, IT&T and Du Pont which own factories called *maquiladoras*. One-fourth of all Mexicans

> work at *maquiladoras*; most are young women. Next to oil, *maquiladoras* are Mexico's second greatest source of U.S. dollars. Working eight to twelve hours a day to wire in backup lights of U.S. autos or solder minuscule wires in TV sets is not the Mexican way. While the women are in the *maquiladoras*, the children are left on their own. Many roam the street, become part of *cholo* gangs. The infusion of the values of the white culture, coupled with the exploitation by that culture, is changing the Mexican way of life. (*Borderlands* 32)

The Chicana thinker illuminates the trauma that has been done to, and continues to be done to, Mexican children and their mothers because of the United States market. Anzaldúa shows how historical trauma is forced onto Mexicans as she poignantly observes Mexicans are being "exploited by that [White] culture." These Mexican women are forced to work in horrible conditions and the State does not do anything about it because they think these women are expendable. The exploitation of Mexicans in maquiladoras system has existed before NAFTA and will most likely exist after NAFTA because Mexicans have been historically exploited by the United States (*Borderlands* 25) (Flores 3) (Martinez 20) (Torres 187). The damage of Mexicans being historically exploited has intergenerationally affected them too because the coupling with the exploitation of the United States' culture is changing Mexicans' culture and way of life.

The loss of culture, especially via the "infusion of the values of white culture," is an effect of the historical trauma that Mexican Americans experience today. Anzaldúa discusses the relationship between culture and identity when writing,

> Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating [to Anglo culture]. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological

> conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness and Angloness. (*Borderlands* 85)

Through this statement, Anzaldúa theorizes how Mexican-American culture and identity were created. This community was forced out of Mexican culture by acts of law and never accepted by Anglo culture for not assimilating. Therefore, this community has had to create their own culture; they are neither Mexican nor Anglo but a mixture of both. One reason why Mexican-Americans need to assimilate to Anglo culture and language is that the dominant culture controls the means of living. As referred to earlier, Anzaldúa states that Mexicans' way of life is changing due to the "exploitation" of the dominant culture. Anzaldúa suggests this mortality saying, "For many *mexicanos del otro lado*, the choice is to stay in Mexico and starve or move north and live" (*Borderlands* 32). If Mexicanxs move north, they must learn the language and culture because the dominant culture gatekeeps access to living a quality life. Assimilate and learn the language, or do not and live in poverty.

The effects of Spanish and Anglo colonialism have led to the continued oppression and exploitation of Mexican Americans. This oppression and trauma, in turn, have led to Mexican-Americans' internalization of racial inferiority (Estrada 332). Antonio Estrada contends that these negative events have been foundational for present day socioeconomic characteristics amongst Mexicans and Mexican Americans. He explains,

> Historical trauma (negative social and historical events) has laid a foundation for

> the socioeconomic characteristics of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, including poverty, underemployment, and low educational attainment, through structured and institutionalized oppression, discrimination, and racism. Sociocultural and socioenvironmental influences include targeted marketing of alcohol, accessibility to drugs, disorganized neighborhoods, and increased police surveillance. (Estrada 335)

I want to emphasize that these general socioeconomic characteristics are not inherent dysfunctions amongst Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Instead, the United States' systemic oppression and subsequent traumatization of Mexicans and their descendants has laid the foundation for these statistics. The border of the United States-Mexico has been and continues to be a site than others, and in effect, impoverishes those whom it marginalizes.

Anzaldúa theorizes her experience of living on the United States-Mexico border through her Borderland theory. She explains, "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (*Borderlands* 25). This theory is not specific to the borderlands of the United States and Mexico, but rather all borders that are othering. Anzaldúa says "the prohibited and forbidden" live in Borderlands, such as people who are not safe in the patriarchal hegemonic heteronormative society. These people are not perceived as "normal" in society.

This Borderland theory is the framework for Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness

theory, which expands on the notion of mestizaje. Anzaldúa refers to mestizaje as "transformed combinations" (*Borderlands* 27). She notes, "the continual intermarriage between Mexican and American Indians and Spaniards formed an even greater mestizaje" (*Borderlands* 27). Anzaldúa explains that "from this [mestizaje] racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (*Borderlands* 99). Mestiza consciousness attempts to connect marginalized people who have struggled with "unnatural boundaries," whether racial, cultural, gender, sexual, spiritual, etc. with likeminded awareness.

Chicanx Studies scholar Sheila Marie Contreras states that if one wants to theorize mestizaje, one must acknowledge all factors of mestizaje, even the ugly. She states, "These markers of otherness, Indigenous ancestry and an affiliation with the Spanish language, exist in tension with one another. At the same time that they can represent cultural phenomena of *mestizaje*, they also allude to histories of conflict, domination, and subjugation" (Contreras 34). Mestizaje is rooted in historical trauma. Still, Anzaldúa states that mestizos are a combination of "continual intermarriage," which disregards the trauma Indigenous people were and still are subjected to. However, Contreras agrees with Anzaldúa that the discrimination against Mexican Americans is rooted in Indigenous racism, explaining,

> Chicanas/os face the institutionalization of anti-Mexican racism in virtually every area public life: health care, education, law enforcement, and even religion. And because it is precisely the racial status of "mixed," with a negative emphasis on the [Indigenous] part of the mixture, that has historically motivated racism against

> Mexicans in the United States, attempts to elevate the [Indigenous] features of Chicano culture and physiognomy make real political sense. (Contreras 77)

Contreras illustrates that the United States' racism towards Mexican Americans is "historically motivated" because of their ancestral Indigenous background "with a negative emphasis on the [Indigenous] part of the mixture." This historical racism has negatively affected Mexican Americans' standard of living. Although the specific Mexican and Anglo hybridization commenced in the 19th century with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Mexican Americans still experience its cultural effects today in 2021.

Flores discusses how the loss of culture is a symptom of intergenerational trauma, saying,

> Loss of language, cultural rituals, and spiritual practices creates shame and despair. The loss of culture and language often goes unmourned, because it is silenced and denied by those who occupy, conquer, or dominate. Such losses and their psychological and spiritual impact are passed down across generations, resulting in depression, disconnection, and spiritual distress in subsequent generations, which are manifestations of historical or intergenerational trauma (Duran and Duran 1995; McCubbin and Marsella 2009). (Flores 8-9)

The United States "silences and denies" Mexican-Americans' "loss of language, cultural rituals, and spiritual practices," which "creates shame and despair" for Mexican Americans. This "shame and despair" becomes "depression, disconnection, and spiritual distress" that is experienced in generations to come. Therefore, loss of culture is an instance of Mexican Americans experiencing evident effects of historical and

intergenerational trauma.

The loss of language comes with the loss of culture. Historical trauma is still felt today through the loss of language resulting from the Spanish and Anglos' colonization. Anzaldúa describes the loss of language Mexican Americans face and how language is a factor of identity in chapter five of *Borderlands*, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." Anzaldúa gives a personal anecdote when describing the loss of language. She says she received "three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler" for getting caught speaking Spanish at recess (*Borderlands* 75). A whole generation of children went to school and was punished for speaking the language with which they were most comfortable. Anzaldúa states that a person can use language according to their current situation. She can maneuver through society by speaking variations of the same language. In the classroom, you are a student. At home, you are a sibling or partner or a parent, and at work, you are a professional. A person manipulates language in each setting to better serve them. Contreras explains Chicanxs are alienated from languages, writing,

> Spanish linguistic identity is at once the sign of otherness in relation to a dominant Anglo power base, even as it also reminds of a history of assimilation. Although many Chicanas/os identify as Spanish speakers, this identification is complicated by the fact that a good portion of Chicanas/os are not fluent in Spanish, are passive-fluent, or are at best uneasy with their knowledge of the language. Furthermore, the centralization of a Spanish linguistic identity has failed to account for, on one hand, the fact that many Chicanas/os are alienated from the Spanish language and, on the other, that virtually all Chicanas/os are alienated from the Indigenous languages of their ancestors. (Contreras 34)

This statement shows that almost all Chicanxs are alienated from ancestral native languages, and many are also alienated from Spanish. This alienation from languages demonstrates the loss of language, which is also tied to the loss of culture. This loss is an effect of historical trauma from Spanish and Anglo colonization.

When I was little and my parents started to teach me how to talk, they tried to teach me English and Spanish at the same time. Unfortunately, I was not grasping either language, so they decided to teach me solely English. Because I was initially taught both languages at the same time, as a child speaking only English, I would pronounce the English words with a Spanish accent. Because of the accent, I was pulled out of class during elementary school for an hour every other day to "correct" my English. My mother consented to these practices because they told her that it would benefit me by helping me blend in with the other children easier. Now I am 26 years old and cannot speak fluent Spanish. This furthers the divide that I feel with my culture. I feel like I am not "Mexican enough" when my family gets together because I can only understand basic Spanish, and they speak too fast for me to keep up.

Another important characteristic of many Mexican-Americans' culture is Catholicism. The Spanish imposition of this religion was also a source of trauma for Mexicans' and Mexican Americans' ancestors. The source of the trauma, Catholicism, continues to be taught and passed down intergenerationally. When the Spanish came and conquered Mexico, they brought their religion of Catholicism. Anzaldúa expresses her and others' experiences with the Catholic Church, saying,

> Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them. How many times have I heard mothers and mothers-in-law tell their sons to beat their wives for not

> obeying them, for being *hociconas* (big mouths), for being *callejeras* (going to visit and gossip with neighbors), for expecting their husbands to help with the rearing of children and the housework, for wanting to be something other than housewives? The culture expects women to show greater acceptance of, and commitment to, the value system than men. The culture and the Church insist that women are subservient to males. (*Borderlands* 38-39)

The Church is another setting along with maquiladoras that perpetuates gendered violence towards women. The Church has harmful values that it indoctrinates in its followers, including prescribing rigid gender roles and normalizing women's dependence and subservience to men.

Yes, the Church teaches traditional gender roles, but these roles are reinforced by the culture. It is heinous that a mother would tell her son to beat his wife when she does not do as he wishes, but this is not rare in Mexican-American culture. This "advice" is evidence of intergenerational trauma because the strict values of the Church and its repercussions can follow a family for generations. Women are taught that their fathers and husbands are the ones who lead the family and that women's jobs are to make their father's or husband's lives easier. Catholicism plays a very big role in why and how Mexican-American culture understands gender roles and sexuality. This religion teaches its practices through its holy book, the Bible. In the Bible, heteronormativity and gender roles are explained in various stories: the women are always submissive; the men are always head of the household; and marriage is only between men and women.

This practice of gender roles has been engrained into Mexicans and Mexican Americans since their ancestors were forced to stop practicing their religions and began

to practice Catholicism during colonization. Anzaldúa mentions native gender roles explaining, "Matrilineal descent characterized the Toltecs and perhaps early Aztec society. Women possessed property and were curers as well as priestesses. According to the codices, women in former times had the supreme power in Tula, and in the beginning of the Aztec dynasty, the royal blood ran through the female line" (*Borderlands* 55). However, Longeaux y Vasquez describes the erasure of Indigenous gender roles, explaining, "Male domination over the woman is a thing of Spain and Europe. Destroying the [Indigenous] women's freedom was necessary in order to conquer and destroy the [Indigenous peoples]" (Longeaux y Vasquez 110). Spanish colonizers used Catholicism to take away Indigenous women's autonomy and as a tool "to conquer and destroy" the Indigenous peoples. Anzaldúa describes this as an integral part of the Chicanx culture, saying, "In the Chicano culture we grow up feeling it's a given that guys have all the power and privileges, that guys are more honest than women, that men are not as competitive as women, that men do not gossip, and that men are more intelligent than women" (*Interviews* 220). This forced religion has affected many generations and has caused Mexican-American culture to adopt its patriarchal indoctrination without question.

I consider myself a recovering Catholic. My mother would take me and my brothers to Sunday mass like a good Mexican mother is supposed to, but we hated it. My mother enrolled the three of us in Sunday school to save our souls as any responsible parent would. After we fought with our single mother, she did not have the energy to argue with us anymore and we stopped going to Sunday school and then Sunday mass altogether. After this, we would only go to church for special occasions such as Easter,

Christmas, and the occasional wedding and funeral. My family, myself included, always considered ourselves Catholic even though we were not regular churchgoers.

In high school, I started to date my current partner. We were 16 years old and helplessly in love. We knew we were going to get married one day, and a prerequisite to get married in the Catholic Church is to be confirmed within the Church. Before you can get confirmed you must go through communion, which requires you to attend regular confessions. Jose and I began our journey with the Church and started to attend Sunday school for teenagers so we could earn the hours to go to confession and then go through communion and eventually confirmation. We considered Sunday school a chore that had to get done so one day we could make the commitment with the Church to be wed. These classes affected our relationship emotionally and physically for the worse. We were 16 years old and had all these hormones coursing through our bodies. We felt the urge to explore our sexuality but knew that we could not sexually touch each other or ourselves because it would send us to Hell.

Once I became aware that the Church's teachings were infringing on my life, I wondered what other teachings I did not agree with. I knew that my father was abusive, but I could not stand up for myself because I would be going against one of the Ten Commandments. Breaking one of the Commandments is a one-way ticket to Hell for all eternity. Now that I am 26 years old, I think that it is ridiculous that I was ashamed to kiss my boyfriend sensually. It is especially ridiculous that it took me 21 years to stand up for myself to my abusive father. After we were confirmed our senior year of high school, we stopped going to Church. This is an example of how I see the Church as a source of intergenerational trauma in my life.

Trauma can present itself through many symptoms. One symptom that many traumatized people, including Mexican Americans, experience is alcoholism. Psychiatrist Rene L. Olvera et al. conducted a research study that focused on heritability of disorders and found,

> In the largest study ever conducted of the heritability of depression and substance use disorders in a Mexican-American population, we found: (1) high prevalence rates of major depression and alcohol use disorders in extended families; (2) significant heritability estimates for lifetime diagnoses of major depression and alcohol and drug use disorders; and (3) evidence that common genetic factors influence major depression and alcohol use disorders. (Olvera et al. 565)

This research study suggests that genetic factors may contribute to alcoholism among Mexican Americans. Anzaldúa speaks about the vices that traumatized people seek out, saying,

> As a person, I, as a people, we, Chicanos, blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves. Most of this goes unconsciously; we only know that we are hurting, we suspect that there is something "wrong" with us, something fundamentally "wrong." In order to escape the threat of shame or fear, one takes on a compulsive, repetitious activity as though to busy oneself, to distract oneself, to keep awareness at bay. One fixates on drinking, smoking, popping pills, acquiring friend after friend who betrays; repeating, repeating, to prevent oneself from "seeing." (*Borderlands* 67)

The Mexican-American community has been through several historical traumas from Spanish colonization to Anglo terrorism, and some of the symptoms from these traumas

can become intergenerational and affect families for many years. Intergenerational trauma happens when historical trauma follows multiple generations (Mohatt et al. 128). In my experience, if the symptoms follow a family for so many years, they can forget why the symptom or coping mechanism started and begin to blame themselves. Once Chicanos "blame ourselves, hate ourselves, terrorize ourselves," their weaknesses become harder to control.

I have seen people seek out alcohol, cigarettes, and food as repetitious vices. My father was addicted to alcohol and cigarettes for almost my whole life. I was about eight years old when I realized he would smoke a cigarette every time he was uncomfortable for one reason or another. I was about 22 years old when I realized my mother and I use food as a repetitious vice. I cannot focus on my depression when I eat tortilla chips in front of the TV. My depression developed when I was 10 years old, and I have been using food as a crutch since. We have developed these repetitious acts to distract us from our problems. These repetitious acts are symptoms of intergenerational trauma.

Chicanos have felt and continue to feel inferior in some spaces as a result of historical trauma's racism and ethnic hatred. Machismo is a social behavior developed to account for this feeling of inferiority and prove their masculinity, sometimes resulting in violence. Anzaldúa discusses machismo in chapter seven of *Borderlands* stating, "[Today's macho's] 'machismo' is an adaptation to oppression and poverty and low self-esteem. It is the result of hierarchical male dominance" (*Borderlands* 105). She continues to observe that White people "displace" their feelings of inadequacy to Chicanos by "shaming him." This shame from White people causes Chicanos to "suffer from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation" (*Borderlands*

105). Additionally, when Chicanos are around other Latinos, they may "suffer from a sense of language inadequacy" (*Borderlands* 105). This "loss of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them…To wash down the shame of his acts, of his very being, and to handle the brute in the mirror, he takes to the bottle, the snort, the needle, and the fist (*Borderlands* 105). Although machismo does exist all over the world, Anzaldúa refers specifically to Chicanos' toxic masculinity in this excerpt. Chicanxs' machismo is rooted in historical trauma because they have been excluded from Anglo and Latinx spaces.

Chicano machismo happens when Mexican-American men feel inadequate in all spaces they occupy. They feel inadequate among White people and other Latinos because of the racism they experience at work, at school, and because of the microaggressions among friends. They are "too Mexican" and "too American" to fit in these spaces. When some men feel inadequate, they compensate by asserting superiority in spaces where they have control, which is usually at home. This superiority can lead to violence. Machismo can lead to abuse. Machismo can be an act of sexism when men target violence against women's mind, body, and soul. Anzaldúa mentions that machismo can happen anywhere, stating, "In general, men have sold women out by undermining them, by not being loyal to them, by battering and raping them, by presenting the belief that women are inferior" (*Interviews* 220). To reiterate, traditional gender roles are not observed in just Chicanx culture, as Chicanxs' approaches to gender roles stem from European colonization. As mentioned earlier,[1] Longeaux y Vasquez explains Indigenous women were not quiet and submissive wives but had respected roles in the community before Spanish colonization

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[1] See page 29.

(Longeaux y Vasquez 110). Chicanx women learned to become quiet and submissive wives to live without violence from the men in their lives. Colonizers use violence as a tool to instill fear, and men use violence against women for the same effect.

Machismo is twofold: men are ashamed of themselves, and men oppress women. Anzaldúa explains "To wash down the shame of his acts, of his very being, and to handle the brute in the mirror, he takes to the bottle, the snort, the needle, and the fist" (*Borderlands* 105). Anzaldúa's words resonate with my own lived experience. When my father felt inadequate as a husband and father, he would brutalize the ones he felt inadequate with. Then he would drink himself senseless. And the abuse would continue until he fell asleep. Unfortunately, this behavior of my father was learned from his father. My paternal grandparents knew each other since they were in the second grade. My grandfather never completed high school because he had to earn money by picking cotton to help his family. As soon as my grandfather was of age, he enlisted in the United States Air Force. My grandparents were married for 56 years before my grandfather's death and had three children, two of whom also joined the Armed Forces. My grandparents were the picture-perfect couple. Even when she was mad at my grandpa, my grandma still called him "honey." But behind the picture lies the ugly truth; my grandpa was abusive to his children and cheated on his wife. I blame machismo.

It is common in Latinx culture to instill certain gender roles into children and the household. Unfortunately, this may bring violence and domestic abuse into the family. This happened to my father, and because he was under the impression that was the normal thing to do, my father was abusive towards my mother, my two little brothers, and me physically and emotionally. Flores observes that Richard Carrillo and Maria Zarza,

for example, have addressed "the psychological impact of childhood victimization on Chicano men and the resultant substance misuse, depression, and violence" (qtd. in Flores 82). Machismo is a violent symptom of intergenerational trauma.

Representations of Historical and Intergenerational Trauma in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* Poetry

Creating is a mode of healing for Anzaldúa. She says, "My job is not just to interpret or describe realities but to create them through language and action, symbols and images" (*Light in the Dark* 7). Anzaldúa is able to create different realities to help her theorize her and her community's trauma. She observes that writing is healing, stating, "So for me writing is a way of making sense of my realities. It is also a way of healing my wounds and helping others heal theirs" (*Interviews* 249). Poetry is a style of writing that allows Anzaldúa to be creative in a way that academic writing may restrict her (*Light in the Dark* 5). In this section, I use a Chicana theoretical lens to analyze poems in *Borderlands/La Frontera* that are concentrated in the second half of the text. I will argue that through these poems, Anzaldúa further vividly illustrates instances of intergenerational and historical trauma which the Mexican-American community has been subjected.

Anzaldúa creates a first-person point of view poem that illustrates an event that leads to historical trauma with the poem "We Call Them Greasers." The first stanza reads, "I found them here when I came. / They were growing corn in their small *ranchos*/raising cattle, horses" (1-3). From these lines the reader learns that the speaker is a White person, and the subjects of the poem are either Mexicans or Mexican-Americans who live on a humble amount of land where they grow corn and raise cattle. The lines

that read, “took off their hats/placed them over their hearts/lowered their eyes in my presence” suggests that the speaker is a White man with authority (6-8). The speaker seems to speak for a group of people with the use of “their hats,” “their hearts,” and “their eyes.” The lowering and placing of the hats is a cultural signifier that shows the group respects the speaker.

The first two lines of the next stanza imply that the speaker is not a part of the community he is critiquing when he says, “Weren’t interested in bettering themselves,/ why they didn’t even own the land but shared it” (9-10). The use of “they” shows that he is not connected with this group of people. The rest of this stanza proves that the speaker works with some form of authority with the local government that gives him the ability to drive families away from their home when the speaker states, “I showed ‘em a piece of paper with some writing / tole ‘em they owed taxes/had to pay right away or be gone by *mañana*” (13-15). The last three lines of this stanza suggests that while the speaker may work for a form of local government, he may nevertheless be a fraud for only showing the “piece of paper” to multiple families: “By the time me and my men had waved/that same piece of paper to all the families/it was all frayed at the ends” (16-18). Each residency is supposed to get an eviction notice that is specific to their name and address. The fact that the speaker used the “same piece of paper to all the families” shows that the speaker is scamming as many families as he can on the behalf of the local government. This stanza illustrates an instance of forced migration, which is a trigger for historical trauma because it victimized a specific group of people.

Stanza three illustrates Mexican Americans leaving their homes, describing, “Some loaded their chickens children wives and pigs/into rickety wagons, pans and tools

dangling / clanging from all sides" (19-21). The speaker says that this group of people "[c]ouldn't take their cattle—/during the night my boys had frighten them off," showing that the organization that the speaker belongs to is deliberately trying to make this group of people suffer (22-23). This stanza shows that there were resisters, but they were not taken seriously by the locals or the local government: "Some even had land grant / and appealed to the courts. / It was a laughing stock" (26-28). This stanza shows that the speaker is not working alone and that he has a group of men, all of whom are invested with legal and civil authority, that are helping him chase this group of Mexican Americans away from their homes by describing, "Still some refused to budge, / even after we burned them out" (30-31). These people are ruthless enough that they will resort extralegal violence to scare Mexicans and Mexican Americans away from their homes. Setting fire to their homes emphasizes the forced displacement Mexicans and Mexican Americans have had to endure. The forced displacement of a community of people from the only way of life they know, such as this one, is a prime example of a historical trauma.

The last stanza describes a rape scene between the speaker and a woman who is part of the collective group that is being forced to migrate. The victim appears to be of Indigenous descent when the speaker says, "in that instant I felt such contempt for her/round face and beady black eyes like an Indian's" (38-39). When the speaker describes the woman as having "beady black eyes like an Indian's," he identifies what Contreras explains as "markers of otherness" which "alludes to histories of conflict, domination, and subjugation" (Contreras 34). Indigenous people have been victim to several conflicts, domination, and subjugation due to colonizers acts of violence. The

speaker is committing a horrific act but justifies this act of violence by describing he felt "such contempt for her." The use of "contempt" shows that the speaker considers his victim to be less than himself. A White man is raping a woman who appears to be Indigenous, which illustrates an instance of domination.

The last stanza describes a rape scene between the speaker and a woman that is part of the collective group that's being forced to migrate.

> Afterwards I sat on her face until
> her arm stopped flailing,
> didn't want to waste a bullet on her.
> The boys wouldn't look me in the eyes.
> I walked up to where I had tied her man to the tree
> and spat in his face. Lynch him, I told the boys. (33-45)

When the speaker says, "The boys wouldn't look me in the eyes," "boys" is referring to his Texas Ranger coworkers. This suggests that the speaker raped this woman in front of them and her partner when he says next, "I walked up to where I had tied her man to the tree/and spat in his face." The poem ends revealing that the speaker is a Texas Ranger. This detail becomes apparent when the speaker says, "Lynch him, I told the boys" (45). Historian Monica Martinez discusses the violent history of Texas Rangers in her book *The Injustice Never Leaves You: Anti-Mexican Violence in Texas*. Martinez uncovers the violent death of a man named Adolfo Muñoz who was arrested by Texas Rangers in San Benito and was to be escorted to Brownsville's jail. But The *Brownsville Daily Herald* reported that Muñoz never arrived at Brownsville's jail, and he was riddled with bullets and "dangling at the end of a rope tied to the limb of a mesquite tree" (93). It is suspected

that Muñoz was lynched by the Texas Rangers. This poem serves as a reminder of the historical trauma groups of Mexicans and Mexican Americans have had to endure because it illustrates a community of Mexican-American people forced to migrate, and by raping and murdering Mexican Americans.

Another poem by Anzaldúa that explores themes of historical and intergenerational trauma is titled "To live in the Borderlands means you." The first line of this poem begins with the title. Anzaldúa writes,

> To live in the Borderlands means you
> are neither *hispana india negra española*
> *ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata*, half-breed
> caught in the crossfire between camps
> while carry all five races on your back
> not knowing which side to turn to, to run from; (1-6)

These lines suggest that the speaker of the poem lives along the United States-Mexico border and is a descendant from multiple regions of the world. The speaker shows that being mestiza can be challenging because she is "caught in the crossfire" and does not know "which side to turn to, to run from." Through these words, Anzaldúa suggests cultural isolation, which is an effect of historical trauma. A mestiza is someone who "is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another" (*Borderlands* 100). Anzaldúa explains how this cultural isolation can be damaging to one's psyche, describing, "Within us and within *la cultura Chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, in both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture. Subconsciously, we see an attack

on ourselves and our beliefs as a threat" (*Borderlands* 100). This "attack on ourselves" from the different cultures that encompass Chicanx culture shows that the historical trauma from Spanish and Anglo colonization has become intergenerational because this attack on their psyches persists through generations.

Anzaldúa also illustrates historical trauma from Spanish and Anglo colonization in the next stanza, writing,

> To live in the Borderlands means knowing
>
> that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years,
>
> is no longer speaking to you,
>
> that *mexicanas* call you *rajetas*,
>
> that denying the Anglo inside you
>
> is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black; (7-12)

These lines express further cultural isolation by emphasizing that the Indigenous part of her self is "no longer speaking to you." The speaker is a descendent of Indigenous and Mexican people, but neither group claims her. Additionally, the line "that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years" describes how Indigenous people have and continue to be devalued and "betrayed" since the Spanish colonization and again with Anglo colonization. Anzaldúa defines "rajetas" as "literally, 'split,' that is, having betrayed your word" (*Borderlands* 217). "Rajetas" is used in the poem to show how Mexicans view the speaker as a betrayer, which is further culturally isolating. Flores states that cultural isolation is passed down across generations and results psychic distress, which is a manifestation of historical and intergenerational trauma (Flores 8-9).

The third stanza illustrates more instances of daily traumas, describing, "*Cuando*

vives en la frontera / people walk through you, the wind steals your voice, / you're a *burra*, *buey*, scapegoat" (13-15). These lines show how a mestiza who lives "en la frontera" is perceived as to others. The usage of "burra" (donkey), "buey" (oxen), and "scapegoat" shows that borderland people are perceived as less than human, as animals. Martinez discusses racism towards Mexican Americans. In *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836-1986*, David Montejano quotes a newspaper named *Carrizo Springs Javelin* that refers to Mexican Americans as a "class of foreigners who claim American citizenship but who are as ignorant of things American as the mule" (qtd. in Martinez 16). This was published only 100 years ago on August 5, 1911, about three generations ago from today. This was published 63 years after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo which declared some Mexicans as Mexican Americans overnight, which is about two generations later. The people that are being compared to a mule are American citizens and have history in the region, whereas Anglo settlers are considered the newcomers. This racism is stemmed from the historical event of the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which has caused intergenerational trauma since racism against Mexicans and Mexican Americans has been passed down through generations.

Unfortunately, an aspect of living on the border as a person who is not white passing is being stopped by border control. Anzaldúa makes reference to this common experience in the poem, writing that living in the Borderlands means "be stopped by *la migra* at the border checkpoints" (23). Historian Kelly Lytle Hernández states that Border Patrol was established in May 1924 and "was created to enforce U.S. immigration restrictions comprehensively by preventing unauthorized border crossings and policing borderland regions to detect and arrest persons defined as unauthorized immigrants"

(Hernández 2). Hernández notes that beginning in 1927, most of Border Patrol's Texas-based districts' activity was inside Texas's greater borderlands rather than along the border line (Hernández 46). She notes this contradictory practice of the Border Patrol, writing,

> Instead of enforcing the boundary between the United States and Mexico, Border Patrol officers patrolled backcountry trails and conducted traffic stops on borderland roadways to capture unsanctioned Mexican immigrants as they traveled from the border to their final destination. Along major and minor transportation routes, the officers reported questioning hundreds of thousands of people. Border Patrol officers in the Texas-Mexico borderlands thus broadly policed Mexicano mobility instead of enforcing the political boundary between the United States and Mexico. (Hernández 46)

This statement suggests Border Patrol was using their authority to perform extralegal acts, such as policing Mexicanxs mobility instead of enforcing the United States-Mexico border. This extralegal policing is illustrated with Anzaldúa's reflection of la migra in line 23.

The fifth stanza illustrates suicidal ideation, "the pull of the gun barrel, / the rope crushing the hollow of your throat" (26-27), which results from living on the border. The United States-Mexico border can be an unsafe area that may cause traumatic experiences that may result in soul wounds. Living with soul wounds is very hard and can result in some desperate people looking to escape. Psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk explains how self-harming can offer relief, explaining,

> But if no one has ever looked at you with loving eyes or broken out in a smile

> when she sees you; if no one has rushed to help you (but instead said, 'Stop crying, or I'll give you something to cry about'), then you need to discover other ways of taking care of yourself. You are likely to experiment with anything—drugs, alcohol, binge eating, or cutting—that offers some kind of relief. (Van der Kolk 90)

Living on the border can affect a person's psyche, as Anzaldúa illustrates in this stanza. A person with soul wounds who does not find a way to heal their soul wounds discovers other methods that may offer some kind of relief. Suicide ideation and self-harming tactics are coping strategies that one may seek who have soul wounds from living on the border.

Anzaldúa suggests living on the border is like being at war, "you are the battleground / where enemies are kin to each other;" (29-30). The use of "enemies are kin to each other" alludes to fighting between Mexicans, Mexican Americans, White, and other ethnicities who also make up this lineage. These groups of people are descendants of the same community but are separated by a man-made border and a social border. The line "you are at home, a stranger" shows the speaker considers the border home, but the border community considers her a stranger (31). There could be many reasons why the border community considers the speaker a stranger. For example, in the earlier chapters of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa observes that queer people may fear going home due to homophobia. Anzaldúa states, "We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged" (*Borderlands* 42). While the speaker is "kin" to her home, her home considers her a stranger. This isolation may be stemmed from homophobia, which can result in soul wounds.

The seventh stanza alludes to the United States forcing the speaker to assimilate to its culture: "the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off / your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart" (37-38). The United States is personified as the mill and the speaker's heart is personified as a kernel. "Shred off" and "crush out the kernel" illustrates that this assimilation is forced against the speaker's will and attacks her psyche. Forced assimilation is an instance of loss of culture (Flores 8-9). Loss of culture is an instance of Mexican Americans experiencing evident effects of historical and intergenerational trauma.

The eighth and final stanza explains embracing of intersections, stating, "To survive the Borderlands / you must live *sin fronteras* / be a crossroads" (41-43). These lines suggest embracing intersection. The speaker states surviving living on the border you must live without borders. One must live without borders to be able to cross from one space to the next. The speaker is able to code switch between Spanish and English in the same sentence because there are no borders between these languages for them. To be a crossroads, one is able to leave one space behind to transition to another space because they are able to occupy both spaces.

These poems add creative insight into the trauma Anzaldúa describes in writing *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Anzaldúa recreates scenarios that represent the history that is not taught in United States' public or mainstream private schools. Anzaldúa has created theories that have sustained a group of people. I did not begin to learn my ancestors' side of history until I was an undergraduate at a university. The history taught in primary school is whitewashed. Contreras discusses this whitewashing saying, "The dominant historical narratives in U.S. education systems still do little to

inform student-citizens about the history of mestiza/o presence in the United States, one that, as we know, precedes Anglo colonization of the Southwest and the West" (Contreras 76). All of history should be taught, not just the history White people approve of. Anzaldúa promotes a side of history that is usually ignored. She has created theory out of some of her worst experiences, but since she has done this emotional labor for herself and her readers, hopefully no one else will have to.

III. ANZALDÚA'S THEORIES OF HEALING IN *LIGHT IN THE DARK/LUZ EN LO OSCURO*

The process of healing from traumatic events is not linear and a different process for every person. Gloria Anzaldúa illustrates traumatic events that have happened to her and the Mexican-American community in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, she illustrates what identity as "theories of healing" for her audience. In short, Anzaldúa's theories of healing include her reflections on the processes of healing from trauma. Notably, she observes that one must heal the self before healing alongside others in community.

Anzaldúa introduces healing and its process stating, "Dealing with the lack of cohesiveness and stability in life, that increasing tension and conflicts, motivates me to process the struggle. The sheer mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish motivates me to "write out" my/our experiences. More than that, my aspiration toward wholeness maintains my sanity, a matter of life and death" (*Light in the Dark* 2). She feels an itch in her soul that will not settle until she reconstructs the fragments of her soul that trauma scattered. Anzaldúa explains that "mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish" motivates her "to process the struggle." This process's end goal is the "aspiration toward wholeness." She describes this wholeness as "a matter of life and death," illustrating the necessity of this act. When Anzaldúa says "my/our" she is referring to a universal collective with her theory nos/otras throughout Light in the Dark. She speaks from a Chicana/mestiza (Mexicana Tejana) experience and identity in several axes— living as a

lesbian, activist, Chicana, Marxist leaning, and writer. Her trauma may be ethnicity-, sexuality-, and/or gender-specific, but her theories of healing, such as nos/otras, conocimiento, and the Coyolxauhqui imperative, are for any person that may experience trauma. In this excerpt, Anzaldúa claims that her sanity is a matter of life and death. She also claims that the only way to maintain sanity is her goal to heal from her soul wounds.

Psychologist Yvette Flores states that soul wounds are a result of "experiences of devaluation…When the essence of a person—his or her appearance, sexuality, culture, and language—are demeaned and devalued, the spirit suffers" (44). Anzaldúa refers to soul wounds when she mentions "the sheer mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish." Anzaldúa defines healing as "taking back the scattered energy and soul loss wrought by woundings. Healing means using the life force and strength that comes with el ánimo to act positively on one's own and on others' behalf" (*Light in the Dark* 89). This definition uses "soul loss" that has been caused by "woundings" to reference trauma that she has been subjected to. By using "sheer mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish" and "soul loss," Anzaldúa recognizes that she is a subject of trauma. Sara Ramírez coined the term "subjects of trauma" as a theory which understands groups of people have been subjected to historical and intergenerational trauma that can be discussed as topics that serve as a starting point for discussions about these kinds of traumas (S. Ramírez 3). By admitting that she has experienced historical and intergenerational trauma that has resulted in soul loss, Anzaldúa's experiences serve as a starting point for discussions about these kinds of traumas. I understand her definition of healing as meaning to put the soul's scattered pieces back together for one's personal sake as well as for community's sake. This is the definition of healing that I will be working with in this chapter.

In what follows, I analyze Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark* to show she offers theories of healing to her readers. I will argue that Anzaldúa demonstrates an attempt to heal from the traumas she presents in *Borderlands* by reflecting on all aspects of her self. This chapter explains how Anzaldúa heals, and the theories of healing she offers her readers. I argue that Anzaldúa creates theories of healing to attempt to heal the self before attempting community healing.

Theorizing Identity: Nos/otras

A person's identity, which consists of their gender, race, sexual orientation, etc., determines how heteropatriarchal society will view them, and is thus integral to how they move in the world. Anzaldúa explains, "Identity is relational. Who and what we are depends on those surrounding us, a mix of our interactions with our alrededores/environments, with new and old narratives" (*Light in the Dark* 69). Many factors contribute to who and what a person is. The environment we live in affects our identity. We are connected to our environment. Stories we hear at home will impact the way we move outside the home. Similarly, what we experience at school or work impacts us at home. The different environments we navigate affect our identity. Because our identity is relational, it is important for us to change old narratives. Anzaldúa says identity is relational, explaining, "Identity is not a singular activity or entity. It's in relation to somebody else because you can't have a stand alone; there must be something you are bouncing off of" (*Interviews* 240). Identity is relational because it depends on how a person is being perceived. Depending on the intersecting aspects of her identity, a lesbian may not be othered in a safe queer space but she may be in a church setting because she is being perceived in each situation by someone else who has their own

preconceived notions of her identity.

In *Light in the Dark*, Anzaldúa rewrites the old narrative of a dismembered Coyolxauhqui (a Nahua/Aztec moon goddess) as a symbol that represents the ongoing process of healing. Anzaldúa explains how reclaiming narratives can be healing stating, "Storytelling is healing when it expands the autohistorias (self-narratives) of the tellers and the listeners, when it broadens the person that we are" (*Light in the Dark* 177). We are able to reclaim past stories, such as the myth of Coyolxauhqui, to rewrite reality. Storytellers broaden a person's perspective when rewriting narratives by reclaiming reality. Anzaldúa explains how reclaiming reality is creating new realities, stating, "Myths and fictions create reality, and these myths and fictions are used against women and against certain races to control, regulate, and manipulate us. I'm rewriting the myths, using the myths back against the oppressors" (*Interviews* 219). When a storyteller reclaims a traditional narrative, they are creating new realities. In Anzaldúa's new realities, for example, Coyolxauhqui is not perceived as disempowered but as a symbol of healing. By reclaiming Coyolxauhqui, Anzaldúa creates a new way to perceive the moon diosa. Anzaldúa creates a new narrative for Coyolxauhqui by reclaiming her reality. This new narrative is important for the way Coyolxauhqui's story is passed through new generations.

Anzaldúa explains her understanding of identity, observing, "It's not 'race,' gender, class, or any single attribute but the interaction of all of these aspects (as well as others) that creates identity" (*Light in the Dark* 66). People contain so many characteristics that no single characteristic can define a person. Anzaldúa mentions how identity is not fixed writing, "To me these categories [of identity] are very much in

transition. They're impermanent, fluid, not fixed. That's how I look at identity and race gender and sexual orientation. It's not something that's forever and ever true" (*Interviews* 215). The beauty about life is that there is no one quite like you. The more we learn, the more we grow. We can change to become the best version of ourselves. Anzaldúa theorizes identity politics with her nos/otras theory.

Sociologist Mary Bernstein presents an overview of research on identity politics. She states, "While acknowledging the role identity plays in all social movements, I emphasize research that examines the specific processes that arise when a movement's identity is, to some extent, externally imposed and forms part of the basis for grievances" (Bernstein 48). This shows Bernstein acknowledges that a social movement is rooted in the members' mutual grievances. For example, the feminist movement is rooted in politically elevating women's issues such as equal pay, sexual and reproductive rights, domestic violence, etc. Identity politics is discussing the feminist movements concerns. Anzaldúa critiques identity politics with her theory of nos/otras by critiquing the politics within the feminist movement.

In the glossary of *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, AnaLouise Keating defines nos/otras as a theory of intersubjectivity that indicates a type of group identity or consciousness which affirms the sense of divisiveness so often felt in contemporary life, but if nos/otras is joined together to form nosotras then it holds the promise of healing which enables us to acknowledge, bridge, and sometimes transform the distances between the self and other (Keating 322-323). This definition is important to consider because it encompasses the theory as a whole. Keating is able to put all the bits together to form a cogent definition. Nos/otras has an element of spirituality that deserves

illumination. Anzaldúa describes the theory of nos/otras as "a position of being simultaneously insider/outsider, internal/external exile. The clash of cultures is enacted within our psyches, resulting in an uncertain position…nos/otras…[creates] a hybrid consciousness that transcends the us versus them mentality" (*Light in the Dark* 79). This statement shows that nos/otras theory addresses more than physical borders as it includes psychic borders too.

When a person is othered, it affects their soul, triggering a type of soul-loss. Flores explains this soul-loss as it pertains to Chicanxs specifically: "When the essence of a person—his or her appearance, sexuality, culture, and language—are demeaned and devalued, the spirit suffers. Likewise, the hearts and minds of Chicanas and Chicanos who are marginalized and othered will suffer" (Flores 44). Therefore, when feminists aren't welcomed into certain feminist spaces, their souls are affected. Anzaldúa says that "healing involves the restoration of power, life force, or soul" (*Light in the Dark* 33). Therefore, for feminist activists to restore their souls, feminist spaces must bridge the distances between "us" and "them."

Nos/otras describes how people, no matter their identity, impact other people's lives. Nos/otras' goal is to bridge people together, to erase the "us" versus "them" ideology to create us together as nosotras. Anzaldúa wants to break the barriers that keep feminists of color outside of contemporary feminist spaces and White women from women of color spaces. The "we" she is referring to throughout *Light in the Dark* are feminist activists, the "us" is anyone who can be othered based on their gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, class, etc. and the "them" are those that are gatekeeping activist spaces who can also be othered based on gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, class, etc. Anzaldúa

continues to discuss nos/otras and identity politics stating, "As an identity narrative, nos/otras has the potential to overturn definitions of otherness. When we examine the us/them binary deeply, we find that otra-ness may be deceptive, merely a cage we assign to others" (*Light in the Dark* 81). Nos/otras is a view into identity politics because it shows how identity creates binaries. Anzaldúa is theorizing her experience living as a lesbian, activist, Chicana, Marxist leaning, writer, but any person who lives in the us/them binary can empathize. Anzaldúa theorizes the life or death struggle a person who lives in a us/them space deals with.

To create safe spaces, we must accept each other's otherness. To create more inclusive spaces, we must come together. Anzaldúa speaks on becoming more inclusive saying,

> Gathering people from many geographies in a multicultural approach is a mark of inclusivity, increased consciousness, and dialogue. This inclusivity reflects the hybrid quality of our lives and identity's—todas somos nosotras. Living in multicultural communities and the complexities of our age demand we develop a perspective that takes into account the whole planet. (*Reader* 245)

In this statement, Anzaldúa claims that the slash between nos/otras needs to be deleted to show that feminists take a "multicultural approach" to "increase consciousness." To achieve Anzaldúa's togetherness, all women should be welcomed in contemporary feminist spaces to promote inclusivity. Anzaldúa "demands" that feminists welcome all women into their spaces, so that "the whole planet" is considered (*Reader* 245).

Nos/otras encourages a collective consciousness without identity barriers to promote more inclusive spaces to bridge people together. This intersubjective approach is

part of the healing process because it uses energy to act positively on one's own and on others' behalf. Anzaldúa's theorization of nos/otras is helpful because when we realize that we can benefit each other and become nosotras versus nos/otras, we can begin dismantling previous labels to "take back the scattered energy" to begin healing.

Conocimiento

There are several steps to move toward healing from trauma. As stated before, the process of healing is not linear. Anzaldúa creates the theory of conocimiento which has seven different spaces. Anzaldúa has based this theory on her healing process and the different spaces she has gone through to move toward healing. However, the process of healing does not have a finished product; it is a continuous cycle that a person will go through for the rest of their life. A person is always a student because there is so much to learn, and the same can be said of healing: the process is never quite done because there is always some transformation that can occur. Beginning the process of conocimiento is the hardest part of the healing journey. First, a person must come to terms with the trauma they have been through, whether it is personal or a group trauma. Anzaldúa describes desconocimiento: "Death and destruction shock us out of our familiar daily rounds and forces to confront our desconocimientos, our sombras—the unacceptable attributes and unconscious forces that a person must wrestle with to achieve integration. They expose our innermost fears, forcing us to interrogate our souls" (*Light in the Dark* 16). Desconocimientos are the parts of the self that a person does not want to face nor admit that lives within them. Survivors of atrocities must recognize that they have been traumatized before beginning the healing process. Psychiatrist Judith Herman addresses psychological healing from atrocities when explaining, "When the truth is

finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery" (Herman 1). The first step in the process of healing is admitting to the trauma because there can be no healing if there is no trauma. This "shock" of "death and destruction" that Anzaldúa describes can be connected to what Flores explains as soul wounds. Once one recognizes the trauma of soul wounds, healing can begin. Desconocimiento is a part of healing because it forces a person to recognize their "innermost fears" to "interrogate [their] soul" to begin restoring their fragmented self. Anzaldúa's end goal, as described in conocimiento, is to "effect a shift" within one's self and learn from her process to teach others how to shift towards healing.

I knew that I was not "normal" and that I carried "baggage," but I did not learn that it was "trauma" until I was a university student and throwing around the word trauma was the "woke" thing to do. I learned that carrying this trauma with me every day was not healthy and that I needed to confront the shadow part of myself when I almost lost a brother. It was not until one of my brothers expressed intense suicidal ideation that I realized what we carry is lethal. This soul loss is called susto in the Latinx community. Anzaldúa says that susto is a coping mechanism, writing, "During or after any trauma (including individual and group racist acts), you lose parts of your soul as an immediate strategy to minimize the pain and to cope—hecho pedazos, you go into a state of susto" (*Light in the Dark* 87).

Anzaldúa's theory helped me "interrogate my soul": I lost parts of myself—experienced what Flores describes as soul loss—when I almost lost a brother to suicidal ideation. I lost parts of myself when my boyfriend-at-the-time raped me when I was 15 years old. I lost parts of myself when a priest scolded me for my summer attire during

confession. I lost parts of myself when I watched my Popo take his last breaths. I lost parts of myself when I was diagnosed with cancer at 24 years old. I lost parts of myself when chemo affected my body by causing me to lose my hair, by passing out in the shower and having my brother finding me conscious and slumped over in my shower chair, by causing neuropathy in my fingers and toes so now I have to walk with a walking aid now, by causing severe brain fog that I considered dropping out of my master's program, by causing me to be immunosuppressed during a pandemic. I lost parts of myself at 25 when I was told I was guaranteed to relapse within five years if I did not go through an autologous stem cell transplant. The transplant process was Hell on earth. I would not wish it on my worst enemy. I was in the hospital for 16 nights and 17 days dealing with some of the worst pain imaginable. I lost parts of myself when I was told that due to the chemotherapy my body has been subjected to, my reproductive system is empty of eggs and therefore I am infertile at 25 years old. I lost parts of myself while living during a snowstorm that made my apartment lose access to power and water for four days, and I had it "easy"; so many people had it so much worse, and some lost their lives. But before any of these losses, I first lost a piece of my soul at five years old, which is the first time I can vividly remember experiencing domestic abuse.

And I am sure I will continue to lose pieces of my soul as I continue life as a Chicana who is on the journey of breaking intergenerational cycles. As Anzaldúa details, the journey of healing is not easy and is a continuous lifelong journey. Healing requires patience with oneself and requires a person committed to the process. However, I am thankful for some of these loses because they have helped me see the ugly that lives in the world. Anzaldúa mentions this insight saying, "Although painful, this shift or shock is

the first step in entering the territory of conocimientos/knowledge, insights that prevailing maintainers of the culture's laws would keep from you" (*Light in the Dark* 86). Using the words "painful" and "shock," Anzaldúa describes the phenomena of recognizing one's soul wounds. She observes that hegemony maintains "culture's laws" and that keeps a person from "insights" to which conocimiento leads you. This push is a space of Anzaldúa's theory of conocimiento.

There are seven spaces total in the path of conocimiento, each signifying a certain aspect of the healing process. Anzaldúa says conocimiento "pushes us into engaging the spirit in confronting our social sickness with new tools and practices whose goal is to effect a shift" (*Light in the Dark* 19). The goal of the seven spaces of conocimiento is healing: space one is el arrebato, where the push to recognize trauma happens (as I have described above); space two is nepantla, where a person sees between the material and spiritual worlds; space three is the Coatlicue State in which a person confronts their desconocimientos; spaces four, the call, and five, putting Coyolxauhqui together, are where a person learns how to overcome trauma; space six is the blow-up when a person rejoins society to "test" their story; and in space seven, shifting realities, this person learns to teach others how to overcome their traumas.

Spaces one through six is where Anzaldúa attempts to heal her self before attempting community healing in space seven. Space one is where self-reflection happens, space two is where a person learns to understand their trauma through the in-between space of the material and spiritual worlds, space three is more self-reflection, spaces four and five is where a person learns more about themselves and how to overcome their trauma, and space six is where a person re-enters society with the

knowledge from spaces one through five. Space seven is where a person attempts community healing after self-healing in spaces one through six. The end goal of conocimiento is to have a healed society that causes no harm to ourselves, to each other, or to the Earth. Conocimiento is an act of healing because a person is actively on the journey of healing their self to try to better themselves and society.

Coyolxauhqui Imperative

Coyolxauhqui, the moon goddess who is dismembered by her brother, resonates with Anzaldúa, and follows her throughout several of her theories, including the Coyolxauhqui imperative. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is one of the seven spaces in the path of conocimiento. This is important because the Coyolxauhqui imperative is a method of healing by itself but serves a higher purpose when placed within the context of conocimiento. This theory focuses on putting back together the self, which alludes to the dismemberment that Coyolxauhqui the diosa endured. Anzaldúa explains this theory, writing,

> The Coyolxauhqui imperative is to heal and achieve integration. When fragmentations occur, you fall apart and feel as though you've been expelled from paradise. Coyolxauhqui is my symbol for the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation, of seeing that self or the situations you're embroiled in differently. Coyolxauhqui is also my symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is an ongoing process of making and unmaking. There is never any resolution, just a process of healing. (*Light in the Dark* 19-20)

Nahua myth indicates that Coyolxauhqui was expelled from her home and into the sky

after her dismemberment at the hands of her brother, Huitzilopochtli. Her fragments are the moon. Anzaldúa equates Coyolxauhqui's dismemberment to any trauma a person may experience. Trauma shakes a person's core, fragments a person's soul. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is the process of attempting to put the self back together.

Anzaldúa gives the reader another definition of the Coyolxauhqui imperative, stating,

> I am often driven by the impulse to write something down, by the desire and urgency to communicate, to make meaning, to make sense of things, to create myself through this knowledge-producing act. I call this impulse the "Coyolxauhqui imperative": a struggle to reconstruct oneself and heal the sustos resulting from woundings, traumas, racism, and other acts violation que hechan pedazos nuestras almas, split us, scatter our energies, and haunt us. (*Light in the Dark* 1)

This definition is slightly different from the first because it has the added urgency. Anzaldúa uses words such as "impulse," "desire," and "urgency" to illustrate the imperativeness of the Coyolxauhqui imperative. The use of "imperative" within the name of the theory suggests urgency, but this definition helps the reader understand the impulse Anzaldúa feels to theorize her experiences. Anzaldúa has a strong desire to make meaning of her pain for the sake of understanding how and why trauma has happened, why she has this desire, and what she wants to get out of this process.

Anzaldúa explains how writing can be healing, expressing,

> For me, writing is a gesture of the body, a gesture of creativity, a working from the inside out…Writing is not about being in your head; it's about being in your

> body…writing records, orders, and theorizes…For me, writing begins with the impulses to push boundaries, to shape ideas, images, and words that travel through the body and echo into something that has never existed. The writing process is the same mysterious process that we use to make the world. (*Light in the Dark* 5)

Theorizing can be healing because it helps a person make meaning of their experiences, including their traumas. Anzaldúa writes because it is the creative act of communicating with her body that helps her make meaning of new and old narratives. She is taking back the scattered energy caused by soul wounds to act positively on her own and then others' behalf by reclaiming old narratives. Storytelling is a method to help tellers and listeners understand narratives. We are able to reclaim past stories, such as the myth of Coyolxauhqui, to rewrite reality. Anzaldúa reflects on "reality": "We revise reality by altering our consensual agreements about what is real, what is just and fair. We can trans-shape reality by changing our perspectives and perceptions. By choosing a different future, we bring it into being" (*Light in the Dark* 21). Storytellers broaden a person's self when rewriting narratives by reclaiming reality. Storytellers are able to prove that identity is relational by creating new realities.

The reader learns that Anzaldúa wants this process to influence her future. She describes how the Coyolxauhqui imperative can influence the future, explaining,

> Though it is hard to think and act positively en estos tiempos de Coyolxauhqui, it is exactly these times of dislocation/separation that hold the promise of wholeness. We must bear witness to what our bodies remember, what el corazón con razón experiences, and share these with others…These healing narratives

> serve not just as self-nurturing "therapy," but actually change reality. (*Light in the Dark* 21)

This excerpt helps us understand the role of the body in the Coyolxauhqui imperative. The body remembers what it has been through, and during estos tiempos de Coyolxauhqui, the body tries to talk to us. We must let our bodies communicate with us, whether it be lying in bed all day to crying in the shower to pretending everything is okay. We must let ourselves feel everything our body wants to feel. This is critical to the healing process. Anzaldúa states in this excerpt that the ritual of letting the body speak is an act of self-care, saying that this "self-nurturing 'therapy'" can help rewrite reality. A person deserves to put all their walls down and feel everything that the body needs to feel. By doing this act of self-care, a person can learn why a certain trauma happened and learn how to prevent this from happening again and to others.

In Anzaldúa's case, she went through several traumas within the Mexican-American community, including forced displacement, loss of culture, loss of language, loss of religion, ethnic hatred, and machismo, which I analyze in chapter one of this thesis. Anzaldúa began the healing process by admitting that she had experienced traumas that affected her, let herself feel what the body needed to feel, theorized how she attempted to heal herself by "bear[ing] witness" to her readers and by trying to teach others how to heal themselves.

Conclusion

Through *Light in the Dark*, Anzaldúa illustrates theories of healing for her readers. Anzaldúa expresses that the goal of healing is "to act positively on one's own and on others' behalf," so healing oneself is only half of the job, with the other half

helping others (*Light in the Dark* 89). But, only once a person has put their fragmented self together are they able to help others. Edén Torres shares insight into how a person must help themselves before helping others writing,

> What we know of power makes manifest our ability to empathize with the sorrows of others dominated by it. We recognize historical mutilation in one another. This means that if we can learn to heal—to make good use of our pain, memory, and rage—that potential for strong and lasting alliances in various political struggles may well become a reality. (Torres 46)

We owe it to ourselves to do the necessary work to heal our self. We as individuals deserve to feel utter comfort in our skin. Once we can call ourselves home, we can open the door to others. Torres makes a great point—Mexican-Americans can easily empathize with other marginalized people because we share similar pain. If marginalized people come together as a collective group, after we have all healed our selves, we can change the world. This is what Anzaldúa means stating the purpose of self-work is to act positively for yourself and others (*Light in the Dark* 89).

A new way of life is necessary to create realities where collective feminist spaces encourage and embrace all voices. Torres states that these collective spaces have the potential to create community if we can heal our soul wounds and come together. Feminist activists must bridge the distance between themselves to create a collective consensual reality. If we change ourselves then we can change the world.

IV. TRAUMATIC CULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN CISNEROS'S *WOMAN HOLLERING CREEK*

Gloria Anzaldúa and Sandra Cisneros both tackle subjects that dominant society consider taboo, such as trauma Mexican Americans face. Both storytellers weave autohistoria and history through their narratives. Anzaldúa is most known for her nonfiction work and Cisneros is most known for her fiction work. Like Anzaldúa, Cisneros's work does not fit into one genre. She writes fiction, but it is realistic fiction, it is true to life narrative. Both authors create texts that give insight into Latinx culture but does not romanticize trauma. Cisneros's writing was first introduced to the world in her chapbook of poetry titled *Bad Boys*. This book was published by *Third Woman Press* in 1980 and contains seven poems, all of which reappear in a later collection of poetry titled *My Wicked Wicked Ways*.

However, the piece of writing that made her known to the world was first published in 1984 and is composed of vignettes titled *The House on Mango Street*. The reason this book became so popular is because of its themes of poverty, racism, sexual assault, etc., that many people can relate to. It is a coming-of-age story told in first person point-of-view by a girl who is about 12 years old. Cisneros incorporates elements of poverty, racism, sexual assault, inconsistent housing, community, family, and innocent adolescence. The stories in *Woman Hollering Creek* are politically charged as well—many give examples of structured violence through the Church and the State, such as "Woman Hollering Creek" and "Never Marry a Mexican." Saldívar-Hull discusses Cisneros's realistic fiction, writing, "The sexual, racial, then geopolitical emerge in the

characters' lived experiences, which are based on Cisneros's own experiences as a working-class woman of color from the borderlands of Greater Mexico" (*Feminism on the Border* 103). Cisneros retells experiences that she has been through and experiences she has heard other people live through. In this chapter, I will analyze Cisneros's short stories, "Woman Hollering Creek" and "Never Marry a Mexican" using a Chicana theoretical lens to argue that Cisneros presents trauma as realistic fiction in order to draw attention to cultural traumatic experiences Mexican Americans may face.

Historical and Intergenerational Trauma in "Woman Hollering Creek"

Woman Hollering Creek is the name of creek in Central Texas. It can be seen off I-10 going towards Seguin, Texas. I have crossed this creek on this highway more times than I can count. My dad lives on land on the outskirts of Seguin, so when it was "his" weekend, my brothers and I would cross this creek to get to our dad's place and then again to get back home to our mom in San Antonio. This creek was named after La Llorona, the wailing woman whose story takes on many variations depending on the storyteller. In this chapter, I follow the version of the tale Domino Rene Perez describes in *There Was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular culture*: "La Llorona is a woman abandoned by the man she loved and left alone to raise their children. Grief or desire for revenge compels La Llorona to murder children and throw their bodies into a river. Despair ultimately contributes to La Llorona's death, and in the afterlife, she is condemned to wander for all of eternity until the bodies of her children are recovered" (Perez 2).

This is más o menos the same story I grew up with. I was first introduced to La Llorona's tale in Laredo where my Tía Esme lives with my cousins. My older cousins

told me that La Llorona's husband left her for another woman and out of sadness drowned her children in the nearby river, that her ghost wears a white dress, that she is found sobbing and searching at night for her children. The tale was a ghost story to keep children from sneaking out at night. Many, many Mexican and Mexican-American people in the Southwest know a variant of the tale of La Llorona. Story has it that this creek in Seguin was named so because people often heard a woman yelling at night. It is important that Cisneros chose a creek that exists, because like this creek, the story of Cleófilas is real too. Cleófilas the character may be fictional,[2] but what she endures is not.

Women's absence of autonomy under patriarchy is an example of intergenerational trauma to which Mexican-American women have been subjected. This can be seen when Cisneros opens the story of "Woman Hollering Creek" with an insight into Cleófilas's life. Cisneros writes,

> The day Don Serafín gave Juan Pedro Martínez Sánchez permission to take Cleófilas Enriqueta DeLeón Hernández as his bride, across her father's threshold, over several miles of dirt road and several miles of paved, over one border and beyond to a town *en el otro lado*—on the other side—already did he divine the morning his daughter would raise her hand over her eyes, look south, and dream of returning to the chores that never ended, six good-for-nothing brothers, and one old man's complaints (*Woman Hollering Creek* 43).

In between the excerpt's imagery and pace are examples of gendered violence that Mexican and Mexican-Americans may face. The text says Cleófilas's father gave her

[2] Archivist Katie Salzmann discovered and noted in print that "the real inspiration" for "Woman Hollering Creek" came from Cleao Solis, a woman that Sandra Cisneros helped escape from her husband (Cleao Solis to Sandra Cisneros, 1986).

suitor “permission” to marry Cleófilas and take her away to a foreign place. This is an example of male hegemony, as men are in control of women’s autonomy. This transaction is between a father and a suitor with no regard of Cleófilas’s autonomy to control whom she will marry. It is very common that transactions like this happen in patriarchal cultures and has happened for generations. In a traditional patriarchal society, women are objects to be exchanged rather than people to be valued for their humanity.

In the same sentence that Cleófilas is being handed over from one master to another, she is also being physically, geographically displaced. The narrator describes, “[Juan Pedro takes] Cleófilas…over several miles of dirt road and several miles of paved, over one border and beyond” (*Woman Hollering Creek* 43). The diction of “several miles of dirt road” and “several miles of paved” illustrates Mexico’s and the United States’ different roadway infrastructure. Cisneros illustrates the physical isolation that Juan Pedro subjects upon Cleófilas. This forced isolation shows the complete absence of autonomy that Mexican-American women may face, whether it be social, economic, or intellectual. Cleófilas resembles the people whose autonomy was and has been neglected by Spanish and French colonizers and Anglo settlers since the 15th century. Like the native inhabitants of the Americas, Cleófilas is taken from her homeland. This shows historical and intergenerational trauma because people of this region have been historically displaced by Spanish colonizers in the 1400s and generations later by American colonizers in the 1800s (Mohatt et al. 128). However, unlike these native peoples, Cleófilas is enthusiastic about her move to el otro lado. She explains, “*Seguín*. She had liked the sound of it. Far away and lovely. Not like *Monclova*. *Coahuila*. Ugly” (*Woman Hollering Creek* 45). Cleófilas is excited to get married, to leave her tiny

hometown, to travel to a new country, and to experience passion. Juan Pedro occupies the role as colonizer in this example by taking Cleófilas away from everything and everybody she knows.

The opening sentence continues to show instances of intergenerational trauma of patriarchal gender roles by which Mexican-American women are subjugated. The text says, "his daughter would…dream of returning to the chores that never ended, and six good-for-nothing brothers, and one old man's complaints" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 43). Cleófilas describes brothers as "good-for-nothing" because in the Mexican-American culture men are not supposed to do any housework. Housework is seen as women's work because men are supposed to be the breadwinners. The use of "good-for-nothing" details that these men do not work outside the home, because if they did, dominant society would not see them as "good-for-nothing." Dominant society dictates men are supposed to work outside of the home, but Cleófilas's brothers do not. So, all the housework responsibility is put on Cleófilas even though her brothers are home and can help. Therefore, Cleófilas describes the chores as "never ending" because she is cleaning up after and cooking for seven men. This sentence describes patriarchal gender roles through gender roles that Mexican-American women may be subjugated.

For trauma to be defined as historical trauma it must be a traumatic event between a shared group that spans across multiple generations. Historical trauma differs from intergenerational trauma as "It is distinct from intergenerational trauma in that intergenerational trauma refers to the specific experience of trauma across familial generations but does not necessarily imply a shared group trauma" (Mohatt et al. 128). I posit that gender-based violence against Latinas is historical trauma because the trauma is

shared between women and spans across multiple generations. Anzaldúa explains that false machismo leads to gendered violence against women, writing, “The loss of a sense of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even brutalize them…Though we ‘understand’ the root causes of male hatred and fear, and the subsequent wounding of women, we do not excuse, we do not condone, and we will no longer put up with it” (*Borderlands* 105). Anzaldúa’s use of the phrase “no longer put up with it” suggests gendered violence has not been a singular occurrence. Instead, as a group, Latinas have experienced gendered violence as a historical trauma that has spanned generations.

Cisneros narrativizes gendered violence between Cleófilas and Juan Pedro, illustrating, “But when the moment came, and he slapped her once, and then again, and again; until the lip split and bled an orchid of blood, she didn’t fight back, she didn’t break into tears, she didn’t run away as she imagined she might when she saw such things in the *telenovelas*” (*Woman Hollering Creek* 47). “The moment” is referring to Juan Pedro physically abusing Cleófilas. Juan Pedro physically abuses Cleófilas because it gives him a sense of control. Juan Pedro has been a victim of the State by being forced to work menial jobs. Antonio Estrada explains historical trauma via structural violence by the State when he says, “Historical trauma (negative social and historical events) has laid a foundation for the socioeconomic characteristics of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, including poverty, underemployment, and low educational attainment, through structured and institutionalized oppression, discrimination, and racism” (Estrada 335). This information explains how Juan Pedro and so many others have been victimized by the State’s oppression. The only area of his life that he has control of is his home. Flores

states racist institutions of the State can produce psychiatric distress (Flores 76). Those with psychiatric distress are more likely to cause harm to others. Therefore, abuse that happens outside the home caused by State sanctioned violence continues inside the home. This quote is also a great example of Cisneros's narrative; the characters of Cleófilas and Juan Pedro are fiction, but their lives are representative of many people and families.

Novelas romanticize the abuse that Latinas may go through. Novelas are a form of cultural transmission, meaning that they teach their audience, who are primarily Latinas, how to respond to abuse. Saldívar-Hull claims, "She responds exactly as the tele programmed her to do; she accepts her place and her submission" and continues to say "Clearly, the media's mission is to transform their largely female audience into consumers, both of material products and, worse, of a conservative ideology: the traditional configuration of the family; women's inherit passivity in fatalism…" (*Feminism on the Border* 109-115). Saldívar-Hull proves how media is complicit indoctrinating its audience by saying this is "the media's mission." The story continues and Cisneros narrates, "She could think of nothing to say, said nothing. Just stroked the dark curls of the man who wept and would weep like a child, his tears of repentance and shame, this time and each" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 48). Cleófilas chooses to console her abuser instead of defending herself or leaving. Isolation is a factor that Juan Pedro has used against Cleófilas, because even if she wanted to leave, how could she? She is in an unfamiliar place, she does not have friends or family near, she does not speak the language, and she does not have access to transportation. In a patriarchal culture, women are taught to acquiesce to the belief that men are superior in intelligence and reasoning abilities and are thus "always right." If a man is upset and beats a young woman, she

must have done something to provoke him. Domestic violence is so common. It is so commonplace in Mexican-American culture that this could happen to your mother, sister, or neighbor. This happened to my mother. This happened to my tías. This happened to me. And it is my burden to carry and to make sure this cycle does not happen to me again for my sake, my family's sake, and our future generations' sake.

Cisneros illustrates that the domestic violence Cleófilas experiences is not isolated and is pervasive amongst Mexican and Mexican Americans. Cisneros suggests this pervasiveness, writing,

> Was Cleófilas just exaggerating as her husband always said? It seemed the newspapers were full of such stories. This woman found on the side of the interstate. This one pushed from a moving car. This one's cadaver, this one unconscious, this one beaten blue. Her ex-husband, her husband, her lover, her father, her brother, her uncle, her friend, her coworker. Always. The same grisly news in the pages of the dailies (*Woman Hollering Creek* 52).

This excerpt is important twofold; one, because it shows the emotional and psychological abuse Juan Pedro puts Cleófilas through, and two, because it illustrates femicide. Juan Pedro tells Cleófilas that she is exaggerating what she knows to be true. Juan Pedro makes Cleófilas doubt her intuition. This manipulation is an example of gaslighting. Domestic abuse is more than physical violence—gaslighting affects the root of a person, their psyche. Another instance of domestic violence can be seen is when Juan Pedro's friend murders his wife when Cisneros illustrates, "Maximiliano who was said to have killed his wife in an ice-house brawl when she came at him with a mop. I had to shoot, he had said—she was armed" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 51). This act of violence is evidence

that domestic violence is gender-based violence and can lead to femicide. Maximiliano's wife had a mop. She could have been disarmed without being murdered. She did not have to die. Cleófilas is reminded that she could be the next victim of intimate partner homicide every day reading the newspaper.

Femicide is the hate crime of intentionally killing women or girls for simply being women. An important aspect of femicide is that most victims knew their aggressor. In 2009 the U.S. Department of Justice published an article that analyzed female victim violence from reported cases from 2007. Catalano defines fatal intimate violence as "violence that includes homicide or murder and non-negligent manslaughter, defined as the willful killing of one human being by another" (Catalano et al. 2). This article indicates that homicide data are voluntarily reported to the FBI by law enforcement agencies, and that the statistics they include are based on the reported crimes. Many crimes against women of color are not given the proper investigations (Catalano et al. 2). The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that in 2007, 14% of all homicides in the U.S. were committed by intimate partners. Of that 14%, women and girls were 64% of homicide victims committed by an intimate partner or family member (Catalano et al. 3). These numbers are from the cases that were reported and investigated properly. I suspect that if women and girls of color homicides were investigated properly, that these numbers would be higher. Femicide does happen. Women are victimized. These statistics and experiences of Cleófilas and Maximiliano's wife are evidence that domestic violence is pervasive amongst Mexican and Mexican Americans.

Cisneros illustrates in "Woman Hollering Creek" the symptoms of historical trauma such as poverty, discrimination, and alcohol abuse that Mexican and Mexican-

Americans may face. Poverty in "Woman Hollering Creek" can be seen when Cleófilas tells Juan Pedro, "[I] know it's difficult saving money with all the bills [we] have, but how else are [we] going to get out of debt with the truck payments? And after the rent and the food and the electricity and the gas and the water and the who-knows-what, well there's hardly anything left" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 53). Cleófilas states that they have "hardly anything left" after paying all their monthly bills. An instance of microaggression towards Cleófilas can be seen when she is at the laundromat with Juan Pedrito when the attendant says, "in this country you cannot let your baby walk around with no diaper and his pee-pee hanging out, it wasn't nice, *¿entiendes*? *Pues*" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 46). This conversation between Cleófilas and the laundromat attendant illustrates discrimination when the attendant says, "this country," which implies that child-rearing is different in Mexico. An instance of alcohol abuse in this short story can be seen when Cleófilas "concludes each [man at the icehouse] is nightly trying to find the truth lying at the bottom of the bottle like a gold doubloon on the sea floor" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 48). The word "nightly" shows that each man at the icehouse comes back every day to repeat abusing alcohol.

Citing socioeconomic characteristics of poverty, underemployment, and low educational attainment, Estrada mentions that these symptoms, such as poverty, discrimination, and alcohol abuse, are symptoms of historical trauma are maintained by the State through structured and institutionalized oppression. Estrada states, "Sociocultural and socioenvironmental influences include targeted marketing of alcohol, accessibility to drugs, disorganized neighborhoods, and increased police surveillance" (Estrada 335). Estrada illustrates present day effects of historical trauma felt by Mexican

and Mexican-American people living in the United States. Evidence of historical trauma can be found when Cleófilas explains how she is dependent on her husband. Cisneros says, “Because the towns [in the United States] are built so that you have to depend on husbands. Or you stay home. Or you drive. If you’re rich enough to own, allowed to drive, your own car” (*Woman Hollering Creek* 50-51). This quote shows how isolated Cleófilas is in her new home in Seguin.

The State discriminates against this group of people through socioeconomic by poverty and other characteristics. Mexicans and Mexican-Americans have been through historical trauma by Spanish colonization and when the United States annexed Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, and Utah. Cisneros describes how spread out the town is, so much so that if Cleófilas needs something from the store she has to ask Juan Pedro to take her or ask him to go without her before/after work, or, if they could afford a second car and Juan Pedro allowed her to drive, she could drive herself. When Cisneros says, “the towns are built so” proves that this is an example of structural violence by the State. The United States engineered their towns to be inaccessible for lower class residents. In traditional heterosexual relationships, the husband is the one who works, and the wife is the one who stays home to clean and raise the children. Because of this, women are doubly oppressed—they are being oppressed by their husband and by the State. In this situation, women are dependent on their husband for economic reasons but also for transportation to access basic needs. The alcohol abuse and gendered violence illustrated in “Woman Hollering Creek” is not an exaggeration, it is the reality for many families.

Cisneros presents an example that illustrates both historical and intergenerational

trauma against Mexican-American women when she rewrites the legend of La Llorona with a feminist lens. Claire Joysmith deduces Cisneros's rewrite of La Llorona's legend stating,

> The rewriting of La Llorona "transshapes" the wandering wailing figure into a Chicana "yell as loud as any mariachi" (Cisneros 1991, 55), a "holler like Tarzan," un grito, that signals freedom and, in this narrative in particular, the possibility of self-expression and a new lease on life for Cleófilas, paradoxically enough, by crossing over the border and returning to her hometown in Mexico (Joysmith 26).

Joysmith states that Cisneros "signals freedom" by rewriting the traditional narrative and gives Cleófilas "a new lease on life," whereas in the traditional narrative she would be a "wandering wailing figure." Cisneros's rewrite of La Llorona can be when Felice drives Cleófilas and Juan Pedrito across Woman Hollering Creek. Cisneros says, "But when they drove across the *arroyo*, the driver opened her mouth and let out a yell as loud as any mariachi. Which startled not only Cleófilas, but Juan Pedrito as well. *Pues*, look how cute. Every time I cross that bridge I do that. Because of the name, you know. Woman hollering. *Pues*, I holler" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 55).

As mentioned before, Woman Hollering Creek was named after the myth of La Llorona, a woman who weeps at night near a body of water for the loss of her children. The purpose of this story is to scare children from going out at night or else La Llorona might find them and keep them. This story that has been told for generations perpetuates a woman's pain. This story teaches children that mothers can be killers. This story teaches children that women can be evil. Sonia Saldívar-Hull examines La Llorona

explaining, “In the Chicano context, the legend of La Llorona typically functions as a masculinist tale that illustrates women’s innate depravity and treachery” (*Feminism on the Border* 156). The story of La Llorona functions as a masculinist tale because it shows that men’s actions have no consequences. La Llorona is to blame for her children’s deaths, but she was motivated by a man’s actions. The story of La Llorona is not intergenerational trauma in the sense that a specific trauma follows a family for generations, but in the sense that the legend shows Mexican-American women in a false light generation after generation for multiple purposes, such as to keep children at home at night or to keep men faithful. Debra Blake claims, “Oral narratives are multiply marginalized by their status as oral; by association with women: even more so by women of color; and by the language in which they are spoken if not standard English, for example, Spanish, black English, or Spanish and English code switching or vernacular” (185). The oral tradition of La Llorona’s narrative is important in Cleófilas’s regard because it shows that she marginalized from working-class background. This story is about one woman’s trauma, but it has been passed down orally for generations, so the new generation are taught to fear of women.

Historically, there is a tale of the weeping woman that predates the Spanish conquest. This rendition of the weeping woman is thought of to be the origin of the La Llorona tale. Perez illustrates the origin stating,

> Some say that she cried out, ‘O my children, we are about to go forever.’ Others heard her howling, ‘O my children, where am I to take you?’ As one of the eight omens that began appearing ten years before the arrival of Cortés in 1519, the Native people attempted to decipher these ‘wonders’ within the framework of

> their worldview… 'Cihuacoatl [an ancient mother goddess], for when something [was] to happen, she [was] the first to predict it, even long before it [took] place' (León-Portilla, cited in Perez 16).

This history shows that the myth of La Llorona predates colonization and shows how she is a goddess that the Indigenous people worshipped (Perez 17). Cihuacoatl is the goddess of motherhood, which is why she was the voice warning the native peoples, her children, of impending doom. Cihuacoatl cries out for her children, much like La Llorona does. Once colonization commenced, the Spanish defiled all the gods and goddess that were worshipped by the Indigenous peoples and made practicing their religion of polytheism punishable by death. The warning of Cihuacoatl eventually became a ghost story to instill fear into children. La Llorona has experienced her own trauma of soul wounds because her legend originated as a mother warning her children, but colonization made her an antagonist in her own story.

Cisneros's allusion to La Llorona demonstrates the historical and intergenerational trauma that was done to Mexican and Mexican-American women, but also takes a step towards reframing this trauma. Traditionally in the Chicanx sense, La Llorona hollers in pain, but Cisneros writes Felice hollering in joy. Saldívar-Hull interprets the ending of this story as communal female solidarity, stating, "'Woman Hollering Creek' transforms a tale of male dominance and female submission and treachery, the traditional tale of La Llorona, into a story of strong women who, in solidarity with one another, transform the powerless lament into a battle cry of resistance against male dominance" (*Feminism on the Border* 106). In Cleófilas's darkest moments, she turns to a community of women to help her. Instead of lying about her bruises, like

she told her husband she will do, she saves money for the Greyhound fare from San Antonio to her hometown. In the journey to San Antonio from Seguin, Cleófilas meets a woman like no other women she knows. Felice is strong, proud, and speaks her mind—not a weeping woman. Cisneros rewrites the tale La Llorona with a feminist lens by liberating her. Felice rewrites history by being a gritona, a woman who hollers in liberation, instead of a llorona, a woman who weeps in pain.

Historical and Intergenerational Trauma in "Never Marry a Mexican"

I first read "Never Marry a Mexican" in Dr. Saldívar-Hull's Chicana Feminist Writers course during summer 2017 at the University of Texas at San Antonio. After my first reading, I was shocked—I thought this story of promiscuity was almost profane. She wanted this story to shock readers. Cisneros chose to write a protagonist who is unapologetically promiscuous because women in the Latinx community are taught to be quiet and submissive. In this section, I will use a Chicana feminist theoretical lens that considers gender, race, sexuality, and class to analyze Cisneros's depiction of historical and intergenerational trauma of Mexican Americans in the short story "Never Marry a Mexican." I argue that Cisneros radically revises the image and narrative of submissiveness by illustrating how trauma is alive in the Latinx community and by offering a narrative of an empowered woman through Clemencia as the protagonist.

The story opens with Clemencia discussing historical and intergenerational trauma of cultural displacement. The protagonist says, "Never marry a Mexican, my ma said once and always. She said this because of my father. She said this though she was Mexican too. But she was born here in the U.S., and he was born there, and it's *not* the same, you know" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 68). This excerpt shows the use of "Mexican"

in two different ways: one as a Mexican national and one as a Mexican-American national. As Clemencia states, the two are very different culturally. This opening paragraph also illustrates internalized racism. Clemencia's mother said, "Never marry a Mexican," but "[s]he said this though she was Mexican too" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 68). Internalized racism is a product of colonialization. Spanish colonizers forced the Indigenous peoples to assimilate to their language, religion, culture, and way of life. This forced assimilation happened again when the U.S. acquired the northern region of Mexico. Mexican-Americans have been forced to assimilate to two different colonizers in the last 500 years.

This historical trauma of cultural displacement has followed Mexican descendants who live in the U.S. in several ways. Hipolito-Delgado et al. states, "The lasting legacy of colonization and U.S. oppression for Latinas/os is self-doubt, self-hatred, and assimilation. The psychological consequences of these are diminished coping mechanisms, arrested ethnic identity development, and lowered self-esteem, all of which have important mental and behavioral health implications" (Hipolito-Delgado 110). Mexican Americans share history of oppression, but Mexican Americans were affected differently by the annexation of lands; each family carries historical trauma differently. Clemencia's mother carries internalized oppression through ethnic self-hatred by warning her daughters to never marry a Mexican. However, the use of "Mexican" here is ambiguous. She could mean a Mexican national, a person who was born in Mexico but now lives in the U.S., or she could mean a person born and raised in the U.S. but is of Mexican descent. A Mexican national is culturally different compared to Mexican Americans because they tend to be stricter when it comes to patriarchal traditional values.

When the United States annexed Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, Nevada, and Colorado by the signing the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 the people who resided in this area were eventually culturally displaced. As previously discussed in chapter one, this shift of citizenship shook this community historically and is still being felt to this day. These people were too Mexican to be welcomed by Americans, but once they adapted to their new dominant culture, they were not welcomed in Mexico either because of this necessary assimilation.

Mexican Americans have suffered historical and intergenerational trauma from Mexicans and Anglo Americans. Both Anglo Americans' and Mexicans' ethnocentrism leads them to believe that their culture and language are superior to Mexican Americans, thus alienating Mexican Americans. Because of this estrangement, they were forced to make their own culture. Cisneros purposefully made the statement "never marry a Mexican" ambiguous to show that Mexican Americans are culturally displaced from Mexican nationals and to illustrate that Clemencia is able to see both perspectives at the same time, much like Anzaldúa's mestiza.

Historical trauma is illustrated further via cultural displacement when Clemencia describes the grief her mother experienced as a Mexican-American woman married to a Mexican man. Clemencia says,

> Having had to put up with all the grief a Mexican family can put on a girl because she was from *el otro lado*, the other side, and my father had married down by marrying her. If he had married a white woman from *el otro lado*, that would've been different. That would've been marrying up, even if the white girl was poor. But what could be more ridiculous than a Mexican girl who couldn't even speak

> Spanish, who didn't know enough to set a separate plate for each course at dinner, nor how to fold cloth napkins, nor how to set the set the silverware (*Woman Hollering Creek* 69).

This excerpt shows the cultural estrangement of Mexican Americans from their motherland's culture by Clemencia's mom not knowing Spanish and not knowing the expected domestic duties of a higher-class household that serves "a separate plate for each course at dinner." This excerpt shows the internalized oppression of Mexican American people because Mexicans deem assimilated Mexican Americans as "not Mexican enough." Hipolito-Delgado et al. explains Mexicans' and their descendants' obsession with whiteness when they state, "In his model of Chicana/o ethnic identity development, Ruiz (1990) argues that the internalization of discriminatory messages leads to the development of ethnic self-hatred, which in turn leads to the abandonment of ethnic identity" (Hipolito-Delgado 125). Mexican Americans have been told that they are not Mexican enough, which is illustrated when Clemencia's mother is given a hard time by her father's side of the family for not knowing the language and for not knowing traditional domestic skills. Because of this and situations like this, Mexican-Americans have internalized ethnic-hatred. In Clemencia's mother's case, she has internalized ethnic-hatred so much so that she has told her daughters to never marry a Mexican. Mexicans give Mexican Americans grief about being Anglicized ever since the U.S. annexed the southwest, making this trauma of ethnic-hatred historically based. Thus, Mexican Americans have historical trauma that is presented as internalized oppression so deeply that they are willing to abandon their ethnic identity.

Clemencia's mother's trauma of internalized oppression follows the next

generation to Clemencia. Her mother's internalized oppression is a symptom of historical trauma, which is now intergenerational since it transmits to Clemencia. This can be seen when Clemencia says,

> Mexican men, forget it. For a long time the men clearing off the tables or chopping meat behind the butcher counter or driving the bus I rode to school every day, those weren't men. Not men I considered as potential lovers. Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Chilean, Colombian, Panamanian, Salvadorean, Bolivian, Honduran, Argentine, Dominican, Venezuelan, Guatemalan, Ecuadorean, Nicaraguan, Peruvian, Costa Rican, Paraguayan, Uruguayan, I don't care. I never saw them. My mother did this to me (*Woman Hollering Creek* 69).

This excerpt is twofold. It shows Clemencia's intergenerational trauma of internalized oppression of ethnic-hatred by lumping different ethnicities as "Mexican," and shows historical trauma of structural violence by the State since the men with blue collar jobs are from a minority. Jean Wyatt explains that while Clemencia's mother's statement likely means to never marry a Mexican national, Clemencia interprets the warning as to never marry a Latino (Wyatt 247). Clemencia showcases her internalized oppression when she writes off any Latino as a potential lover. The psychological consequence of colonization is arrested ethnic identity development (Hipolito-Delgado et al. 110). Clemencia suggests that this symptom of internalized oppression has been inherited from her mother, which makes this evidence of intergenerational trauma.

Anzaldúa describes space one of conocimiento, el arrebato, as: "Although painful, this shift or shock is the first step in entering the territory of conocimientos/knowledge" (*Light in the Dark* 86). Although Clemencia can be an unreliable character, I believe

readers can trust her judgement because recognizing that you have experienced trauma can be painful. Clemencia further proves that colonization has affected many Latin America countries because these are the people working menial jobs. Historical trauma of colonization has laid the foundation for the socioeconomic characteristics of poverty and underemployment through structured and institutionalized oppression (Estrada 335). Clemencia lists all these people as unlikely lovers because she sees them as less than because of job opportunities they are not afforded. Clemencia's words are a reminder that Latinxs are living through the structural effects of historical trauma, and, without recognition of her interconnections with these people, she continues to experience internalized oppression.

Historical trauma is further illustrated when Drew, Clemencia's Anglo-American lover, calls Clemencia "Malinche," a name that alludes to the fall of the Aztec empire. Clemencia narrates, "My Malinalli, Malinche, my courtesan, you said, and yanked my head back by the braid. Calling me that name in between little gulps of breath and the raw kisses you gave" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 74). When the Spanish invaded Mexico, their leader Hernan Cortez was given women as slaves, including a woman by the name of Malinalli, better known as La Malinche. Cherríe Moraga gives more information about the history of Malinche and the fall of the Aztec empire illustrating, "As translator and strategic advisor and mistress to the Spanish conqueror of Mexico, Hernan Cortez, Malintzin is considered the mother of the mestizo people. But unlike La Virgen de Guadalupe, she is not revered as the Virgin Mother, but rather slandered as La Chingada, meaning the 'fucked one,' or La Vendida, sell-out to the white race" (Moraga 99). History views La Malinche as the reason why the Aztec empire fell, because Malinche

supposedly gave Cortez insider knowledge. Now, Malinche is referred to as La Chingada. Octavio Paz, a famous Mexican poet, calls mestizos "hijos de la Chingada" which translates to "children of the fucked one."

This historical knowledge is important because like La Llorona, Cisneros rewrites La Malinche's myth with a Chicana feminist lens. Instead of being the fucked one, Cisneros writes La Malinche as the one to fuck. Another similarity that Drew shares with Cortez is that they are both from European descent. It is White men that are causing traumatic experiences to Mexicans and their descendants. Drew calling Clemencia by this name is a reminder of the harmful past; Malinche is a historical figure who is associated with historical trauma. Clemencia takes control of her sexuality and chooses to exploit Drew, instead of being the one exploited for insider knowledge as Malinche was.

Cisneros further illustrates the effects of historical trauma when Clemencia describes Megan's, Drew's wife, appearance and why Drew would not leave Megan for Clemencia. This is seen when Clemencia says, "[Megan and Drew's child] got the same kind of skin, the boy. All the blue veins pale and clear just like his mama. Skin like roses in December" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 77). This is further evidence of internalized oppression. Society's beauty standards are based on European features of blond hair, blue eyes, light skin tone, such as Megan and her son. Latinxs are taught that the idealization of white skin tone and other typical European physical features are what is beautiful, which leads to internalized oppression by ethnic self-hatred (Hipolito-Delgado et al. 122). Clemencia has been taught that she is not as beautiful as Megan because she has a darker skin tone. Therefore, she allows Drew to compare her to La Malinche, because he fetishizes her dark skin and dark hair, which makes her feel beautiful. However, Drew

keeps Clemencia a secret and would not leave Megan for her. This is seen when Cisneros says, "Besides, [Drew] could *never* marry *me*. You didn't think…? *Never marry a Mexican*. Never marry a Mexican…No, of course not. I see. I see" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 80). Clemencia has distanced herself from Latinx discourse so much so that she does not realize that she is part of the colonized community until her White lover rejects her. Cisneros writes this realization with so much impact. The reader can almost hear the gears spinning in Clemencia's head and her heart breaking as she concludes that she is included in the Mexican discourse. Clemencia's internalized oppression is evidence of historical trauma from the Spanish colonization.

As in "Woman Hollering Creek," Cisneros rewrites the historic traumatic tale of La Llorona in "Never Marry a Mexican." There are usually similarities that Latinx stories possess which incite comparison with the folktale of La Llorona. In these stories, the Llorona-like character is a mother, is connect to a water element, and must have a purpose (folklore's La Llorona searches for her children). Clemencia possesses all three characteristics. Although Clemencia did not birth a child, she claims responsibility for Drew's son's birth saying, "I was the one who convinced [Drew] to let him be born…and I'm the one that gave [Drew] permission and made it happen, see" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 74-75). Clemencia claims she let Drew give his wife a child. She says that this child would not have been born unless it were for her convincing, therefore metaphorically making her a mother since she helps "birth" the son.

Another traditional La Llorona lore element that is seen in "Never Marry a Mexican" is a water element. There is a scene in this story where Clemencia is driving home from visiting Drew's house where Clemencia takes the smallest matryoshka doll of

a set from his wife Megan and then throws the doll into a river. Clemencia recounts, "On the way home, on the bridge over the *arroyo* on Guadalupe Street, I stopped the car, switched on the emergency blinkers, got out, and dropped the wooden toy into that muddy creek where winos piss and rats swim. The Barbie doll's toy stewing there in that muck. It gave me a feeling like nothing before and since" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 82). This scene invokes the water element that incites my comparison of Clemencia to La Llorona. Traditionally, La Llorona is near a body of water searching for her children, but Clemencia near a body of water discarding an object that was treasured by someone she disparages. The creek that Clemencia discards a possession of Megan's is "muddy" where "winos piss and rats swim." These words give the reader imagery of an unappealing creek. "The Barbie" refers to Megan because Clemencia views her as beautiful and perfect, while "stewing there in that muck" shows the reader that Megan's matryoshka doll is submerged in the "muddy creek." Cisneros writes Clemencia as a La Llorona that is vengeful rather than wailing. Clemencia is vengeful towards Drew and his family because he rejected her. Clemencia is metaphorically a mother, is vengeful, and is on a mission. Clemencia says, "And if I killed someone on a night like this?…Except it's not me who I want to kill" (*Woman Hollering Creek* 83). After Clemencia discards the toy of Megan's, she is murderous.

Domino Renee Perez discusses Clemencia as a vengeful Llorona explaining,

> Clemencia in "Never Marry a Mexican" bears a likeness to the vengeful Llorona. The protagonist is capable of any harmful act and seeks married white men with whom to have affairs. La Llorona is not named directly, but we can read the story through the lens of the lore to see the ways in which women become entrenched

> further to liberate themselves from the Llorona-like narratives into which they have been inscribed (Perez 223).

Clemencia liberates herself by experiencing pleasure from promiscuity, from stealing from Megan, from trapping Drew's son in the same toxic love that she has been a victim of from Drew, and from feeling murderous. Cisneros rewrites the historic traumatic tale of La Malinche and La Llorona with a feminist lens in "Never Marry a Mexican" with the character of Clemencia. Clemencia is fucking instead of being fucked over, and she is vengeful instead of weeping.

Conclusion

"Woman Hollering Creek" and "Never Marry a Mexican" illustrate traumas that are specific to Chicanxs. In these two stories, Cisneros chooses well-known Latinx narratives to allude to with her characters. The character Felice in "Woman Hollering Creek" is a feminist revision of the folklore of La Llorona, and the character Clemencia in "Never Marry a Mexican" is also a feminist revision of La Malinche and La Llorona narratives. Cisneros chooses Felice as the metaphorical vehicle to transport Cleófilas and her child to safety. Felice is the opposite of the traditional tale of the woman who weeps and stalks the night for children. Clemencia's character alludes to La Malinche, but Clemencia is opposite of the traditional narrative and is sex positive rather than a sex slave. Like Cleófilas, Clemencia is the opposite of the traditional tale of the woman who weeps, but instead of hollering with joy Clemencia is experiencing pleasure. These two stories illustrate the transformation of Mexican and Mexican-American womanhood that is unlike Latinx society's expectations.

Anzaldúa defines healing as, "taking back the scattered energy and soul loss

wrought by woundings. Healing means using the life force and strength that comes with el ánimo to act positively on one's own and on others' behalf" (*Light in the Dark* 89). Like Anzaldúa, Cisneros creates to theorize the historical and intergenerational trauma of forced displacement, loss of culture, loss of language, and stigmatization of the State she and her community have been subjected. By rewriting the tale of la Llorona and la Malinche with a feminist lens, Cisneros begins the healing journey for these women's narratives. Rewriting traumatic narratives is an opportunity Cisneros offers her Chicanx readers to envision healing through reading her work.

V. COMMUNITY HEALING WITH CISNEROS

Chicana feminist literature was born from the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. During this movement Mexican Americans were advocating for social justice. However, Mexican-American men were the faces of this movement and were not advocating for women's voices. Some Mexican-American women resisted labeling themselves as "Chicana" because of the negative connotation of "Chicano" from the Chicano Movement. But eventually women came together to advocate for themselves. Some of these women even began to teach and write about Chicana feminism in academia. An artist that helps to illuminate Mexican-American women's traumatic experiences is Sandra Cisneros. In this chapter, I analyze Cisneros's relationships with scholars Norma Alarcón and Sonia Saldívar-Hull. I consider Alarcón's and Saldívar-Hull's insight into the Chicano Movement, Alarcón's experience with racism and sexism from colleagues and academia, how their friendship has sustained Cisneros, and how their friendship has influenced Cisneros's prevalence in Chicanx Studies. I apply trauma theory to Cisneros's life and friendships and posit that these scholars' shared trauma—inflicted by academia—is rooted in historical trauma. Cisneros's work paves a path for healing from this trauma as a community.

History of the Chicano Movement

Since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Mexican Americans have been discriminated by hegemonic society. After having been oppressed for over a century, Mexican Americans began to fight for civil rights, and the Chicano Movement was born. The Chicano Movement included strikes during the 1960s and 1970s, which

stemmed from people of Mexican descent who were tired of being considered second-class citizens. A group of people who helped set this movement in motion were second-generation Mexican Americans born on United States soil who came of age during World War II. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, "3.5 million persons of Mexican descent resided in the southwestern part of the United States" of which "more than half were native-born U.S. citizens, and probably about one-third, or just less than one million, were men of draft age" (R. del Castillo 49-50). Over "500,000 Mexican-American men joined the armed services" in this fight "to eliminate racism abroad," from which it became increasingly evident that "discrimination at home was [also] morally wrong" (R. del Castillo 49-50). The Mexican-American identity began to shift as Mexican Americans thought of their place within larger society and "refused to continue to accept their second-class status" (R. del Castillo 49). After fighting alongside Anglo Americans to defend the United States, Mexican Americans "sought to leverage their patriotism and military service for inclusion and belonging in white America" (Foley 149). However, in the post-World War II decades, Mexican Americans continued to face segregation and discrimination.

Having "grown weary of patiently waiting for democracy to take root in the Southwest," Mexican Americans of the post-World War II era, many of whom were now decorated war veterans, banded together to contest "barriers of racism that remained in schooling, housing, and employment, as well as the perception that all Mexicans were immigrants and 'foreigners': criminal, lazy, and diseased" (Foley 148-49). Throughout the Southwest and California, Mexican Americans "fought in the courts to end discrimination and segregation and took to the streets and rural roads to protest low

wages and intolerable working conditions," bringing about "national attention to one of the nation's least understood and fastest growing populations" (Foley 148). Mexican Americans made it their mission to show Anglo America "what being American meant from their perspective," forcing "multicultural America on a path to redefining what it means to be a nation that could no longer ignore, or exploit, its 'brown' citizens in the Southwest" (Foley 148). Thus, the Chicano Movement was born.

During the Chicano Movement's 1969 Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, Mexican-American women attempted to express their concerns about not only racism within Anglo-American society but also sexism within their own culture. However, "Chicano men oppose[d] the efforts of [Chicana] women to move against their oppression," claiming that "it was the consensus of the [Chicano community] that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated" (Vidal 22-23). Inspired by the impact of the Chicano Movement, Chicanas all over the United States began to break away from the Chicano Movement and created small activist groups within their communities. By 1971, over 600 Chicanas gathered in Houston, Texas, to hold the first national conference of the newly formed Chicana feminist movement. Together, Chicanas challenged social institutions that contributed to or were responsible for their oppression.

Chicanx Studies Scholarly Foremothers

The National Chicana Conference of 1971 made history as the first conference focused on Chicana issues, but many were hesitant to join the conference because of the way women were treated during the nationalist Chicano Movement. Some of today's most prominent Chicanx scholars did not identify as Chican*o* during the Chicano Movement, such as Norma Alarcón, Sonia Saldívar-Hull, and Adelaida R. del Castillo.

Saldívar-Hull says, “As I began to journey toward renaming myself as a Chicana feminist, a woman who refused the Chican*o*, I knew too much about women’s issues to submit to the local Chicano movement groups in Houston and serve the male egos coffee along with my intellect, however unschooled it remained” (*Feminism on the Border* 29). Saldívar-Hull had just graduated high school in 1970 and was trying to figure out where she fit in the world. She grew up in Brownsville, Texas, and was no stranger to misogyny, racism, or classism.

Adelaida del Castillo, who has been writing critically of Chicanx studies since 1977, writes,

> [For women], assuming leadership also meant the risk of having one's personal integrity and emotional stability threatened. The revengeful and denigrative campaigns against women by men were the most effective and successful. Commonly, woman in leadership were labeled unfeminine or deviant. At times, women were accused of being sexually perverse or promiscuous, and men were deliberately used to betray them. When a woman leader had a compañero, he was frequently taunted or reprimanded by the other men for failing to keep her under his control. (A. R. del Castillo 9)

History did not record the invisible labor that Chicanas did for the Chicano Movement. The men of this movement did not let women shine. Despite the men’s efforts to claim Movement history for themselves, there were women who shined for their contributions. However, if they were not single, their male partners were taunted for “letting their woman” be so outspoken. And if these women were single, they were called lesbians (as if that is a bad thing) and were taunted as being less feminine than their counterparts.

This movement was not an ally to women.

One of Chicana studies' foremothers is Norma Alarcón. Alarcón earned her Ph.D. in Spanish literature from Indiana University Bloomington in 1983. She also created *Third Woman*, which was a magazine before a publishing press, while in school for her Ph.D. This press is responsible for giving a home to Chicanas' voices when no one wanted to hear them. Alarcón also talks critically of the Chicano Movement, stating,

> In a traditional society organized along metaphysical or cosmological figurations of good and evil, cultural deviation from the norm is not easily tolerated nor valued in the name of inventiveness or 'originality.' In such a setting, to speak or translate in one's behalf rather than the perceived group interests and values is tantamount to betrayal. Thus, the assumption of an individualized nonmaternal voice, such as that of Chicanas during and after the Chicano movement (1965-75), has been cause to label them malinches or vendidas (sellouts) by some, consequently prompting Chicanas to vindicate Malinche in a variety of ways, as we shall see. Thus, within a culture such as ours, if one should not want to merely break with it, acquiring a 'voice of one's own' requires revision and appropriation of cherished metaphysical beliefs. (Alarcón, "Traddutora, Traditora" 63)

Alarcón graduated with her bachelor's degree in Spanish literature with a minor in comparative literature in 1973. So, she would have been aware of the Chicano Movement and its treatment of women. In the quote above, Alarcón says that men viewed Chicanas practicing feminism as betrayal. When men in the Chicano Movement said that they did not want to be second-class citizens anymore, they were speaking for men only and not for women too. When Chicanas began to speak out, Chicanos began to degrade them by

associating them with the person blamed for the fall of the Aztec empire, La Malinche. By using this epithet, men attempted to make women powerless. Alarcón says for women to speak freely, they must rewrite previously held metaphysical beliefs such as religion and gender roles. One of the first women to speak freely of her Chicanx culture and rewrite previously held metaphysical beliefs was Sandra Cisneros.

In her book *Feminism on the Border*, Saldívar-Hull has a chapter dedicated to Cisneros and her writing. Saldívar-Hull describes:

> Sandra Cisneros, faced with triple alienation as a working-class woman of color in an elitist writing program in the Midwest, devised resistance tactics to avoid incorporation by what she calls the 'mainstream.' As the sole Chicana in her graduate program at the University of Iowa Writers Workshop, Cisneros was alien because of her race and ethnicity, alien as working-class woman—alien, that is, as a product of her specific history. Her resistance strategies for survival included writing counter to what was expected of her. (*Feminism on the Border* 83)

Saldívar-Hull mentions that Cisneros's "resistance strategies" are giving voice to the voiceless. Cisneros has created poetry, short stories, novels, memoirs, children's books, and scholarly articles and is still creating to this day. Although an artist at heart, Cisneros is also a teacher. She taught at Latino Youth Alternative High School from 1978-1980 after earning her MFA from Iowa Writers' Workshop. It was at this school where Cisneros taught students who wanted a second chance to earn their high school diploma. After her time at Latino Youth, she taught at various colleges for four years as a visiting professor. Although never hired as a full-time professor, Cisneros's writing is published in scholarly journals and anthologies. However, these publications are very rare. The

remainder of this chapter will analyze her publications in scholarly venues and how her friendships with Alarcón and Saldívar-Hull influence these appearances based on my research from the Sandra Cisneros Papers at the Wittliff Collections. This archival insight illuminates how a pivotal Chicana feminist writer, Sandra Cisneros, helped shape Chicanx literature's canon.

Chicanx Studies Scholarly Foremothers Paving the Way for Cisneros

To research Cisneros's and Alarcón's relationship, I began with their correspondence files. In these files I learned that Cisneros helped Alarcón begin Third Woman Press, which led me research Third Woman's start. In Alarcón's archive, the Norma Alarcón Papers, correspondence between Cisneros and Alarcón began in 1979. In 1980 at the Midwest Latina Writers' Workshop, Alarcón met with several up-and-coming writers such as Cisneros and Ana Castillo, who is considered one of the leading voices in Chicana feminism. On Third Woman's website on its history page, it is revealed that "the idea for [Third Woman] was first, if hesitantly formulated" (C. Ramírez "History"). With the organizational help of Cisneros and Diana Solis, the woman who organized the Midwest Latina Writers' Workshop, *Third Woman* magazine launched in 1981. Cisneros contributed poems to volume 1, issue 1 titled "Josie Bliss," "Traficante," "Mexican Hat Dance," "Something Crazy," and "Sir James South Side." In fact, Alarcón created a writing contributor named Marisa Cantú that gives Cisneros a review of her writing. Catherine Ramírez, the person who wrote the "History" page on Third Woman's website, states,

> Alarcón and her colleagues at *Third Woman* fueled the burgeoning, feminist, woman of color, literary movement throughout the early and mid 1980s by

> inventing themselves. In fact, Alarcón literally invented Marisa Cantú, one of the contributors to Volume One, Number One. In my interview with her, she informed me that she used the pseudonym, "Marisa Cantú," to write a book review in order to make *Third Woman*'s staff appear larger than it actually was. In the book review, Cantú praises the work of a young, promising Chicago-based poet by the name of Sandra Cisneros. Anticipating the young writer's success, she observes, "Cisneros is a talent to watch" (45). Alarcón explained that she wrote the review with the intention of "point[ing] towards a flowering" of Latina—in particular, Midwestern Latina-literature. (C. Ramírez "History")

Even though Alarcón and Cisneros had met just the year before, Alarcón was willing to jeopardize her press's future by creating Marisa Cantú to promote Cisneros's writing. Alarcón must have had faith in Cisneros as a writer and believed that she was going to change Chicana's prevalence in literature, which she did with *The House on Mango Street*, just three years after *Third Woman*'s start. But the most interesting thing about Alarcón's and Cisneros's correspondence files in the Sandra Cisneros Papers is that the earliest proof of their communication begins in 1983. In fact, the earliest correspondence that the Wittliff Collections has from Alarcón is a letter from January 13th, 1983. In this letter Alarcón tells Cisneros, "THIRD WOMAN is the only way we can challenge others to pay more attention to woman writers and also to provide the continuity of that writing and that vision and that existence" (Norma Alarcón to Sandra Cisneros, 13 January 1983). One may wonder: why were the first four years' worth of their relationship not donated to the Wittliff Collections?

Sociologists Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Chana Teeger theorize silence in

collective memory. They state, “While acknowledging that silence is often tightly coupled with forgetting and talk with memory, we wish to expand on the ways in which silence can also be used to facilitate recollection, while talk can be used to enhance amnesia” (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 1104). They theorize that while silence is often associated with forgetting, silence is also a way to facilitate recollection with commemorating and can operate as a vehicle for memory. I suggest that this may be a reason Cisneros chose to withhold the beginning of her correspondence with Alarcón. Although the first four years of their correspondence is not in the Sandra Cisneros Papers at the Witliff Collections, it is in the Norma Alarcón Papers at the University of California, Berkeley. This form of silence is the attempt of Cisneros setting the limits “on what is speakable or unspeakable about the past” (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 1107). By setting the limits of her correspondence with Alarcón, Cisneros is performing “the ultimate example of acknowledgement and remembrance” (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 1108). Cisneros is using silence as a vehicle of resistance to control the way her correspondence with Alarcón is perceived.[3]

When I researched Cisneros’s and Saldívar-Hull’s relationship, I also began with their correspondence files. The Wittliff’s paper trail of their relationship began in 1985. The Sandra Cisneros Papers could not evidence exactly when they met, but Saldívar-Hull

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[3] Similarly, in the Sandra Cisneros Papers, there is only one letter that Anzaldúa sent to Cisneros that is in the Wittliff Collections. In August 1989 Anzaldúa asks Cisneros to contribute to an anthology that she is putting together, but Cisneros says no because she is on a time crunch of her own (Gloria Anzaldúa to Sandra Cisneros, 14 August 1989). However, the Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers at the University of Texas at Austin contain correspondence with Cisneros from 1989 through 1993 and include a manuscript of Cisneros’s *Loose Woman*. I posit that Cisneros is enacting silence as a tool “to facilitate recollection” (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger 1104).

wrote about a conference she attended where Cisneros read. Saldívar-Hull says, "In the spring of 1984, the National Association of Chicano Studies (NACS) held its annual conference at the University of Texas at Austin. At that conference, the publisher Nicolás Kanellos organized a reading by four Chicanas whose works Art Público Press had just published: Evangelina Vigil, Pat Mora, Ana Castillo, and Sandra Cisneros" (*Feminism on the Border* 81). She then goes on to say, "But it was Sandra Cisneros, reading from her just-published *House on Mango Street*, with its Chicago Chicana perspective, that convinced me—finally—that I had found a literature I could work on that would speak to me in a way that Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, or even Virginia Woolf could not" (Saldívar-Hull, *Feminism on the Border* 82). I assume it is at this event where Saldívar-Hull and Cisneros started their relationship.

However, Saldívar-Hull was aware of Cisneros's work before this event. Based on my findings in the Sandra Cisneros Papers, their relationship was nurturing. For example, Cisneros sent a letter to Saldívar-Hull on January 22, 1989, writing,

> Querida Sonia, wanted to say ¡felicidades! on your well-deserved success. Of course, we all knew you could do it. I'm so proud for you. And wow Helena has gone and won an NEA. What a wonderful way for a year to begin! For all of us. There are so many things I want to say thank you for—for the beautiful [illegible] (my favorite color!)—but always for your support, love, faith, for taking my stories with you, on your lectures, papers, and most important, in your heart. Te abrazo, te felicito, Sandra. (Sandra Cisneros to Sonia Saldívar-Hull, 22 January 1989)

Most of the correspondence files between Cisneros and Saldívar-Hull are heartfelt letters

and holiday cards. However, if Saldívar was writing an academic paper that mentioned Cisneros or her writing, it appears she would send drafts via fax to Cisneros for approval. Cisneros's friendship and support of her writing means a great deal to Saldívar-Hull based on their correspondence files.

The scholar that has influenced Cisneros's presence in the Chicanx scholarly field the most is Alarcón and her press Third Woman. Before Cisneros met Alarcón she had published a few poems in her undergraduate school journal, *Cadence* of Loyola University. However, it was Third Woman Press that promoted her work as a poet and a nonfiction writer. Cisneros contributed to *Third Woman* magazine volume 1, issue 1 in 1981; volume 3, issue 1 in 1984; and volume 3, issue 2 in 1986. In 1987 Third Woman Press also published a collection of poems titled *My Wicked Wicked Ways*. Cisneros also contributed an essay titled "Cactus Flowers: Women's Book and Periodicals and Where to Find Them if You Live in San Antonio" in an anthology edited by Alarcón in 1986 titled *Third Woman: Texas and More*. It was with the support of Alarcón that Cisneros was able to be the writer that Chicanx literature and studies needed her to be.

Like Alarcón, Saldívar-Hull created space to nurture Cisneros's prevalence in the Chicanx scholarly field. Although Saldívar-Hull did not run a publishing press, she does run the University of Texas at San Antonio's (UTSA) Women's Studies Institute. In 2006, the Women's Studies Institute named Cisneros the recipient of the Women's Advocate of the Year Award at UTSA. Saldívar-Hull sent Cisneros an email the day before the ceremony to give Cisneros a draft of the speech she created, writing,

> I'm really excited about tomorrow…Let me cut and paste some of what I'll say tomorrow so you can understand the context of the award we're presenting

> you…"Today I am honored to present the Women's Advocate of the Year Award to Sandra Cisneros. From her first publication, *The House on Mango Street*, to her books of poetry, to the short story collection, *Woman Hollering Creek*, to the more recent *Caramelo*, Cisneros has opened up a space to critically engage the domestic sphere as a legitimate site of political theory. Because of her influence, women who once leaned their sadness on an elbow have gone to become educators, politicians, writers, artists and community activists" …Your community work is not as recognized as your literary advocacy for women. With this award, I hope to make people aware of your activism. (Sonia Saldívar-Hull to Sandra Cisneros, 28 February 2006)

An important part of feminism is praxis. A person can teach feminist theory to a classroom of college students but is only a true feminist if they make a conscious effort to practice the theory. Saldívar-Hull practiced Chicana feminism when she created a space to honor Cisneros for her community activism.

Cherríe Moraga states that "this is what being a Chicana feminist means—making bold and political the love of the women of our race" (*Loving in the War Years* 139). Saldívar-Hull practiced Chicana feminism by "making bold and political love" by recommending Cisneros for this esteemed award. This is an instance of Chicana feminists in solidarity with one another. Another example of Saldívar-Hull creating space for Cisneros is by dedicating a chapter of her book to analyzing Cisneros's writing. *Feminism on the Border* is 214 pages long, 44 of which is analyzing Cisneros' border narratives in her fiction books.

Trauma in the Ivory Tower

Cisneros's main supporter over the years was Alarcón. Unfortunately, Alarcón's health took a turn for the worse in 2004 which made her quit running Third Woman Press and teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, which she expresses in a letter to Cisneros in 2005. What is more unfortunate than that is UC Berkeley refused to give Alarcón the severance package she deserved. Alarcón hired a defense team and sued UC Berkeley for what she deserved. When Alarcón needed a letter of support, Cisneros gladly obliged. In her letter of support to Alarcón, Cisneros writes,

> It was her support of my manuscript THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET, and of my first book of poetry published through her press, that gave me great faith in myself in a time when there was little support for work by Latinas, or even recognition of Chicana feminism. Thanks to her press, her critical writing, and her wholehearted support and encouragement, I can call myself an author today…When her life began to disintegrate was precisely when she should have been flourishing; when she was at UC, Berkeley. What we all first saw as a great opportunity became a cross for her to bear, since neither her critical work nor the work of the press was supported by her colleagues or the university. It was a terrible experience for a thinker of this caliber who had devoted her lifework to Latina letters, and she became ill as a result…It is an irony that the institution should have been an environment of support and encouragement of her work, has not given her the compassion and support she deserves, but truly has destroyed her. (Sandra Cisneros to Norma Alarcón, 8 August 2005)

This is just one example of academia promising opportunity and support to women of

color but not fulfilling those promises. Alarcón experienced soul wounds because she has "experience of devaluation" that "marginalized and othered" her (Flores 44). Her soul wounds are presented as her "cross to bear," such as Cisneros has described. Thankfully, Alarcón had Cisneros to support her when academia would not. Cisneros witnessed her friend, Alarcón, combat racism, sexism, and classism by their colleagues and university.

Over the years of Chicanx Studies, life has not improved for women of color professors. When Chicanx Studies began to integrate into academia in the 1960s because of the Third World Strike, women of color professors were not being hired. Women of color did not begin to teach Chicanx Studies until 1967 when affirmative action was amended to include gender alongside race, creed, color, and national origin of nondiscriminatory categories of the hiring process (Zelman 35). Mary Romero is a Professor at Arizona State University and experienced sexism and racism while in this position. She says, "Although hired to teach and do research in specific areas of study, Chicana and other professors of color, report academic positions becoming inseparable from their gender, race, and ethnicity. Not only do Chicanas find the educational institution gendered (Acker 1992) but also class-based and racialized" (Romero 152). Romero wrote this in 1997. Unfortunately, not much has changed for Chicana professors since then.

Margarita Machado-Casas is an Associate Professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio in the College of Education and Human Development, in the division of bicultural-bilingual studies. In 2013 Norma Cantú, Elsa Cantú Ruiz, and she co-wrote an article titled "Laberintos y Testimonios: Latina Faculty in the Academy." In this essay they discuss the sexism and racism that Chicana professors still face today. They say,

“The dismal numbers of WOC (and Latinas in particular) who are in faculty positions from assistant professor to full professor tells a story of the challenges and often hostile environments that they have had to face to survive in institutions of higher education” (Machado-Casas et al 4). Chicanas have had to deal with racism and sexism in academia since they started allowing them in the ivory tower.

These instances of sexism and racism are not isolated events. Academia has a history of “demean[ing] and devalu[ing]” the “essence of a person,”[4] which has been illustrated above. For trauma to be classified as historical trauma, it must have three factors. It must— 1) be traumatic, 2) have affected a specific group of people, and 3) be intergenerational. Although sociologists may consider the term “intergenerational” in the familial sense, I posit that in this instance of abuse from academia, the term can be applied to the interactions of people from different generations. These three instances of trauma expressed by Alarcón, Romero, and Machado-Casas et al. caused by academia happened in 1997, 2005, and 2013. Academia has taken on the role of colonizer in this case because it has caused trauma to a specific group of people over generations. Alarcón’s experience in academia is not isolated because it has happened to other Chicana feminists through generations. Therefore, I posit that Alarcón’s trauma within academia is an instance of historical trauma.

A Small Fighting Unit

Cisneros enacts on one of Anzaldúa’s theories of healing—conocimiento, specifically the space of the Coyolxauhqui imperative. This this theory states healing is a process of making and unmaking of one’s self (*Light in the Dark* 20). Both Anzaldúa and

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[4] Flores’s definition of trauma.

Cisneros mobilize writing as a vessel of the Coyolxauhqui imperative. Both storytellers choose to reframe traditional traumatic instances of Mexican American women's lives to promote new narratives of women friendships. These new narratives of women friendships are acts of healing because they are "using the life force and strength that comes with el ánimo to act positively on one's own and on others' behalf" (*Light in the Dark* 89).[5] In addition with the Coyolxauhqui imperative, Cisneros attempts to heal her self in conjunction with her friendships.

In light of my archival research, I posit that Cisneros creates new narratives in her writing but also in life. Her friendships with Alarcón and Saldívar-Hull illustrate that healing can be done with community. Together these three women practice community healing. Judith Herman states sexual abuse victims had the strongest protection against psychological breakdown by having the morale in leadership of a small fighting unit (Herman 25). Here, I am only extrapolating from Herman's trauma theory, and I am not suggesting that Cisneros has experienced sexual abuse. In Herman's experience working with sexual abuse victims, she notices that those who congregate in solidarity with other sexual abuse victims have a stronger psychic connection. Cisneros chose Saldívar-Hull and Alarcón to have in her group, "a small fighting unit." Alarcón, Cisneros, and Saldívar-Hull's friendship fight white supremacy, cultural stigmas, academia, and any other hurdle that may cause "psychological breakdown" (Herman 25).

Even though Chicanx theory and literature has made strides since the Chicano Movement began, academia mistreats women of color professors. Academia has imposed historical trauma onto Chicana feminist scholars. But, through academia, these women

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[5] This is Anzaldúa's definition of healing.

have found each other and have created new narratives for themselves and their community of Chicana feminist scholars. According to the archive, Cisneros's relationships with Alarcón and Saldívar-Hull has stood the test of time because they are nurturing friendships. Each friendship is a small fighting unit that facilitates healing of their selves. Cisneros and Alarcón as well as Cisneros and Saldívar-Hull check on each other, ask how they are doing, ask if they need any help, and consistently send holiday cards each year. Their connections are more than scholarly, but rather personal, nurtured by the unpaid but nonetheless laborious work of friendship. These women make space for each other and amplify the others' voices and successes. Together, these women actively work together to stop traumatic cycles that dominant society puts women through.

Healing Self by Serving Community

Cisneros enacts healing with her friendships, but also with her passion for serving her communities. Through the years Cisneros has had jobs all over the United States, but she has always served her community in some capacity. While Cisneros was an instructor of Spanish, English, Creative Writing at Latino Youth Alternative High School, Chicago—a school dedicated to previous high school dropouts who return to finish their education—she coordinated the school newspaper and wrote grant proposals for the literary arts component of the school. She was a recruiter and counselor for disadvantaged students as the assistant to the director of the Educational Opportunity Program at Loyola University. As the literature director at Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio she coordinated monthly reading series with local and guest writers; she taught three creative writing workshops to children, teens, and adults; she supervised a poetry-in-the-schools pilot program; interviewed guest writers; wrote

articles for the Center's literary/arts journal; and coordinated the first annual Texas Small Press Book Fair. Cisneros also taught poetry to grades two through five in San Antonio Independent School District as an Artist-in-the-Schools.

Along with having different jobs that served community, Cisneros has organized various programs and projects that serve her community. She has coordinated City Songs, which was funded by the Chicago Council on the Fine Arts. City Songs was a 12-week community poetry workshop for adults. After receiving the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, she founded the Latino MacArthur Fellows, Los MacArturos, into a reunion focusing on community outreach. She founded the Macondo Foundation, which is an association of socially engaged writers that now makes its home at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio. Also, she has founded the Alfredo Cisneros Del Moral Foundation, which she named after her father, a grant-giving institution serving Texas writers. Cisneros is an activist that promotes healing in her community. She is "taking back the scattered energy" caused by trauma and "using the life force and strength" to "act positively on one's own and on others' behalf" (Light in the Dark 89).[6] By serving her community, Cisneros is enacting healing for her community and herself.

In conclusion, the Chicano Movement spurred the Mexican-Americans civil rights movement, but Chicanas, especially, are not free, as they have been subjected to historical trauma from academia. The ivory tower may be a place that oppresses marginalized people, but it has brought Alarcón and Saldívar-Hull together with Cisneros. These women nurture their friendships by creating new narratives for Chicana feminist scholars and heal their selves while healing together. In addition to healing with

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[6] This is Anzaldúa's definition of healing.

her friendships, Cisneros enacts healing with her community activism.

VI. EPILOGUE: A MESTIZA CANCER SURVIVOR'S AUTOHISTORIA

Anzaldúa has given me the knowledge to fill in gaps of my self that I did not know were empty. Because of her writing and influence, I changed my degree path from biology to English. While I was met with resistance from my family, I recognize that being a teacher is the path that I have been destined for. I feel such a pull to literature and to teach others how to read against the grain of patriarchy and colonization. Anzaldúa has fulfilled her task because she has guided me to healing, and now I will guide others. If we, the marginalized, can heal our self and help others to heal their selves, then we can shape what Anzaldúa hoped for—a new way of life.

I am currently going through the Coyolxauhqui imperative. As I write, it is late in October of 2020 and I am going through more hardship than a person ever should. Unfortunately, exactly a year ago, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. After completing the standard chemotherapy regimen for this specific cancer, I rang the bell that signified that my journey was over. However, the regimen only erased about 80% of my cancer. So, I did another chemo regimen for six months. My PET scan in late August showed that I did not have a speck of lymphoma. I was finally done fighting—or so I thought. My primary oncologist told me to visit an oncologist that is specialized in my specific cancer. So, I did. I met with the specialist on a Monday. He studied my complete medical file and told me that my cancer is guaranteed to relapse within five years. He said the only thing that can save my life is an autologous stem cell transplant. The transplant itself is not painful, but the side effects are Hell on earth. He said that the two chemo regimens I have been through have been about a five or six on a scale from one to

10 (with 10 being the worst). He said the chemo that I will be hit with will be an 11.

One of the side effects that concerned me the most was infertility. He recommended a fertility specialist that he refers all his patients to. I met with the fertility specialist that Thursday and told her what my story was. She performed a sonogram on my reproductive tract where she found my left ovary to be empty and my right ovary with two eggs. A person should have anywhere from 10 to 20 eggs in their ovaries at any given time. She said not to worry, there could be several reasons why I am not showing very many eggs, including the fact I have been on the birth control pill for the last seven years. She said that she will draw some blood to run tests that will show how many eggs I have in my fallopian tubes, the egg reservoir, based on my hormone levels. I met with her on a Monday that was two weeks after my initial meeting with the oncologist specialist. She told me that my hormone level was undetectable, which means that my egg reservoir is practically empty. And there is no telling if the few eggs I do have are healthy or have been affected by chemo. And the process of in-vitro fertilization is 50/50—there is no guarantee that an egg will become a future baby. She said that a person in my position should not go through the extra stress, physically and mentally, and financially.

So, I am infertile. Jose, my boyfriend for the last nine years and my life partner, was in the shower during this virtual meeting, so I undress and join him. And I begin to wail. Once I am alone in the shower I sit in the tub and let the water splash over me. Let its pitter-patter soothe my sobs. I could have sat there with my legs crisscrossed for hours. The tub in our first home together is where I begin the life-long process of grieving the children that I will never have. This loss feels real like I have lost real people that I have loved. This loss will follow me for the rest of my life. And I do not know how

to deal with the news that I have not finished my battle with cancer, and I will never be able to have biological children. I do not know what to do from here.

When one tries to heal themselves from trauma, but all the pieces do not fit together as planned, that is when they visit the Coyolxauhqui imperative again and attempt to reconstruct all the pieces of the self again. I planned to finish my master's in two years with an impressive CV and then continue with school for my Ph.D. to become a professor. I wanted to become a mentor, to guide students through their education and life, like how my mentors have helped me. I wanted to become a beacon of light for those who needed it, like how Dr. Ramirez, Dr. Gano, and Dr. Morrison are for me. But my plan did not work out how I imagined, which has been especially hard for me with a Virgo rising. I grieved for the loss of what I imagined for my future. I grieved the loss for what my normal was, and I grieved for what my new normal is now post auto stem cell transplant. I accept that my life was "dislocated" by my illness, and I accept the "promise" that my fragmented pieces will connect in a new form that will serve me better than I could have previously planned for.

Writing this thesis has been a sort of "self-nurturing 'therapy'" because it has given me the time and the space to recognize my soul wounds and attempt to rearrange the fragments of my self. I choose to take bits of Anzaldúa's and Cisneros's theories of healing. I choose to heal my soul wounds with my community and my family. I try my best to uplift those around me and aid in their healing as the best as I can. I will be in the continuous loop of the Coyolxauhqui imperative for probably the remainder of my life because the shock of my cancer and its treatment on top of my intergenerational trauma has altered my reality. But I am in control of my reality, I can choose how to perceive this

life. If I can change myself, then I can change the world.

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