CONCEPTUALIZING DISPLACEMENT THROUGH POETRY: AN ANALYSIS OF PERSIAN AND CHICANA POETRY THROUGH EMBODIED WOMEN OF COLOR FEMINISMS

by

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In this thesis, I view poetry as a site of revelatory self-(re)envisioning through which one's lived and learned experiences of displacement can be distilled, processed, and shared. From my lived experience as a Persian American woman who cannot step foot in Iran, I feel how poetry gives me a voice to name my complex experiences of (be)longing. From my work with Chicana feminisms and poetry, I see how poetry is utilized to conceptualize Chicana identities that experience ambivalent belongings due to the (re)designation of the US-Mexico border. As I analyze poetry written in the late 20th and 21st centuries by Persian and Chicana writers, I ask: How does poetry hold space for the lived realities of (be)longing experienced by poets who have undergone displacement, whether firsthand or otherwise?

My choice to center Persian and Chicana poetry allows me to honor my lived knowledge as a Persian American poet and academic engagement with Chicana and women of color feminisms, as well as comparative literature analytical frameworks. In this thesis, it is crucial to draw upon Persian and Chicana theorization as well as women of color feminist theory. Writers whose work I engage include Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Mariana Ortega, María Lugones, Shireen Roshanravan, and Sara Ahmed. With the support of their theorization, I

illustrate how Persian and Chicana writers express their experiences of displacement through poetry to conceptualize identity and (be)longing through displacement. Major themes identified in this self-conceptualization include lived contradictions, identity multiplicity, "world"-traveling, an imaginary homeland, and the shared corporeality between poet and poem.

As I write, I bring historical context, feminist theorization, and close readings together to support my argument that poetry is a tangible site through which to conceptualize the personal and the political of displacement. This thesis also involves a personal creative element, as I analyze three of my own poems and include my poetry collection, *The Sad Songs Are Not Sad, Just Distant,* as an appendix.

Acknowledgements

I am thrilled to be presenting this thesis to my audience and reader at this time, after many months of researching, writing, and revising. At the same time, it would feel disingenuous to claim that this thesis reflects the work of one year—in truth, it holds a culmination of passions and curiosities I have had the privilege to explore throughout these past four years at UO. I am indebted to my many academic mentors who have recognized and deepened these research interests; whose teachings have expanded my ways of thinking; and whose wonder has inspired my own. These last two thoughts extend to the brilliant women of color feminist theorists centered in this thesis. Each time I revisit their theorization I experience a renewed desire to be/do/act in this world.

I am profoundly grateful for the support of my two main thesis advisors, Dr. Isabel Millán and Dr. Leah Middlebrook. These mentors approached this thesis with immense thoughtfulness and generosity, all while imparting their invaluable expertise. I am particularly appreciative of how fully they've held the nuance of the topics at hand, as well as my own identity, as I navigated writing this thesis.

This thesis is infused with the radiant energy of my closest friends. Whenever I felt weary, frustrated, or enthused during the process, these individuals received me with an abundance of love and care. I am so lucky for them.

Thank you to my grandfather, Abdi Baba, and to my grandmother, Maman Lila, for coloring my childhood with a rich feeling of togetherness. When explaining my thesis topic to my grandfather, he leapt into a discussion about poetry as an imaginative space—I hadn't even referenced this idea yet! He is a force in this world.

My mother, father, and sister have provided me with a sensitivity toward recognition, community, and self-knowing, all of which shape this thesis. Thank you to my Mama, Karen, for raising me with the gentle observation that only a poet-parent could offer. Thank you to my Baba, Aria, for instilling within me a love of words, rhythms, and playfulness. Thank you to my ultimate inspiration—my sissy *joon*, Ava. Watching you move through the world gives me the courage and language to do so myself.

Table of Contents

Poem Index

Introduction

Every inheritance is a compass.

Autumn at midnight, the forest sky
is every bullet-scattered brain
caught into white stuttering fire,
a canvas of sustained thought.

Uncertainty, too, is riddled with light.

-Shabnam Piryaei

As a second-generation member of the Persian diaspora, my identity is built from stories of an impossible-to-reach, ever-present imaginary homeland. Ever since I was a child, I have felt a deep desire to read poetry—it feels like the lines of a poem can hold aching truths that a person alone cannot carry, that can only be expressed by written, serendipitous intentionality. As I grew into my early adulthood, I began writing my own poetry. The imaginative space of a poem reveals aspects of me to myself and, over the past year, I have been working on a collection of poems that conceptualize the multiplicities, contractions, and embodied knowledges which are informed by my heritage of secondhand displacement and shape my identity. My collection is called *The Sad Songs Are Not Sad, Just Distant*. The contradiction is at hand in this title—the Persian songs which I call sad are not truly sad, yet my distance from them reshapes them as such.

My understanding of the relationship between identity and poetry is shaped by embodied women of color feminisms. This area of feminism houses many brilliant authors. My starting point in investigating the role between poetry and displacement comes from Audre Lorde's 1977 essay "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in which Lorde writes that "Our poems formulate the implications of ourselves, what we feel within and dare make real (or bring action into accordance with), our fears, our hopes, our most cherished terrors" (1). To Lorde, a Black lesbian essayist and poet, poetry is both an act of illumination and a site of revelatory (re)imagination through which one's lived experiences are distilled, processed, and shared. This visionary potential is crucial to writers who navigate themes of displacement and identity multiplicity in their work. Chicana[1] feminist discourses of identity at the United States-Mexico borderlands also demonstrate how poetry is used to conceptualize identities that are confronted by borders and displacement. Poetry by Chicana writers is a key factor of Chicana feminist theorization, and creative writing—or writing that centers the author's embodied experiences—is considered a methodology of self-understanding, coalition-building, and resistance against oppressive dominant discourses. As Cherríe Moraga, a queer Chicana feminist and theorist, writes, "here, in the underbelly of the 'first' world, women of color writing is one liberation tool at our exposal" (2015, 13). This writing is both political and personal at the same time.

Gloria Anzaldúa is one such Chicana feminist poet-theorist. In her revelatory book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) Anzaldúa strikingly intertwines her artistic and academic writing, creating a body of work where theory exists as an extension of the self,

[1] I use the term "Chicana" in congruence with the terminology used by Chicana feminist theorists whose work I engage. Today, this terminology is challenged for its gendered approach. Instead of using the term "Chicana," many individuals, scholars, and activists use terms such as Chicanx or Chicane to demonstrate gender neutrality. This switch demonstrates how feminist thought seeks to include everyone, not just women, into its conversations. I use Chicanx when referring to the broader community.

never impersonal nor purely objective. Throughout chapters of feminist theory, vignettes of memories, and powerful affirmations of her "hybrid" identity, Anzaldúa weaves a thread of poetry into her book, merging the worlds (and words) of theory and lived experience. She writes, "I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence" (Anzaldúa 1987, 59). Anzaldúa's testimony-theory methodology dialogues with "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in that both authors center poetry as a way to understand one's experiences of rupture, contradiction, and (be)longing. Like Anzaldúa and Lorde, poetry is the space in which I conceptualize my fears, hopes, and terrors. For me specifically, such states of being, questioning, and imagining resonate most deeply with my Persian diasporic identity.

When I first read Anzaldúa's work in *Borderlands/La Frontera,* I felt my self-conceptualization shift. My family was exiled from Iran in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution and, to this day, it is unsafe for us to visit Iran. Because of this, my Persian cultural identity is built through knowledge of a place I cannot physically know. There are many painful and beautiful aspects of such an identity; oscillating between experiences of longing and belonging created a profound identity insecurity within me. Though Anzaldúa speaks to Chicanas in *Borderlands/La Frontera,* through her language I realized that the identity contradiction and multiplicity I had experienced throughout my life was not necessarily negative. Moreover, I suddenly gained the vocabulary to articulate this. Like Anzaldúa, I had the power to reclaim my cultural ambiguity and flexibility through creative writing, developing an understanding of myself that does not downplay contradiction or fragmentation, but rather dialogues between and through these ways of being.

From my lived experience as a Persian American poet who cannot step foot in my "homeland," I feel how poetry gives me a voice to name my complex experiences of (be)longing to a nation and culture I cannot fully immerse myself in. From my work with Chicana feminisms and poetry, I see how poetry is utilized to conceptualize Chicana identities that have undergone continual displacement due to US imperialistic and settler colonial designations of the US-México border. In this thesis, I analyze how poetry is a site of revelatory self-(re)envisioning through which one's lived and learned experiences of displacement can be distilled, processed, and shared. To do so, I employ an embodied woman of color feminist theoretical lens as I analyze poetry by displaced Persians and Chicanas. As a specific area of feminist thought, tending to situational intricacies and conditions, Chicana feminisms exist as a unique genre. At the same time, the corporeality of Chicana feminisms, as well as the position of Chicanas as women of color, prompts me to include this theorization within embodied women of color feminisms. By drawing upon a more expansive category of feminist theory, I find deeper connections between poetry and displacement, emphasizing the relationship between women of color and writing which centers body, place, and self.

In this thesis, I use "Persian" to describe ethnicity and "Iranian" to refer to nationality. This terminology is often contested; the term "Persian" is riddled with notions of racial purity which erase the multiple ethnic identities of Iranians, and I do not condone this usage. In fact, I would argue that this erasure works against women of color feminist theorization which seeks to understand the intersections between race, ethnicity, and gender in order to provide relevant frameworks of liberation from these interconnected oppressions. Though this topic is important and generative to this thesis, providing a full discussion on Iranian ethnic identities and their treatment inside and outside of Iran is currently outside of my scope. I move between using

"Persian" and "Iranian" to describe the physical position of the poets whose work I analyze and to speak to my larger goal of complicating narratives of displacement that obscure or downplay the role of place in understanding identity. For example, while I analyze poetry from displaced Persian perspectives, not all of these poets have the same relationship with or access to the homeland, and they certainly cannot be categorized as being solely of "here" or "there." If I depart from this terminological pattern, it is to reflect one's own language of self-identification. This, too, points to important elements of place and selfhood through experiences of displacement or diaspora—one's own identity is never static but always negotiating an inside-outside dynamic that informs their poetic voice, as well as the language they use to self-refer.

For Persian poetry, I will be focusing on poetry that was written outside of Iran following the 1979 revolution. Poems analyzed in this thesis are written by Granaz Moussavi, Sahra Aalaei, Sheila Sadr, and Farnaz Fatemi. I also will be analyzing three of my own poems to speak to a second-generation Persian experience of displacement. The Chicana poets I engage with include Anzaldúa, Moraga, Lorna Dee Cervantes, and Sandra Cisneros. Though I only include poetry by displaced women and gender nonconforming writers in this thesis, the poetry I analyze is not always overtly feminist. While not limited to a women-only perspective, embodied women of color feminist frameworks are important to this thesis for their sensitivity to the added nuances of oppression, struggle, and world-making experienced by women and gender nonconforming individuals. For example, a displaced Iranian woman living in the United States may experience a more extreme version of "world-traveling" as posited by the Latina theorist María Lugones due to her "traveling" between both gendered and cultural identities. Perhaps existing around or writing for other displaced women opens a world and discourse that is doubly removed from the mainstream social environment. This idea interests me greatly, and I anticipate working with the

specific nuances of women's experiences of displacement through feminist frameworks in my future research.

The practice of writing poetry to conceptualize identities that have undergone displacement is not unique to Persian or Chicana poets. My choice to center these two perspectives within poetry of displacement stems from my most immediate resource, which is my lived knowledge as a Persian American poet, and the prolific nature of Chicana poetry and poetic self-theorization, which is exemplified by Anzaldúa's *borderlands* theory and Moraga's *theory in the flesh.* These concepts and theories are crucial in *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color,* an anthology of women of color feminist theory and writing which was co-edited by Anzaldúa and Moraga in 1981. Demonstrated through the collection of pieces in *This Bridge Called my Back,* writing as a tactic to understand oneself and one's lived experiences of oppression is an important element of women of color feminist theorization. Among women of color feminist theorists, I draw most heavily upon Anzaldúa, Moraga, Lorde, Lugones, Mariana Ortega, Shireen Roshanravan, and Sara Ahmed.

For these reasons, I analyze Persian diasporic poetry and Chicana poetry through Chicana and embodied women of color feminist theorization, asking: How does poetry hold space for the lived realities of (be)longing experienced by poets who have undergone displacement, whether firsthand or otherwise? What does embodied knowledge offer the displaced poet and poem? As I explore these questions though close readings of Persian and Chicana poetry, I demonstrate how poetry facilitates a creative (re)envisioning of one's disrupted identity through centering lived contradictions; traveling between worlds, languages, and knowledges; and centering the corporeality of lived knowledge through the poem itself.

This thesis will follow the movement outlined above. In the first chapter, I describe the theoretical frameworks I use in this thesis, focusing specifically on Chicana and embodied women of color feminisms. I then discuss my decision to focus on Persian and Chicana poetry, drawing upon the feminist frameworks I have outlined to demonstrate the coalitional potential between lived realities of displacement that are conceptualized through the imaginative space of poetry. Next, I provide context on the Persian and Chicana experiences of displacement to which I refer by conducting a historical analysis of the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran and the 1848 imposition of the US-Mexico border, as well as the contemporary consequences of these historical events. This will involve a discussion on imaginary homelands, which I see as a similarity between Persian and Chicana poetry and experiences of displacement. Finally, I provide definitions of specific terms and concepts used in this thesis, including home and imaginary homelands; poetry, understood specifically through Lorde's theorization; and the concept of *autofantasía.*

The second chapter of this thesis focuses on poetry as a site to navigate Persian and Chicana poets' experiences of contractions within and between their identities. This idea will be explored in greater depth in the third section of my paper, where I talk about identity multiplicity born of displacement. However, at this early point in the thesis, I will focus on how Persian and Chicana theorists and poets think about and (re)envision the displaced writer through writing about lived contradictions. I will be conducting close readings of three poems that contend with identity contradictions. Anzaldúa's *mestiza consciousness* will be especially important here as I ask how the poet (re)envisions their identity through the contradictions they experience.

In the third chapter, I embark on a deeper analysis of what contradictions reveal, being the multiplicitous subjectivity of a displaced/diasporic identity. I rely heavily upon Ortega's

theorization of multiplicitous subjectivities and Lugones' idea of world-traveling. This analysis moves beyond observing contradiction, demonstrating how the imaginative space of poetry facilitates a site for traveling between cultural fluencies and knowledges. Here, I show how the flexible and imaginative space of a poem holds space for one's multiple shifting (be)longings, knowledges, and versions of self. The idea of a poem as an imaginative space is concept I draw from Lorde's understanding of poetry as a medium in "Poetry is Not a Luxury," in which she understands a poem to hold one's innermost truths and possibilities for world-building. I include five close readings of poems in this section to provide examples of the many ways multiplicitous subjectivities are represented in poetry.

In the fourth chapter, I provide a more formal analysis of embodiment in poetry, drawing upon embodied women of color feminist theory which views writing as method of self-understanding. Not all the embodied women of color feminist theory I utilize contends with displacement specifically. However, these voices provide important perspectives on how, for women of color, the practice of writing from embodied experiences of displacement is an act of resistance against expectations of identity as one-dimensional within a US context. This specifically impacts people of color who are asked to legitimize their "American" identity by performing or erasing their cultural/ethnic/non-white racial identities. Moraga's theorization is relevant here for her attunement to the relationship between embodiment, identity, writing, and liberation. Her idea of "theory in the flesh" will be put in dialogue with Lorde's "Poetry is Not a Luxury" to provide context on writing through embodiment. Ultimately, I propose that with embodied knowledge as subject matter, a poem holds space for a poet's lived experiences and takes on its own corporeality, existing as a parallel body to the displaced poet's. This is examined

specifically in the shape of a poem itself and the poet's use of metaphor to intertwine their being with poetic techniques and the space of the poem.

In my conclusion, I will gesture toward potential areas of research expansion, reemphasize the coalitional implications of this thesis, and speak to specific discourses and policies of repression that have affected Persian women and Chicanas in more recent years. After the conclusion, I will be including my own poetry collection as an appendix to this thesis, which includes the three pieces I have close read in chapters two, three, and four, as well as pieces that I do not discuss. My collection is made of 11 poems. I hope that the women of color feminist frameworks of thought I center in this essay, and specifically Anzaldúa's testimony-theory framework, can guide the reader as they engage with my body of work.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Frameworks, Histories, and Recurring Terms

Though much research has been done on Persian poetry and Chicana feminist theorization independently, it is rare to see these areas of thought put in dialogue, and it is even rarer to see an approach that looks at Persian poetry through an embodied or Chicana feminist lens. From my personal perspective on displacement and my academic engagement with Chicana feminisms, I see this as an oversight. There is much to be revealed by putting the liminality navigated by Chicana poets in dialogue with displaced Persian poets. Chicanas, who are Mexican American individuals who were born in or migrated to the United States, can experience ambivalent belongings and relationships to the United States as both their country and not their country. This ambivalence is owed to the US's settler colonial and imperialist occupation of Mexico in the 19th century, in which Mexican territory was claimed and renamed as the Southwestern states. Chicanx people, therefore, experience a form of internal displacement, and the pre-1848 homeland Mexico is most accessible through imagination and intergenerational memory. Persian experiences of displacement post-1979 are more external, in that the displaced Persians I speak of live outside of Iran. This displacement and the complex (be)longings resulting are owed to the Islamic Republic's co-option of Iran, the impossibility of return for many displaced Persians, and a changed homeland. Though the historical impetuses for these realities of displacement may not converse fluently, the identity contradictions, ambivalences, and (be)longings explored by both poetic perspectives certainly can. In this chapter, I will review the theoretical frameworks that are important to this thesis, address my decision to center Persian and Chicana poetry, provide guiding historical context on Persian and Chicanx histories of displacement, and define the ways I think and write about certain terms in this thesis.

Theoretical Frameworks

While most of the literature I draw upon fits within the genre of embodied women of color feminisms, it is relevant to be more specific when reviewing certain texts and areas of feminist thought. To begin, I would like to discuss Chicana feminisms, which largely inform this project. Two major theorists whose work I engage are Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga. These authors have contributed foundational material to Chicana feminisms, demonstrating how Chicana feminisms exist as their own framework of thought which speaks to the nuances of oppression experienced by Chicanx people. At the same time, Anzaldúa and Moraga draw upon other women of color feminist theorists themselves, speaking to the coalitional solidarity that can be built when women of color theorists and writers from different backgrounds come together. This is seen especially in *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color,* co-edited by Anzaldúa and Moraga and first published in 1981, which provides an anthology of women of color feminist writing from the late 20th century.

Chicana feminist frameworks of thought, selfhood, and identity are crucial to this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, Anzaldúa and Moraga refuse to separate the theorization and creative writing they produce. As an example, this is seen in Anzaldúa's *mestiza consciousness,* where she posits that repairing the damage of identity fragmentation comes from finding power in one's ambiguity and developing one's own language of self, value, and image (1987, 103). This concept is also seen in Moraga's idea of theory in the flesh, where the body and its lived experiences cannot, and should not, be removed from one's writing and theorization (2015, 14). Given the emphasis on selfhood and identity in these theories, when I analyze Chicana poetry it is crucial to draw upon Chicana feminist theorization as well. Secondly, I emphasize the importance of Chicana feminist frameworks in this thesis because it was this area of thought that

led me to my thesis idea. As mentioned earlier, Chicana feminist theorization formally introduced me to themes of in-betweenness, ambiguity, and language as they relate to one's cultural identity—this provided me with language and frameworks to explore and affirm my own Persian identity while paying attention to the nuances of Persian selfhood and experiences of displacement.

This thesis relies heavily on Anzaldúa's and Moraga's writing. I am guided by Anzaldúa's books *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and *Luz en lo oscuro/Light in the Dark* (2015)[2]; *This Bridge Called my Back: Radical Writing by Women of Color* (1981), co-edited by Anzaldúa and Moraga; Anzaldúa's letter-essay "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers," which is included in *This Bridge Called My Back*; and *The Last Generation* (1993), a book of prose and poetry written by Moraga. I also draw upon the works of other Chicana feminist theorists such as Mariana Ortega, the author of "Multiplicity, Inbetweenness, and the Question of Assimilation" (2008), and the Chicana members of the Latina Feminist Group, who helped write *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2001).

Aside from Chicana feminist theory and writing, authors I engage within women of color feminist theory include Audre Lorde, María Lugones, Sara Ahmed, Shireen Roshanravan, and the Latina Feminist Group. It will be critical to explain what I mean by women of color feminist theory and embodied women of color feminist theory within context of this thesis. Principles of women of color feminist theory, specifically through a Black feminist lens, are illuminated by *The Combahee River Collective Statement* (1977), in which the Combahee River Collective describe that

[2] *Luz en lo oscuro/Light in the Dark* is a collection of Anzaldúa's work which was published posthumously. This book provides an in-depth overview of Anzaldúa's theorization as it relates to spirituality, marginalization, identity, and events of the 21st century. Though I do not directly cite material from this book, it has shaped my understanding of the relationship between one's life and writing.

> The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people. We are of course particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex, and class are simultaneous factors in oppression. (Combahee River Collective, 1977).

Counter to white feminism of the 20th century, which had excluded women of color from feminist spaces, women of color feminists and collectives of the late 20th century gave name to women of color feminist consciousnesses by highlighting the intersecting systems of oppression that inform sexism, racism, and classism. Kimberlé Crenshaw defines this as intersectionality.[3] Embodied women of color feminist theorization builds from this framework, emphasizing the bodily experiences of oppression faced by women of color which, within a US context, are informed by legacies of colonization, slavery, and xenophobia. The writers I draw upon in this thesis write about and from different communities, moments, and frameworks. Despite their differences, I have found that, as a common thread, women of color feminist theorists critically analyze and reimagine the body—both in terms of identity and position—through observing and reinventing the relationship between these multiple oppressions and the body.

Related to self-understanding and reimagination, in this thesis, I complicate traditional methods of analyzing and writing about poetry through diverging from the traditional distinction between poet and speaker. Instead of referring to "the speaker" in my analyses, I use the poet's name. This deliberate decision is rooted in my commitment to understand and treat the personal as political in poetry, which exists in dialogue with the women of color feminist theory I draw upon where multiple authors implore women of color to write from themselves, for themselves,

[3] See "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" (Crenshaw 1989)

and for other women of color. To treat poetry in this way is highly revelatory but can also be controversial for its potential reduction of a poet's technical capacities and obfuscation of the boundary between autobiography and fiction.

In regard to the potential reductive quality of this type of reading, I posit that reading a poem through the lens of a poet's personhood is consistent with the embodied women of color feminist theory I draw upon in this thesis. By reading the speaker's voice as the poet's, I employ Anzaldúa's argument that there can be no separation between life and writing, which is stated most explicitly in her letter-essay titled "Speaking In Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers." Anzaldúa writes that "the danger in writing is *not fusing* our personal experience and world view with the social reality we live in, with our inner life, our history, our economics, and our vision" (1993, 170, emphasis mine). This argument converses with Lorde's view of poetry as the distillation of feeling, rather than the abstraction of it (1).

As a method of exclusion from the institution of academia, poems by women of color poets are often denied the technical analysis they deserve. This is one form of marginalization women of color writers face. While I attend to the poetics utilized by the poets in this thesis, it feels equally important to me to root my analyses in the understanding of poetry as a medium which is inextricably tied to a poet's personhood. This hybrid approach is used to affirm the technical expertise of these poets while acknowledging poetry's capacity to hold one's innermost truths. I certainly do not intend to propose this reading as the only "correct" or appropriate way to analyze these poems. Rather, I believe that this type of reading mobilizes women of color feminist teachings on the intrinsic relationship between selfhood and writing through its provocation of the separation between poet and poem. I deviate from this decision in my close

reading of Cisneros' poem to attend to the specificities of her writing technique. Beside this, all the poems in this thesis are analyzed through the framework of poet-as-speaker.

In response to the tension between autobiography and fiction posed by this framework of analysis, I draw upon a concept developed by Isabel Millán called *autofantasía* which is informed by Anzaldúa's idea *autohistoria. Autofantasía* is described by Millán as a literary technique which injects the self (*auto*) into text in real, imaginative, and fantastical (*fantasía*) ways (202). Millán writes:

> The utility of autofantasía then lies in emphasizing both autobiographies and fantasies as forms of fiction. Both autobiographical fictions and fantasy fictions collide into autofantasía as a fictionalized narrative or literary technique. (203-204).

While Millán speaks specifically to the incorporation of the author in children's literature, the idea of *autofantasía* as a method to blend together and communicate autobiographical and fictitious events is relevant to my reading of the poet's role in the poetry they write and the idea of poetry as an imaginative space. While I do not mean to assume that all the poets whose work I analyze in this thesis write from the "I," I deliberately intertwine the poet and the poem in my language of analysis to speak to Lorde's understanding of poetry as a personal production, written from the self, and women of color feminist theorization that emphasizes the importance of incorporating one's identity into one's creative writing. By complicating the presupposed boundary between autobiographical "nonfiction" and fiction, *autofantasía* names a third space where an author can incorporate their own experiences within their work while still holding the agency to expand upon, reshape, or reimagine the events of their life.

In the case of poetry of displacement, embodied women of color feminist theory provides an important lens through which I can explore the poet's treatment of body, language, and place. The writers mentioned below contribute to a women of color feminist way of thinking and being that is important to my analysis of poetry in this thesis, though their work is not necessarily connected. Lorde's understanding of poetry in "Poetry is Not a Luxury" (1977) is crucial to my treatment of and definition of poetry throughout this thesis, and it was also this essay which led me to this project and my own poetry writing. Lorde is a Black lesbian feminist with a family history of displacement, and through her identity, she reimagines language as a deeply bodily and intuitive expression. Ideas of language, subjectivity, and self-expression are important to Lugones as well, and in "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception" (1987), she posits that individuals with multicultural identities must travel between the "worlds" of their identities, using their cultural fluencies to exist wholly in (often contradictory) spaces of belonging. This argument is grounded in Lugones' navigation of her Latina (Argentinian) identity, both internally and externally. In "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement" (1999), Ahmed also navigates themes of belonging as she argues that home for a migrant or displaced person is the contradictory space in which one is *almost* at home. Ahmed's theorization provides context for my definition of an imaginary homeland and the displaced poet's relationship to this space through body and language. These contradictory experiences are theorized upon by Ortega in "Multiplicity, Inbetweenness, and the Question of Assimilation" (2008) through the idea of multiplicituous subjectivities, in which individuals with two or more cultural identities must negotiate these whole aspects of themselves. By paying close attention to the complexities of a multiplicitous subjectivity, there exists greater potential for coalitional solidarity. Finally, in "Passing-as-If: Model-Minority Subjectivity and Women of Color

Identification" (2010), Roshanravan speaks on meaningful and lasting coalition by writing about the role of ambivalently racialized "model-minority" subjectivities, describing the simultaneous liminality and privilege of this position. Though these authors contend with diverse themes of being, their treatment of the body and examination of its position provide crucial frameworks of analysis to understand the nuanced themes explored by displaced Persian and Chicana poets.

Regarding my work with what a displaced or exiled poet looks like and contends with, an important part of this thesis comes from literary criticism which is not overtly feminist. I mostly draw upon this theory to define what I mean by poetry and to understand the identity complexity of the displaced poet. Aside from Shireen Roshanravan's work, there is little Persian feminist theory in this thesis. Most of the Persian scholarship I engage falls within the genre of literary criticism—for example, describing the Iranian writer in exile; the quality of poetry written by displaced Persians; and the importance of Persian poetic traditions. In past research projects, most of the Iranian feminist scholarship I have found speaks to the relationship between Iranian women and the political state of Iran, factions of Iranian feminists, or the perception of Iranian women within patriarchal Iranian contexts. Poetry as a method of self-conceptualization through experiences of displacement does not seem to be central to this theorization. Here, I am responding to a lack of scholarship on how *displaced* Persian women locate and express identity and (be)longing through poetry, not scholarship on Persian women's poetry or the poetics of Persian displacement, generally. Scholarship on women within Persian poetic traditions and Iranian women's use of poetry within Iranian contexts is quite robust and often centers feminist frameworks of analysis.[4]

[4] See *The Mirror of My Heart: A Thousand Years of Persian Poetry by Women* by Dick Davis for an introduction to Persian women's poetry. See also "Feminist Culture and Politics in Iranian Women's Post-Revolutionary Poetry (1979-2017)" by Mahrokhsadat Hossein.

Because feminist thought and scholarship responds to its context, the scope of the scholarship mentioned above makes sense. For many Iranian feminists, freedom from the authoritarian and patriarchal state of the Islamic Republic of Iran takes priority, and this explains the prominence of political and mobilizing themes in Iranian feminist scholarship.[5] Self-expression through poetry, when discussed, generally responds in some way to the Islamic Republic's limitation of women's self-expression and the ways Iranian women poets subvert and upend these hyper-patriarchal expectations. Persian feminist scholars and poets living outside of Iran undertake the task of conceptualizing their internal and external identities; this tension between the past (sometimes imaginary) home and current living context creates a double perspective which I find relevant to displaced Persian and Chicana poetic voices. Internally, their writing may examine and communicate their wants and desires, family histories, and experiences of displacement. Externally, they may write on their position in relation to power within their living context, racialized discourses of belonging, or potential for coalitional thought and organizing between women of color. These are just a few examples of how subject matter for Iranian and Persian feminists reflect the complexities of their living situations and struggles. For these reasons, it is important to make a distinction between the frameworks provided by Iranian feminist and displaced Persian feminist theory.

Why Persian and Chicana Poetry? Why Embodied Women of Color Feminisms?

Persian and Chicana experiences of displacement are in no way mirror images of one another. Chicanx individuals contend with ambivalent belonging to their homeland due to ongoing legacies of US imperialism and coloniality. Chicanas face patriarchal oppressions and

[5] Roja Fazaeli offers a discussion on factions of Iranian feminists and their relationship to the Islamic Republic in her article "Contemporary Iranian Feminism: Identity, Rights and Interpretations."

othering from both white US culture and Mexican culture, meaning their various experiences of displacement include gendered exile and racialized othering. Displaced Persians typically live outside of Iran and across the world, largely in Western countries. Their experiences of displacement are often caused by exile or unlivable situations in Iran, meaning there is little hope of returning to Iran. Persian groupings often develop unique cultural qualities and linguistic trends, meaning this type of displacement can be understood more specifically as diasporic.[6] Regarding patriarchal oppression, Persian women living in Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution have been subjected to intensely traditionalist Islamic gendered restrictions. In comparison, other patriarchal living contexts may seem mild. Persians do not contend with colonialism as a primary reason for displacement post-1979, whereas coloniality is central to Chicana experiences of displacement. At the same time, there are similarities to be found between these experiences of displacement. Broadly, both histories and experiences involve a reaction to imposed Western imperialism. Both experiences have been conceptualized through traditional mediums of poetry and song, which hold special cultural significance.[7] Both displaced Persians and Chicanas are subjected to the patriarchal cultures of their homeland cultures and different living locations. Both experiences involve displacement from an imaginary homeland,

[6] For more information on this diasporic identification, see "Introduction: Iranian Diaspora" by Babak Elahi and Persis Karim. Referring to displaced Persians living in Los Angeles, the authors find that the "focus on syncretic and hybrid cultural production suggests that Iranians [in Los Angeles] were caught in a world between but could find, in that liminal space, a critical practice that distinguished them from both the national hegemony of the home culture and the transnational capital of the host society" (Elahi and Karim 83).

[7] My understanding of poetry as a specially celebrated aspect of Persian culture is informed by my lived experiences. When I attempt to crystalize these experiences, I think of my father and grandfather's interest in and dedication to reading poetry (for themselves and aloud, to me), and the role of poetry in traditional celebrations, such as *Shab-e Yalda* (where pieces by the Persian poet Hafez are typically read aloud). For reading on the importance of written and oral poetic production within Persian and Chicanx cultures, see "Charting the Past and Present: Iranian Immigrant and Ethnic Experience through Poetry" (Persis Karim), the introduction to *The Mirror of My Heart: A Thousand Years of Persian Poetry by Women* (Dick Davis), and "Setting the Context: Gender, Ethnicity, and Silence in Contemporary Chicana Poetry" from the book *Contemporary Chicana Poetry* (Marta Ester Sánchez).

which I understand as a cultural home place that can no longer be accessed except through memory or imagination.

These differences and similarities are all generative to this discussion. From a women of color feminist perspective, it is important to put Persian and Chicana poetry of displacement in dialogue to develop solidarity and coalitional relationships between women of color. In "Passing-As-If," Shireen Roshanravan describes the limitations of the model-minority racial category in the United States, where Asian American women, for example, are conceptualized as ambiguous, not-real minorities, and thus exist in a tense space between group resistance, white constructions of their identities, and the political Woman of Color identity (3, 6). Not only does this overlook the real oppressions experienced by Asian American women—such as Iranian women—within a US context, but it seriously hinders opportunities for solidarity and coalition between different women of color. Roshanravan writes

> Women of Color politics rejects monolithic, abstract, or homogeneous notions of identity politics that require erasure of difference to prove solidarity. Instead, it posits the social, cultural, and historical specificity of one's location and embodied knowledge as crucial in developing and mobilizing effective strategies to end violence against women and their communities. (6)

While Persian and Chicana struggles cannot be equated, it is important to put these struggles and modes of self-conceptualization in dialogue to contribute to broader women of color coalitional dialogues. This also provides me with the impetus to draw upon women of color feminist thought. While this thesis centers work by Persian and Chicana poets and theorists, I also draw

upon the perspectives of Black, West Asian, and Latinx feminist scholars to open my landscape of theory to a wider scope of (embodied) women of color feminisms.

Women of color feminisms are known to focus on coalitional solidarity, intersectional frameworks, and direct responses to the sociopolitical environment and legacies from which the theorist writes. Within a US context, women of color feminisms are informed by and respond to legacies of colonization, slavery, immigration policy and xenophobia, and post 9/11 rhetoric of Islamophobia and terrorism. These ongoing violences and oppressions play out upon the bodies of people of color, both physically—seen clearly in the dehumanizing and genocidal violence of slavery and colonization—and discursively, seen in the US's construction of white supremacist, calculated hierarchies of ethnicity and national belonging that shape suspicion toward immigrants of color and violent rhetoric about Middle Eastern and Latinx people. As María Lugones writes in "Radical Multiculturalisms and Women of Color Feminisms," the epistemic linearity proposed by Eurocentric discourses "erased the knowledges produced in resistance to its imposition through conquest, colonization, and enslavement" (Lugones 2014, 77). Women of color feminist discourses not only reclaim and highlight these erased knowledges but interrogate how such oppressions fuse together to create intersectional oppressions and multiplicitous identities. For example, when "womanhood" is intertwined with whiteness within a Western context and white feminist discourses, a woman of color's womanhood defies this categorization, proving that gender is both racialized and multiplicitous (2014, 69). It can be argued that much of woman of color feminist theorization involves discourses of embodiment due to the attention towards the ways bodies of color are constructed by and resist Western and Eurocentric discourses and policies. I define embodied women of color feminisms as a genre of feminism where theorists critically analyze and reimagine the body—both in terms of identity and

position—through observing the relationship between these multiple oppressions and their effect on the body and its perception, both internally and externally. In the case of poetry of displacement, embodied women of color feminist theory provides a lens through which I explore the poet's treatment of body, language, and place.

On the note of women of color embodied feminisms and coalitional solidarity, I want to clarify that I do not believe the poetic expressions of displacement I identify within this thesis are solely reflective of Persian and Chicana experiences of displacement. At the same time, I cannot broaden my scope to "poetry of displacement" for two reasons. Firstly, a commonality I see between these poetic traditions are the concepts of imaginary homelands and ambivalent belongings, which I do not see as applicable to all experiences of displacement. Here, I am thinking about situations of displacement which allow for return, or where the homeland has not undergone intense change. I do not see this as the situation for Chicanx experiences of displacement—although many Chicanx individuals travel between the United States and Mexico, the displacement to which I refer has to do with the colonial conquest and renaming of Mexican territory by the United States, which has not been reversed. It is here that I locate ambivalent belongings and the imaginary homeland, or a homeland which, for the time being, exists in memory and imagination. Many displaced Persians are able to travel to Iran, while many were displaced from Iran under exilic conditions, meaning there is no possibility of a safe return. Beyond this, the homeland itself has been changed drastically under the Islamic Republic. This cultural and societal re-invention can make a true return home impossible even for Persians who are able to travel to Iran.

Secondly, expanding my focus to all poetry of displacement that engages an imaginary homeland is beyond the scope of this thesis, my academic areas of expertise, and my cultural

affinities. Analyzing Persian and Chicana poetry allows me to honor my lived knowledge as a Persian American poet and academic engagement with Chicana and women of color feminisms. I am able to identify a framework of similarities that gives the necessary attention to both of these cultural perspectives. Hopefully, the framework identified here can provide relevant insights to poetry born of others' experiences of displacement.

Historical Context

Before diving into an analysis of the Persian and Chicana poems I have selected, it is crucial to provide an overview of the histories that lead to these realities of displacement. I will be starting with a discussion on the displacement resulting from the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979. Then, I will move into a discussion on Chicanx history, describing the US imperialistic redesignation of the US-México border in the 19th century and the dispossession and displacement experienced by Mexican and Indigenous individuals in the acquired territories. While these historical moments are separated by over 100 years, I find similarities in Persian and Chicana experiences with ambivalent belongings, cultural affinities, and citizenship status, for example. Where there are differences between these two experiences, I point to coalitional potential between these experiences.

By displaced Persians, I refer to the diaspora that resulted from the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran which left thousands of Iranians displaced, imprisoned, and killed. The revolution reflected a culmination of tensions between Iranian citizens and Iran's constitutional monarchy. With its focus on modernizing and secularizing Iran, the Shah's regime was critiqued within Iran as a form of Western imperialism. Over the 1920s-1970s, many Iranian citizens grew weary of the Shah's economic, agrarian, and secular policies (Khosrokhavar 70-71). The

revolution was not spearheaded by one single group, but rather "a heterogenous group of social actors ranging from the traditionalist bazaar people and radicalized clergy under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, to the young people in the cities who had gone through a long process of modernization…and the various leftist forces…that rejected the government as the 'lackey of imperialism'" (Khosrokhavar 71). But without any clear direction or congruent motives, the revolutionary energy of the 1970s was capitalized on by Islamic revolutionaries who, by 1979, had amassed the resources to enact a government coup.

Over forty years later, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to govern Iran, imposing its authoritarian rule over Iranian people. The theocratic government relies on extreme interpretations of Islamic tradition to uphold itself and a morally "proper" society. Women are particularly affected by the "morality" laws of the regime: physical self-expression is restricted through mandatory self-covering laws and modesty dress codes, and women face punishment for artistic self-expression as well. Those who resist the regime's laws of propriety face detainment, abuse, and death at the hands of the state. These intense restrictions imposed on women's individual rights and self-expression create a situation where "acts such as blatantly unveiling, singing, and dancing in public are not merely signs of normalcy, but rather serve as powerful means to dismantle this patriarchal system from within" (Zarabadi 767). One of the most well-known of the regime's laws targeting women is the mandatory self-covering law which requires all women, regardless of religion, to wear a *hijab* in public in accordance with Islamic values. A now famous example of the IRI's violence towards women is seen in the state's murder of Mahsa Amini, an Iranian Kurdish woman, in 2022 for not wearing her *hijab* "properly." Outrage over Amini's death erupted into the *Zan, Zendegi, Azadi* movement (Woman, Life, Freedom

movement), which spread nationally and internationally as a marker of the local and global community's condemnation of violence against Iranian women.[8]

Many Iranians who were exiled from Iran because of the revolution have yet to return into their homeland. Because of my grandfather's position in the Iranian Air Force, and thus affiliation with the Shah, my father's family's exile was particularly violent, and it is not safe for them to return to Iran. As second-generation members of the diaspora, and given the nature of our family's exile, my sister and I are also unable to visit Iran. As we have gleaned knowledge about Iran from remaining photo albums and others' memories, we have developed a warped understanding of Iran as a type of imaginary homeland. Aside from conditions of exile, many Iranians have chosen to leave their homeland to escape the harsh laws and poor economic realities of the republic. A family friend of ours managed to leave Iran several years ago to attend graduate school in the US. Regarding his childhood, he has told me that the intense surveillance in Iran makes existing feel like a criminal act. It is *Shab-e Yalda,*[9] and he has been singing, dancing, and reading poetry in our living room, gathered with 10 other graduate students who have left Iran. They've arrived to the United States in their late twenties by choice, but choice is a fraught concept when life in your homeland is unlivable.

The concepts of a homeland and belonging are complex for US Chicanx communities as well due to overlapping Spanish and US colonial and imperial oppressions. The territory now recognized as Mexico underwent a form of double colonization, first by the arrival of Spanish

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[8] This movement is also known by its Kurdish name *Jin, Jiyan, Azadi.* Many argue that Kurdish is the more appropriate language to center in the title of this movement, seeing as Mahsa Amini herself was Kurdish. The erasure of Amini's Kurdish identity and the discreditation of *Jin, Jiyan, Azadi* demonstrate the oppression of non-Persian ethnic groups in Iran, which was mentioned briefly in my earlier comment on Persian/Iranian terminology.
[9] *Shab-e Yalda* is translated to "night of rebirth" in English. This celebration takes place on the winter solstice to acknowledge that the longest nights of the year have passed—the days will get longer, and there will be light again. *Shab-e Yalda* is traditionally celebrated with fruit (specifically pomegranates), reading poetry aloud, and gathering with loved ones.

colonizers in the 16th century and subsequently by the United States in the era of Westward expansion and Manifest Destiny (Anzaldúa 1987, 5, González and Fernández 470). The Spanish colonized this land through committing genocide against Indigenous peoples; developing a convoluted racial hierarchy with meticulous identity labels;[10] and imposing the values and culture of Catholicism upon Indigenous groups. The development of the Mexican identity is linked to *mestizaje*[11] or mixing between Indigenous and Spanish people as a result of ongoing coloniality. During the 19th century US colonial and imperial project of Westward expansion, the US began to encroach upon Mexican territory through the Annexation of Texas and disputes over the Río Grande River as a border between Mexico and the United States (Resendiz et al. 22). Shortly after this annexation, in 1846, the US declared war with Mexico (Resendiz et al. 22). This is recognized as the Mexican-American War from a US historical lens but is named more appropriately as *La Invasión Estadounidense* (The United States Invasion) in Mexico. Coerced by occupation and imperialism, Mexico signed the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, succeeding the territory now recognized as the Southwestern states to the US in exchange for financial compensation—unsurprisingly, this compensation was never paid in full (Anzaldúa 1987, 7). In terms of social and economic ramifications of this invasion, "in the post-1848 years in the newly acquired southwestern frontier, Anglo settlers frequently treated the Hispanic population much like they dealt with the native Indian population: as people without rights who

[10] Here, I refer to the Spanish colonial Casta system. See "Hispanas and Hispanos in a Mestizo Society" (Antonia Castañeda) for further reading on this colonial project of racial categorization.

[11] More recently, *mestizaje* and the label of a *mestiza/e/o* identity have been problematized within Chicanx and feminist studies. Because the romanticized idea of *mestizaje* informs labor markets that extract and appropriate Indigenous labor and cultures, "the mestizo narrative requires the continuous appropriation of Indigenous cultural production for the renewal of the folklorized origins and fallen birthright of the mestizo nation" (Saldaña-Portillo and Trujillo 149). I profoundly agree with this critique of economies which are exploitative of Indigeneity—when I use the terms *mestizaje/mestiza/e/o,,* I refer to historically appropriate discourses and Anzaldúa's own terminology (ie *mestiza* consciousness). See "Introduction: What Does Mestizaje Name?" by Saldaña-Portillo and Trujillo for further reading.

were merely obstacles to the acquisition and exploitation of natural resources and land" (González and Fernández 470). Mexican and Indigenous individuals were displaced within their own homeland through the US conquest of South Texas and Northern Mexico, forcibly dispossessed of land and resources, subjected to militarism at the border, and regarded socially and systemically as "other" (Resendiz et al. 25-26, referencing Tamez et al. 232-233).

The term Chicanx refers to Mexican American individuals who were born in or migrated to the United States, often living in their very own ancestral land of the Southwestern states. The terms Chicano/Chicana were conceived of and used as pejorative racial labels during the 19th and 20th century. However, the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 70s actively sought to reclaim this identity, giving voice to the imperial and colonial oppressions experienced by Chicanx people and illuminating the multiple consciousnesses born from these violences. Chicana feminist struggles and thought predate the Chicano movement, in that Chicanas have experienced and responded to patriarchal oppressions before the 1960s. However, during the 1960s, Chicana feminism gained self-consciousness through its official articulation and naming. Responding to the social environment of the 1960s, "Chicana feminists expressed a high level of frustration with both the Chicano Movement and the Women's Movement. They argued that freedom from race/class oppression would not eliminate sexual oppression. Similarly, freedom from sexual oppression would not eliminate oppression on the basis of race/ethnicity and class" (Segura and Pesquera 75). Chicana feminist writers focused on recognizing the unique violences resulting from their doubly oppressed racial/ethnic and gender identity, arguing that Chicanas experienced multiple experiences of exile and exclusion: first, from their country; second, from the larger Chicano community for challenging the heteropatriarchal standards of Mexican culture; and third, from the white feminist agenda which excluded women of color and their

lived realties of oppression. As their struggles and realities were ignored by the *machisto*/male-dominated environment of the Chicano movement, Chicanas organized their own social movement. Gloria Anzaldúa, a prominent queer Chicana feminist theorist and writer, is recognized for her work in theorizing the *mestiza* identity to affirm the multi-relational, oftentimes conflicting and ambiguous identity of Chicanas, disrupting the one-dimensional and cis-heteropatriarchal standards of womanhood in Mexican and American society that refuse Chicanas their identity multiplicity and agency.[12]

Defining Recurring Terms

It is necessary to define terms which are specific to my thought processes about home and poetry. As I find similarities between Persian and Chicana poetics of displacement in the concept of an imaginary homeland, it is important to address the complexity of home and what I mean specifically by the terminology I use. In "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement," Sara Ahmed speaks to the complicated notion of home for those who find themselves estranged from their original home, addressing the romanticized narratives of migration specifically. She writes

> In some sense, the narrative of leaving home produces too many homes and hence no Home, too many places in which memories attach themselves through the carving out of inhabitable space, and hence no place in which memory can allow the past to reach the present. (Ahmed 330)

[12] While queerness is not central to the analyses conducted in this thesis, it is crucial to highlight that Anzaldúa's theorization is largely rooted in her alienation from Mexican and US culture due to her queer identity. It is from this positionality that Anzaldúa is able to critique cis-heteropatriarchal standards of womanhood.

The “Home” to which Ahmed refers is unreachable because the displaced subject is unable to marry the spaces of the past and the present. The past home is accessible through memory and familiarity, while the present is accessible through the physicality of the space, and the memory of what home once was estranges the present home from the Home status. Because “home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject’s future,” the migrant experience of home requires imagination much like Lorde’s idea of a poem, where “poetry is the way we give name to the nameless so it can be thought” (Ahmed 331, Lorde 1). The tension between impossibility and necessity, the nameless and the thought, points me towards the term imaginary homeland. I understand an imaginary homeland as a place one cannot return to which is familiar through one’s nostalgia and memory for the place. The homeland is imaginary because it is changed and unreachable physically.

I use the term home*land* to emphasize the home place itself, and thus the experience of displacement from the home. In “Homes Unbound: Flight, Displacement, and Homing Desire in Exile Persian Poetry,” Fatemeh Shams describes exiled Persian poets’ navigation of home, explaining how “home continues to haunt their exilic memory by evolving through sensory associations and encounters with place, sound, and smell” (Shams 11). Such sensory encounters are important to an imaginary homeland and are reflected in the imaginative space of poetry. Regarding a second-generation displaced perspective, in “Weaving a Larger Web: Cuban American Writing in the Latin@ narrative” Karen Christian describes how memory, (be)longing, exile, and displacement interact. The wound of exile or displacement bleeds through the fabric of one individual. Accordingly, “for second-generation immigrant writers, the family memory archive is frequently a confusing mix of painful postmemory and idealized recollections of the homeland” (Christian 280). By absorbing others’ recollections of the homeland, second-

generation writers undertake the unique challenge of writing through and about nostalgia for a place they have never existed intimately within. Though they have no immediate memory of the homeland, their identities, interests, and affinities are aligned with the pull between the confusing, painful, and idealized. Speaking from my own second-generation displaced perspective, postmemory feels more lived than imagined—I am conscious that I have not lived the stories that I have heard from my father and his family throughout my life, and at the same time, these stories, memories, and recollections are inscribed onto my being and my knowledge. When writing about this lived knowledge, however, I must utilize my imagination. It is here that the imaginative space of poetry is particularly useful.

Poetry as an imaginative space is an idea I take directly from Lorde's "Poetry is Not a Luxury" which guides my definition of poetry and the analyses I conduct. Lorde rejects the idea that poetry should be an inaccessible medium, which she connects to the white male European tradition of poetry.[13] Instead, Lorde posits poetry as a necessity, a space of imagination, a site for articulating felt experiences, a revolutionary space. She teaches us that poetry "forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action." (Lorde 1). Traditionally, poetry is identified by use of verse, line, rhythm, structure, and sound patterning. However, these traditional defining factors are bent by poets who work outside of verse or rhyme, who either subvert or reject known poetic structures, and who blur boundaries between genres and discourses. This poses the question: How do we define a medium that actively evades category?

[13] "I speak here of poetry as the revelation or distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word poetry to mean—in order to cover their desperate wish for imagination without insight" (Lorde 1).

In response to this question, the literary critic Jahan Ramazani proposes a dialogic understanding of poetry, where

> Poems come into being partly by echoing, playing on, reshaping, refining, heightening, deforming, inverting, combating, hybridizing, and compressing extrapoetic forms of language.[14] (Ramazani 6)

Lorde's vision of poetry as an accessible medium which gives name to feelings we do not yet have language for and Ramazani's understanding of poetry as dialogic, or responding to other languages and discourses, provide the frameworks through which I understand poetry in this thesis. When put together, these frameworks allow me to look at poetry as a body of text that is allusive in nature; precise with language; intimate in experience; fragmented in form; in imaginative dialogue with language that is traditionally not considered poetic; and based in feeling, imagination, and experience.

There are other terms that I use in this thesis that benefit from explanation. These terms include embodiment, embodied feminisms, displacement, (be)longing, *testimonio, mestiza consciousness,* and theory in the flesh, among others. I feel that they are better described within the specific context in which they are used, and, as such, I will be explicit about these terms and what they mean within this project as they arise.

[14] "Extrapoetic" language refers to language that exists outside the scope of the traditional definition of poetic language.

Chapter 2: Identity and Self-(re)envisioning Through Contradiction

Poetry is an extraordinarily celebrated medium in Iranian culture. This appreciation is fed by the continuity of Persian poetic rhetoric, where poetry dating back to the 10th century can be read with relative ease today due to consistencies in vocabulary, grammar, and metaphor (Davis 14). Within Persian households, it is not uncommon to find a well-loved copy of Hafez or Rumi laid upon a coffee table, and colloquial Farsi itself is laden with verse. This popularity certainly affects the writing and reception of Persian diasporic poetry, and many writers in the diaspora contend with a language dilemma—should they write in Farsi to appeal to cultural and literary poetic tradition? Should they write within their linguistic context to address their experience of linguistic displacement? This is differently challenging for second-generation members of the diaspora, who have never been immersed in their homeland or language. Some Persian poets contend with the language dilemma posed by non-Farsi linguistic contexts and experiences of displacement by including phonetically spelled Farsi in their poetry.[15]

There is no correct way to navigate the tension between the past and the present, the imagined and the lived. However, when juxtaposed as irreconcilable contradictions, displaced Persian writers constantly encounter a gap between their writing identity and cultural identity (Rahimieh 40). In "The Quince-Orange Tree, or Iranian Writers in Exile," Nasrin Rahimieh describes how this gap is negotiated as she explores the concept of the Persian writer in exile: the one who embarks upon creating a new identity from the disruption of homeland. By analyzing the role of childhood imagination in the Iranian singer Shusha Guppy's autobiography, Rahimieh finds that "expatriation, which [begins] with glances into an enticing and imaginary unknown,

[15] I provide an example of phonetically spelled Farsi in my poem "May God Protect You on Your Journey," which is included in this chapter. However, I speak more directly to this concept when I analyze "Farnaz" (Fatemi) in the third chapter, as I think this form of code-switching converses well with ideas of identity multiplicity and world-traveling.

bears within it the seeds of a new creativity" (41). It is the tension between what is known and what is unknown, the insider and outsider status, that provides the creative impulse for the displaced writer. This tension ultimately resolves itself as liberation from an either/or choice, remaking the Persian displaced writer as a vessel to hold and examine these multiple identities, perspectives, and juxtapositions which often contradict. In this sense, Persian poetry of displacement does indeed reflect the site of radical (re)imagination Lorde sees in poetry as a genre—displaced Persian poets give name and voice to their lived experiences which are born from realities of in-betweenness, whether alluding to languages, cultures, knowledges, or geographies (Karim 113). The Persian poet Shabnam Piryaei writes that "Uncertainty, too, is riddled with light." Though the in-between of displacement is an ambiguous space, it certainly generates creativity.

Anzaldúa speaks to the identities, tensions, and desires of women of color writers in her letter-essay "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers," which was written in 1979. Drawing upon her lived experiences relating to her Chicana identity, Anzaldúa issues a call to action to women of color, asking them to write through and beyond the dangers and challenges that are inflicted upon them by academic institutions, other writers, and the public eye. To Anzaldúa, writing is a way to reclaim visibility, to inscribe oneself into existence. Explaining why she writes, she says

> Because the world I create in the writing compensates for what the real world does not give me…To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. (Anzaldúa 2009, 169)

Writing is the method through which Anzaldúa conceptualizes and shares her identity. She encourages other women of color to write, drawing attention to the idea that there can be no separation between one's life and one's writing. On this note, she encourages us to throw away the abstraction instilled into us by academic writing, writing from lived experiences instead to heal the unique ruptures and violences contended with by women of color. Though she does not address displaced women of color directly, writing as a tactic to discover and establish oneself converses with Rahimieh's discovery that the displaced Persian writer navigates their selfhood through writing. In both situations, identity ambiguity (from experiences of racism, exile, and/or displacement) is explored through writing.

Anzaldúa's theorization of her *mestiza* identity deepens the connection between writing and experiences of ambiguity, in-betweenness, and contradiction. In *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa describes *mestiza consciousness,* a tactic of survival for Chicanas to navigate their overlapping identities that often exist in contradiction with one another, repairing the fragmentation of this existence of multiplicity. She writes

> As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover… I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet. (Anzaldúa 1987, 103)

In this passage, Anzaldúa grapples with the concept of a homeland through displacement, describing how displacement has forced her to embody a contradiction: belonging nowhere, and yet, belonging everywhere. Anzaldúa leverages this uprooting to shape "a new story to explain the world," or language to re-imagine belonging and reclaim this in-between. This language and

symbolism are often most apparent in Anzaldúa's poetry, which she includes throughout her theorization. As such, Anzaldúa's poetry allows her to draw upon her own lived experiences to makes sense of the liminality and violence of displacement experienced by Chicanas.

Anzaldúa puts her theory in practice in the poetry she includes in *Borderlands/La Frontera.* Specifically, the poem "To Live in the Borderlands" demonstrates her creative self-(re)envisioning to navigate the contradictions of her Chicana identity and position at the United States-México borderlands. Her poem begins with its title, reading, "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 (Anzaldúa 1987, 194-195, 1-3)

Immediately, Anzaldúa confronts the treatment of racial identities as discrete, pointing to the many aspects of her identity that she exists between given her Chicana, *mestiza,* "mixed" racial/ethnic identity. Despite this in-betweenness, Anzaldúa puts all these identities together in two lines, italicized and in lowercase, equalizing them within the body of the poem to highlight the fact that, whether contradicting or not, these identities make up her very existence. The (disparaging) terms *mestiza* and *mulata* are followed by "half-breed," signaling the dehumanization Anzaldúa faces regarding her multifaceted identity. These ideas are prominent in Anzaldúa's prose as well. However, the line groupings and breaks in "To Live in the Borderlands" visualize her experiences of contradiction and goals of identity harmony in a way prose cannot. While Anzaldúa champions identity ambiguity, there is nothing ambiguous about her poetic decision to equalize her ethnic identities and dialogue between them in the first three lines of the poem.

Later, Anzaldúa speaks about how her actions contradict one another, further demonstrating the entanglement of her cultural identities:

To live in the Borderlands means to

put *chile* in the borscht,

eat whole wheat *tortillas*,

speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;

be stopped by *la migra* at the border checkpoints; (19-23)

The cultural contradiction of the *chile* and the borscht, the *tortilla* and whole wheat flour, is held by Anzaldúa when she puts them within the same line of her poem. Her actions show how she is of multiple cultures and identities, and that there is no need or possibility of disentangling them. In the last two lines of the stanza, she demonstrates identity contradiction through place: though she speaks Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent,[16] situating her in the United States, she is still questioned by *la migra* at checkpoints. She belongs everywhere and nowhere at once. She is of every culture and cultureless at once. As Anzaldúa writes, in the borderlands "you are at home, a stranger" (31).

Anzaldúa starts each stanza with a reference to the borderlands—whether it is "to live in the borderlands," "in the borderlands," "*cuando vives en la frontera*"—and continues with examples of contradictions she experiences of regarding race, gender, culture, and place, and belonging. Even staying alive in the borderlands is conceptualized as between states of being, such as living versus surviving. In the last stanza of the poem, Anzaldúa writes:

[16] Though it is unlikely that Anzaldúa spoke entirely in a Brooklyn accent, living in New York certainly left an impact on her: "As a queer Chicana living in New York City in a Puerto Rican neighborhood, surrounded by Russians, Jews, and other "racially" different peoples, I bore my "differentness" and negotiated my identity" (Anzaldúa 2015, 68). See chapter four of *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo oscuro* for further reading.

To survive the Borderlands

you must live *sin fronteras*

be a crossroads. (41-43)

As *fonteras* translates to borders, Anzaldúa leaves us with one last contradiction: to survive the borderlands, one must live without borders. She becomes a crossroads for the many identities and contradictions she faces, and she advises this to those reading the poem. It seems that resisting the contradiction is more painstaking than accepting the contradiction as a part of one's identity. Becoming a "crossroads" also harkens to the creative-constructive, world-making component of *mestiza consciousness,* where Anzaldúa "[participates] in the creation of yet another culture," a *mestiza* culture where she envisions her identity without borders.

Granaz Moussavi's poem "The Sale" contains similar themes of contradiction and self-(re)envisioning. Moussavi is a Persian poet, filmmaker, and translator who emigrated from Iran to Australia in 1997. In "The Sale," she describes her displacement from Iran while reminiscing on the past and creatively imagining her future(s).[17] On shifting identities and self-conceptualization, Moussavi writes:

[and] so much time passes

that we begin to fear mirrors,

to stare at our childhood hair

that now plays a gray melody—

[17] I have been unable to narrow down the original publication of "The Sale." The version I work with is from the PBS article "Voices in Exile" by Aria Fani. It is also important to note that this poem was translated to English by Sholeh Wolpéh. The fact that this poem was not written in English could explain my difficulty finding its original publication. Furthermore, poet location and translation speaks to the way I attempt to complicate displacement in this thesis—Moussavi enacts her position as simultaneously of "here" and "there" by writing in Farsi about Iran, despite her displacement from her country.

string by string.

We have forgotten our dance beneath this sky,

a sky dying of a black hacking cough. (31-37)

Evidently, Moussavi has gone through a change that leaves her fearful of witnessing her own self. Motifs of time passing, seen in graying hair and forgetfulness, speak to the duration of Moussavi's distance from Iran. At the same time, perhaps Moussavi is referencing internal distance from her homeland while living in her country due to the social and political changes ushered in by the Islamic Republic. Her forgetting of "our dance beneath this sky, / a sky dying of a black hacking cough" addresses these realities simultaneously: forgetting "our" dance emphasizes Moussavi's Persian culture and loss of participation in it, "this" sky makes Iran familiar and foreign at the same time, and the image of the sky dying speaks to experiences of change and struggle within the homeland.

It seems that Moussavi, like Anzaldúa, belongs everywhere and nowhere at the same time. She is able to recognize her situatedness in Iran through the known, now unknown, dance beneath the sky. She is no longer fully situated in Iran ("*this* sky," emphasis mine), shown through her forgetfulness and the uninhabitability of the sky as it deteriorates. Throughout this passage, Moussavi contends with the ways her identity has changed tangibly and intangibly through displacement. For example, her hair is described as childhood hair before she reveals that it is greying, a change which she associates with song (a gray melody— / string by string.). This tangible, visible change demonstrates how long it has been since Moussavi has been in Iran. Though her distance from Iran is regarded sadly, she (re)envisions her own change as expressive or generative, seen in the way her hair "sings." On the other hand, realities of displacement have

impacted her in internal ways as well. I draw again upon how she has forgotten the dance, which demonstrates how her displaced identity is made of her memories, or lack thereof.

Moussavi continues to write about the contradictions of her displaced identity through symbols, much like Anzaldúa's use of symbols to make sense of the world and her position in it. Towards the middle of the poem, Moussavi writes:

> What remains is only a crow
> in love, and never tamed.
> You've come too late,
> I gave my shoes to a cloud—a keepsake
> to one who does not crush lovesick ants.
> You're too late.
> Nothing remains but a dress
> invaded by vagrant moths. (21-28)

Like Anzaldúa, Moussavi refuses to be patient with the entity that displaces her—she is no longer waiting but moves into an imaginative, world-building space which is represented by the cloud which holds her shoes, or her next steps. The image of the lovesick ants invokes Sa'di's Persian poetic proverb about undeserved harm,[18] and thus represents Moussavi's innocence in loving her homeland while emphasizing the underserved violence of displacement. The displacing entity, presumably the Islamic Republic, displaces and exiles Persians who are

[18] Here, I am drawing a connection to Sa'di's book *Boostan* where, in the eighth stanza, he writes: "Do not bother the seedbearing ant / for it is alive, and its life is sweet and joyful" (translation by me). Sa'di is a well-known Persian poet who wrote during the 13th century. His poetic teachings remain relevant in colloquial Farsi today. See https://ganjoor.net/saadi/boostan/bab2/sh14 for 13 stanzas of this poem in Farsi. I couldn't find any relevant information on this stanza in English.

devoted to their homeland. The image of a dress being "invaded" by moths can speak to the country of Iran being taken over by an unpopular regime, or to Moussavi's absence. While her love for her country is humble, like an ant, Moussavi expresses the agency of this love through the image of the crow, a being who is "in love, and never tamed." The crow represents impetuous flight which cannot be restrained by borders. Both the ant and the crow represent the displaced subject who must navigate her loving longing for home and unpredictable displacement. Though there is contradiction between the passive ants and active crow, the contradiction is generative, allowing Moussavi to express her complex experiences of (be)longing to a homeland which rejects her. Towards the end of the poem, Moussavi describes her return, saying "I'd be coming to gather the torn pieces of tomorrow, / to glue them together before it's time for dawn prayers" (49-50). Crucially, she makes a shift from addressing the past—they now address the future through the image of "torn pieces of tomorrow" which are assembled to make sense of the following day. Through these actions, images, and symbols, displacement in "The Sale" exists in dialogue with Anzaldúa's contradicting belongings and re-envisioning of the future.

The last poem I analyze in this chapter is one of my own titled "May God Protect You on Your Journey." I wrote this poem after visiting my London-based Persian relatives in August this year, who I was seeing for the first time since I was a very young child. My poetry often centers my father and my secondhand understanding of his experiences of displacement, but in this poem, I center the relationships between my Persian aunts, sister, and myself as we understand displacement (from Iran and from each other), longing, and tenderness. "May God Protect You on Your Journey" starts with my sister navigating a situation of *tarof*[19] as my aunt offers her a beautiful watch that belonged to our great-aunt before her, which she wore in Iran as a girl:

[19] *Tarof* is a word in Farsi referring to the cultural practice of offering, often between host and guest. This practice must be navigated delicately to prove cultural fluency.

In the mist of a windowless hallway, my aunt insists that my sister take her watch,
the tiniest hoop through which to jump, soar deftly and land, legs shaking.
A tremor that never lets go of you. Maybe the body is baffled that it made it
through.

They fight in front of me over the ticking gold and the velvety blue, alive
as ribbon. Betrayed desire, feigned exasperation, she takes the watch. My aunt is
triumphant,
the watch somehow martyred. (1-6).

The offering of the watch becomes "the tiniest hoop through which to jump, soar deftly and land," both a cultural test and a portal to Iran which my sister must maneuver with her cultural knowledge. The poem immediately becomes an imaginative site because, like Lorde, I use the language and space of poetry to describe my perception of the world, my cultural fluencies, and my production of knowledge about myself and my family. When my sister gives in to my aunt's imploration, "the watch is somehow martyred." The religious connotation of martydom is used to invoke discourses on the revolution and martyrdom in Iran while also illuminating how the watch itself is a sufferer of the distance it has traveled, the worlds and wrists it has belonged to. Like Anzaldúa, I notice the cultural collisions, or *choques*, that are born out of navigating contradictions (Anzaldúa 1987, 100). This *choque* occurs relationally, between my sister and aunt, though it is located internally as well in the way my sister must negotiate with our aunt in culturally appropriate ways. My simultaneously loving and aching relationship with my aunt is described when I say: "A cucumber leaves a bitter film on my lips and my aunt is pained joy

/radiating into every bone of my body. I cannot leave her and I will" (7-8). The bitter skin of a sweet cucumber, the pained joy, the impossible parting—all of these contradictions paint my being, and there is no way to separate them from my cultural identity. Instead, I use the space of the poem to put these realities in dialogue, affirming contradiction as a part of a displaced identity.

An example of contradiction is seen in my overlapping sensory worlds and imaginative desires:

> All of the women's hands hurt. The watch band smells of cumin and the perfume drawer,
> my grandmother's skin. It's a scent I want to bathe in, opaque as white water
> running off uncooked rice. Cool sweet water swirling in a pot. So many times
> I've wanted to follow my fingers, dip my arms up to my shoulders. To drink soft water
> and let it starch me, right me from inside. (14-18)

Here, I remember my grandmother through the way she smells, sweet and cool, like the water we rinse rice with over and over before cooking it. The stiffening quality of starch, left suspended in the water by the rice, contradicts its soft feel on my hands. Similarly, there is a contradiction in my desire for water, a fluid entity, to structure me from inside out. My longing for my grandmother and to be bathed by a ritual of my culture are envisioned through seemingly incompatible sensory experiences. However, in the imaginative space of the poem, these desires work with one another to demonstrate my complex longings. Towards the end of the poem, I describe our farewell to our great-aunt. As she turns away from the apartment hallway, I see "pain in her hand as it closes the door in front of us," and my sister and I say "*dastetoon dard*

nakone." Colloquially, this is a way to express gratitude in Farsi, but literally translated, it means "may your hands not hurt." We locate the humor in this by repeating it to each other in English, but the paradox is sad, and the door is now closed. All we can do now, separated once from our homeland and twice from those we love, is hope that they feel no pain. Through the space of the poem, I am able to turn contradictory experiences of displacement which I have lived and absorbed from others into language I can see and read. I revision my identity as one intertwined with my aunts, despite being separated from them by geography and knowledge of displacement.

The three poems in this chapter provide an initial look into how displaced Persian and Chicana poets utilize contradiction within their poetry to reflect their simultaneous belongings. Like Anzaldúa explains in *Borderlands/La frontera,* these poets utilize their in-betweenness to create new understandings of their place, self, and relationships. By choosing to describe the self through multiple affinities and distances, these poets describe the tension of (be)longing that displacement causes. The focus on self-(re)envisioning and contradiction in this chapter provides a starting point for us to read poetry of displacement and the many nuances that exist between multiple worlds of experience.

Chapter 3: Multiplicity and its Manifestations

So far, we have observed and analyzed the contradictions posed by three poems and the self-(re)envisioning that is forged by poets through placing these contradictions on the same poetic plane. This pattern connects to the larger idea of identity multiplicity, a concept which is important to multicultural and feminist studies. While many scholars have written on the ways in which one's identity and/or consciousness becomes fragmented, multiple, and shifting due to experiences of oppression and displacement, embodied women of color feminist theorists describe how engaging multiplicity is a form of resistance to Eurocentric and Western expectations of one-dimensional identity. To describe identity multiplicity, I draw upon Mariana Ortega's definition of "multiplicitous subjectivity" and María Lugones' example of "world-traveling." Anzaldúa's theorization of *mestiza* consciousness remains relevant throughout.

My starting point with multiplicity comes from Mariana Ortega's "Multiplicity, Inbetweeness, and the Question of Assimilation" (2008). Ortega problematizes past theorization on cultural assimilation in the United States, demonstrating the many ways in which assimilation is a forever incomplete project due to the multiplicitous nature of multicultural subjectivities. When someone with a multicultural identity attempts to adjust to different social contexts, they may experience a form of self-questioning which blurs the boundaries and expression of their identities. She writes:

> Were I to move to another country or to another region of my country where there is a different dominant set of norms and practices, it is very likely that I would experience a self or identity-questioning experience, and things would definitely become blurry, out of focus…What to do? How to survive? Do I do what they do? Do I become like them? Do I try to be one of them? (Ortega 69-70)

The idea of complete assimilation to avoid otherness is unattainable, a fiction—the "other" will always exist within a multicultural identity. Ortega identifies multiplicitous subjectivity as a tactic of resistance to this either-or identity dilemma. According to Ortega, "multiplicity refers to the existence of two or more cultural and/or racial views/understandings/values, etc., that an individual has to negotiate" (71). A multiplicitous subjectivity, then, refers to subjectivity of the individual self that does the negotiation. In the poetry I analyze, this negotiation is seen in contradiction and the multiple worlds and knowledges explored in a poem. Examples of traveling between these states of being are seen in Lugones' and Anzaldúa's theorization, which Ortega's incorporates in her own work.[20]

Like Ortega, I turn to Lugones' work to demonstrate the experience of a multiplicitous subjectivity. In "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," Lugones describes world-traveling as a practice where an individual with multiple cultural, societal, and/or community identities navigates their belongings by moving between the worlds of their identities. Lugones uses the term "world" to refer to "an actual society given its dominant culture's description and construction of life," "a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society," or a space where "one animates one [world] or the other or both at the same time without necessarily confusing them" (10-11). World-traveling can constitute a physical move, but, as Lugones explains, these shifting belongings are often experienced internally because one's multiple worlds always exist within the self. She writes

[20] Ortega draws upon Lugones' and Anzaldúa's work frequently in "Multiplicity, Inbetweeness, and the Question of Assimilation." I've included two quotations in this note that demonstrate her engagement with their work. In reference to Lugones: "María Lugones emphasizes the multiplicitous subject's impurity, plurality, and liminality that may be sources of resistance" (75). In reference to Anzaldúa: "By multiplicitous subjectivity, I mean a self that can be understood as being in between, in Nepantla, as being hybrid, multicultural, or mestizo—think of Gloria Anzaldúa's vivid and powerful account of the New Mestiza" (71).

> Those of us who are "world"-travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different "worlds" and of having the capacity to remember other "worlds" and ourselves in them… The shift from being one person to being a different person is what I call "travel." This shift may not be willful or even conscious, and one may be completely unaware of being different than one is in a different "world," and may not recognize that one is in a different "world." (Lugones 1987, 11).

Lugones specifies that shifting between worlds, between expressing as one person and then expressing as another, is not disingenuous or a form of acting. All of these ways of being are true to the person—the person with world-traveling capacities just uses language and space in different ways depending on the world they're "in" (Lugones 1987, 11). The constant shifting between different worlds and their expression can produce what Lugones theorizes as a "two-imaged self" (1987, 13). This concept is especially important to the poetic analyses I conduct where displaced Persian and Chicana poets navigate self-doubleness.

Regarding her Latin American identity, Lugones says: "I can have both images of myself and to the extent that I can materialize or animate both images at the same time I become an ambiguous being" (Lugones 1987, 13). As mentioned in the article's title, part of world travelling involves playfulness, or an ability to bend the rules of each world through one's attitude. On this concept, Lugones writes:

> Playfulness is, in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight. (Lugones 1987, 17).

The capacity of Lugones' theorization is powerful to me. Not only does she conceive of world-traveling and two-imaged selves, but she explains how she finds wisdom and delight in the ambiguity of her identities, the spaces between them. Playfulness involves creativity, much like poetry—both hinge on envisioning possibilities and realms for the self to inhabit. Like Ortega, Lugones does not minimize the complexity of any of the worlds or aspects of self that exist within the subject. Multiplicitous subjectivities and playful world-traveling demonstrate how a multicultural identity does not live within an either-or dichotomy (you are either Persian or American/you are either Mexican or American). Rather, one's identity can be Persian and American. One's identity can be Mexican and American.[21] Our identities always shape us; how they are expressed depends on our context. Within Ortega's and Lugones' frameworks, experiences of identity ambiguity can be reconstructed as not oppressive, but imaginative and generative.

An interesting aspect of multiplicity as theorized by Lugones and Anzaldúa is their attention towards language. Because world-traveling is a process of accepting ambiguity, tension, and contradiction within the self, responding to the discursive differences between worlds is often language-based. Lugones describes that "the first way of being at ease in a particular 'world' is by being a fluent speaker in that 'world'" (12). From a multicultural perspective, this is most immediately understood as speaking the languages of one's multiple cultural identities. In this thesis, I do not limit "fluent speaker" to verbal dialogue. Rather, I argue that poetry is a site where cultural fluencies converge, blending belongings together by dialoguing through and

[21] The term "American" technically refers to those living in North, Central, and South America. "American" is used in this discussion to describe a US-positioned identity which is simultaneously parceled apart and smashed against a multicultural person's "ethnic" identity (ie, Persian "American" or Mexican "American"). By saying "Persian and American," for example, I speak to an identity entanglement that is relevant to a multicultural subjectivity, as well as Ortega's and Lugones' theorization. Terms such as "US-ian" are emerging as more appropriate ways to speak of the US identity positionality.

between them. This idea relates to the language dilemma posed earlier. In poetry, cultural fluencies are blended when Farsi or Persian cultural symbols are incorporated into poetry written in within the writer's linguistic context.[22] This idea is also relevant also to Ramazani's treatment of poetry, in which poetry itself is a type of world-traveler due to its dialogic interactions with multiple discursive traditions. Anzaldúa, too, is deeply attuned to the linguistic aspects of her identity. This is seen in the way she repurposes words, thinks about value systems, and practices writing as resistance. It is also seen in the tension she experiences between writing in Spanish and in English and in her characteristically imaginative theorization through re-definition. As already discussed, *mestiza* consciousness is one example of how her self-theorization is rooted in language and re-imagination: *mestiza* consciousness provides "a new story to explain the world and our participation in it" (Anzaldúa 1987, 103). This new story relies upon reimagining past stories and reinventing language to speak about ourselves.

For me, language world-traveling is deeply relevant to my experience of multiplicitous subjectivity. When I visit my grandfather in Los Angeles, we speak only Farsi, and I am able to engage with parts of my identity that are only revealed through this language. I lean toward my Persian identity, and I feel deeply connected to this, my, culture—the humor, the poetry, the role of a granddaughter. When I come home, away from my Persian relatives, community, Farsi, I feel disoriented. I am unsure of myself. The week feels profoundly difficult as I attempt to find ways to exist that express my Persian identity in the way I want. Eventually, I find a middle ground again, but I am inclined to believe that much of my identity confusion comes from the linguistic shift. I will sometimes include phonetically written Farsi in my poetry to reflect my journey to a middle ground version of myself through language.

[22] See Karim's "Charting the Past and Present: Iranian Immigrant and Ethnic Experience through Poetry" for an in-depth analysis of symbolism within a displaced context.

Regarding displaced perspectives, I find it important to put Lugones' theorization of worlds and world-traveling in dialogue with memory and knowledge. This interpretation draws attention to the intimate belongings mediated and negotiated through world-travelling. I return to a quote I provided in chapter one. As Ahmed writes

> In some sense, the narrative of leaving home produces too many homes and hence no Home, too many places in which memories attach themselves through the carving out of inhabitable space, and hence no place in which memory can allow the past to reach the present. (Ahmed 330)

According to Ahmed, home for the displaced subject is simultaneously ubiquitous and inaccessible. This speaks to Lugones' theorization of worlds—there are many worlds to call home, but existing in and belonging to them is more complex, as this involves a process of constantly renegotiating identity, playing with rules, and developing fluencies. For Ahmed, memory is central to homing. Because memories fill in the imaginary home(land), the past home fills with memory, and the present moment cannot connect to that nostalgic past. Blending Lugones' and Ahmed's work, I posit that memory and cultural knowledge compose their own home or world to travel into and out of for displaced people, or those in proximity to displacement. This is important to me personally given my identity as a second-generation member of the Persian diaspora and my inability to visit Iran. For me, the imaginary homeland is truly imaginary, rooted in others' memories and the cultural knowledge I learn as I practice my fluency. To understand the connection between poetry and an imaginary homeland, I call again upon Lorde's conceptualization of the poem as an imaginative space to demonstrate how one's cultural worlds can be entangled with each other, at once playful, loving, wounding, and disorienting.

Sheila Sadr is a Persian poet who lives in California. Through her exploration of memory, familial relationships, and power structures, her poetry shows an oscillation between her worlds of belonging. In "A song becomes the earth anytime," Sadr places her Persian and US worlds within one poem, demonstrating how she moves between them. Her Persian world is represented with warm memories, rich flavors, and deep sadness, while the US world is represented by hostility, loneliness, and contempt. She writes

> A song excavates the smell
> of Ameh Maryam's kitchen on Eid
> from a decade ago, lets the rice
> lift in its drum beat & the mahi to fry over
> Googoosh's vibrato. My father says
> he listens to Persian music
> so he doesn't get depressed.
> & now I know the cost of a plane ticket. (Sadr 3-10)

Sadr's lived experiences and cultural knowledge in this poem show her longing for, and distance from, her Persian world. Googoosh's song "excavates the smell" of *sabzi polo mahi,* a celebratory Persian meal of herbed rice and fish.[23] The warm jubilation in the scene at Ameh Maryam's is juxtaposed with Sadr's father's depression and material realities of accessing the homeland. This change is also seen in the different use of enjambment between the first five and last three lines of this passage. In the first 5 lines, and especially in the fourth line, the

[23] Googoosh is one of the most well-known and highly regarded Persian singers of our time. Her career as a musician began before the revolution, meaning her distinctive voice is evocative of pre-revolutionary Iran for many displaced Persians. My favorite song of her's is *Gole Bee Goldoon* (Flower Without Flowerpot).

enjambment style imposes a sort of musicality—the scene at Ameh Maryam's house feels uninterrupted by the enjambment, which works rather to create breath or lilts in the vibrant memory, much like Googoosh's vibrato. However, in the fifth line, Sadr's worlds of joy and sadness become entangled as her sentence about Ameh Maryam's house ends and she picks up the discussion of her father.

From here on, the movement of the enjambment becomes more regular. Importantly, in the seventh and eighth lines ("so he doesn't get depressed. / & now I know the cost of a plane ticket.), Sadr uses the ampersand differently than in her recollection about her aunt's house, where it is used as a form of lilt or motion. The movement of the poem is paused by the period after "depressed," only to be restarted by the ampersand in the next line, grounding the reader in the material realities of displacement. Sadr is explicit about the different worlds she exists in due to her displaced identity, emphasizing the difference between these worlds through tone, structure, and images. Towards the end of the poem, Sadr reflects on "how much an education costs in america," alluding to her disillusionment with the US image of opportunity. This dialogues with the costly plane ticket and reinforces the monetary struggle her family has gone through since their displacement. In the last lines, Sadr conceptualizes herself as

> a wanderer
> in a country that refuses to annunciate
> your father's name in native tongue,
> curses your dinner, holds contempt
> like a bag of shaken wasps. (18-23)

Sadr recognizes her ambivalent belonging to the US as she wanders between the multiple worlds she inhabits. She is unafraid of drawing attention to the ways she is misrecognized and regarded with hostility.

In "Freeway 280," Lorna Dee Cervantes reflects with nostalgia upon the places and worlds she inhabits. Cervantes is a Chicana poet and professor whose work has located her in Berkeley and Santa Barbara. "Freeway 280" begins with Cervantes' description of an imaginary homeland, seen in the interaction between the now-Californian landscape and the freeway:

> Las casitas near the gray cannery,
> nestled amid wild abrazos of climbing roses
> and man-high red geraniums
> are gone now.
> The freeway conceals it
> all beneath a raised scar. (1-5)

The natural landscape is spoken of with nurturing affection—the diminutive "casitas," "nestled," "abrazos"—which is ruptured by the image of the freeway, a concealing scar. This rupture speaks to the redesignation of the US-Mexico border and the constant and militaristic materialization of the border through fences and walls. By using the language of a "raised scar" to describe the cement freeway, the freeway acts within the poem as a foreign construction which conceals but never erases the land and legacies of violence at the border. The language aspect of world-travelling is found in Cervantes' fluid switching between Spanish and English without the visible marker of italics. Though this detail may seem minor, its absence positions Cervantes' Spanish-speaking and English-speaking worlds on the same plane, despite her distance from

Mexico due to conquest, renaming, and paving. As readers, we come to this poem unknowing of the time Cervantes writes from, but this temporal ambiguity is interrupted by the short line "are gone now." Through this line, we as readers recognize that the world Cervantes describes is no longer fully accessible to her. And yet, perhaps this world is not so far away. In the second stanza, she writes "wild mustard remembers, old gardens / come back stronger than they were, / trees have been left standing in their yards" (8-10). Time becomes ambiguous again between the first and second stanza. Like the regrowing plants and the testimony tree, Cervantes remembers and engages with the scarred land simply by bearing witness to its tenacity. The worlds diverge and converge.

In the third stanza, Cervantes addresses the relationship between her position and the tangible/intangible landscape she speaks of:

> I scramble over the wire fence
> that would have kept me out.
> Once, I wanted out, wanted the rigid lanes
> to take me to a place without sun,
> without the smell of tomatoes burning
> on swing shift in the greasy summer air. (14-19)

By describing one world by what it is not, we get the picture of two worlds: the first world is hot, agricultural, and labored, and the quality of air reflects this. The second world is devoid of these sensory qualities. The physical barriers of these worlds are described as the wire fence and rigid lines, or the border and the freeway itself. The "out" to which Cervantes refers can be understood multiply—as a barrier, as an option, as an opportunity, as an escape.

The different worlds of the landscape shape Cervantes differently as she conceptualizes what she misses, what she longs for, and what she escapes from. The last stanza of this poem demonstrates her negotiation of identity through worlds more explicitly:

> Maybe it's here
> en los campos extraños de esta ciudad
> where I'll find it, that part of me
> mown under
> like a corpse
> or a loose seed. (20-25)

There is a part of Cervantes that is missing, that she hopes to find, and she imagines finding it in the space between the Mexico and the US. "Los campos extraños de esta ciudad" translates to "the strange fields of the city," though "extraño" can also be understood as foreign, odd, or unknown. In this in-between space, the missing part of her identity is buried under the earth, conceptualized as a corpse or a seed. These images evoke both ends of a life cycle—the seed signifying the beginning of life, the corpse signifying the end. They seed can also be interpreted as a reference to agricultural cultures of Chicanx communities, both developed through tradition and imposed through economic coercion. It is her position while world-traveling that determines whether this part of her composes or decomposes, though the idea that the part of her is "mown over" suggests a connection to an earlier time, world, or imaginary homeland.

Sandra Cisneros is a Chicana poet, novelist, and storyteller. Writing gently and honestly, Cisneros' writing is ever so attentive to the moments, stories, and lives which slip through the cracks. In "Abuelito Who," the speaker explores identity multiplicity through writing

about their Abuelito,[24] demonstrating the worlds they both travel between. Because the speaker assumes a witnessing position, the poem does not explicitly describe their personal journey of world-traveling. However, due to their intimate knowledge of Abuelito, they travel through his identity to record their own movement between worlds. The poem starts:

> Abuelito who throws coins like rain
> and asks who loves him
> who is dough and feathers
> who is a watch and glass of water
> whose hair is made of fur
> is too sad to come downstairs today (1-6).

Abuelito is made of two worlds, being made of "dough and feathers," tender to the touch, and "a watch and glass of water," an image which feels cold and mechanical. The softness of "dough and feathers" is accomplished through the physical sensory quality of both, as well as the feeling of the words in the mouth: the fricatives of "dough" and "feathers" make the sound softer in the mouth, a feeling which is juxtaposed with the affricative, hard sound of "watch." From the speaker's perspective, dough, feathers, a watch, and a glass of water all exist within Abuelito, though they represent different sides of his identity. Abuelito expresses insecurity as he "asks who loves him." He "is too sad to come downstairs," presumably where the rest of the family

[24] In my close reading of "Abuelito Who," I employ the traditional distinction between speaker and author to attend to the specificity of Cisneros' writing style and subject matter. In her introduction to *The House on Mango Street,* Cisneros writes: "The people I wrote about were real, for the most part, from here and there, now and then, but sometimes three people would be braided into one made-up person…Emotions, though, can't be invented, can't be borrowed. All the emotion my characters feel, good and bad, are mine" (22-23). Though "Abuelito Who" is not included in *The House on Mango Street*, it reads similarly to the poems and vignettes which make up her novel. I refer to "the speaker" to honor the entanglement Cisneros describes above. Please refer to chapter one (pp. 20-22) for my discussion on my treatment of the speaker-author distinction in this thesis.

lives, creating another layer of separation between the worlds. The idea that the speaker witnesses their Abuelito anyhow shows how they are also a world-traveler—they can move between his identity, sadness, and insecurity while living in their own world downstairs.

The speaker's navigation of these worlds is seen also in their interactions with Abuelito. The speaker describes Abuelito as someone "who tells me in Spanish you are my diamond / who tells me in English you are my sky" (7-8). These two lines bring several ideas of identity multiplicity to the forefront. Firstly, we see the language component of world-traveling. In Spanish, Abuelito describes the speaker as his diamond, and in English, they are his sky. These different terms of endearment demonstrate how one's expression and reception of love depend on the world they exist in. But this experience is doubled; not only does the speaker comment on these different worlds, but with Abuelito as the subject of the poem, his use of different terms of endearment signifies the multiplicity of his own perspective, or his navigation of multiple worlds. Like the speaker and Abuelito, my and my grandfather's world-position shift depending on whether he calls me "my dear" or *jeegaram* (my liver),[25] though the depth of his affection remains the same.

Secondly, Abuelito's multiplicitous identity is demonstrated in poem through its structure. Rather than writing "Abuelito tells me in Spanish you are my diamond and in English you are my sky," Abuelito's multiplicitous identity is shown by splitting these parts of self into two different lines, both introduced by "who." This poetic structure shows that Abuelito exists completely in both worlds—he is not necessarily experiencing rupture, but holds more than one identity, and this is seen through his interactions with his grandchild. Finally, Abuelito's identity multiplicity points to the speaker's own. Because the speaker evidently engages with Abuelito in

[25] A common term of endearment in Farsi.

both a Spanish-speaking and an English-speaking world, the speaker's description of their relationship with Abuelito demonstrates their own cultural fluency between their Spanish-speaking and English-speaking identities.

Farnaz Fatemi is an Iranian American poet and editor whose work involves inspecting her Persian identity, language, twinhood, and liminality.[26] She was named poet laureate of Santa Cruz County, California in 2023. In "Farnaz," Fatemi explores the lived realities of her bicultural identity. The poem starts:

> Our parents argued in a language
> we didn't understand. We were born
> in Las Vegas or Teheran,
> twin cities of fantasy and chance. (1-4)

From the first stanza, we can see the idea of multiple belongings and the ambiguity this raises. Las Vegas and Tehran are posed as "twin cities of fantasy and chance," and the imaginative potential of this immateriality points to Fatemi's experience of an imaginary homeland and her use of the poetic space to explore her resulting identity. The different cities of Las Vegas and Tehran fit snugly into Lugones' metaphor of world-traveling. Fatemi also clues her reader in to her cultural fluency with Farsi by spelling Tehran as "Teheran." While both spellings are considered correct in English, the syllabic division of "Teheran" more closely represents its pronunciation in Farsi. Though it is a small detail, this spelling shows Fatemi's fluid transitioning between worlds almost through code-switching. Another interesting element of these opening lines is seen in Fatemi's use of the plural person pronoun of "we." Though she has

[26] See Fatemi's book *Sister Tongue* for her collection of poetry on these concepts.

not formally introduced her twin to the poem, she speaks from "we" and uses the twin metaphor in her description of Las Vegas and Tehran. As a result, the reader can read the "we" as Fatemi's own self and sister or as the multiple versions of herself that appear depending on her location—whether physical or emotional—in the worlds of Las Vegas and Tehran.

In the second movement of the poem, Fatemi addresses her multiplicitous identity though her self-understanding as a twin, her name, and her parents' language. She writes:

> I taught myself who I was
> by watching my sister carefully.
> I worried when
> the day came and I wanted
> to say *I'm not her*. (22-26)

The idea of identity multiplicity is made simultaneously external and internal to Fatemi as she incorporates her twin in this poem. She both learns who she is from her sister and realizes that she is different ("*I'm not her."*). Her sister's being is external to Fatemi's; however, as they are twins, made of the same flesh and blood, Fatemi's identity is intertwined with her sister's. Through understanding her identity through and separately from her sister, Fatemi demonstrates the multiple versions of self she holds. Fatemi discusses her name, "Farnaz, a name that made me lonely," unlike her sister's name, which is "Iranian but sayable / by everyone." The difficulty posed by the name Farnaz to an US tongue speaks to the isolating sensory experience of existing in a world that sounds wrong. My sister and I navigate a similar dynamic to Fatemi and her twin: my name is Lily, sayable by everyone in an US context, and I become *lili* to Persians. My sister's name is Ava, pronounced "Ah-vah." She is misread as *Ayva* in an US context and is immediately

recognized in Persian context. I once asked her what this experience felt like to her as she grew up. She recalled standing in front of the bathroom mirror in middle school after being called *Ayva* all day, looking foreign to herself, almost unrecognizable. I wonder if Fatemi experiences similar feelings self-estrangement, isolation, and recognition due to others' interactions with her name.

Beyond naming, the language component of identity multiplicity and world-traveling is seen in the last few stanzas of the second movement. Fatemi writes:

> By the time I was born
> my mute parents wondered
> how to speak as Americans
> as they moved away
> from the people who loved them.
> How could I know the dark
> inside their mouths hurt them, too. (36-42)

Here, she contemplates immigrant parents' own language dilemma as they attempt to situate their children within the linguistic context they live in. Like Sadr in "A song becomes the earth anytime," Fatemi draws attention to the US context—her parents don't wonder how to speak in English, but as "Americans," illustrating their desire to fit in with this identity/position. This part of the poem also demonstrates knowledge-traveling, a concept which I came to after contemplating world-traveling. In the last two lines of this section, Fatemi describes the darkness which hurts her and her parents, presumably referring to their reluctance to teach her their native language, Farsi. During these lines, she exists multiply in the past and future. While in the past,

she did not understand how this decision wounded her parents, her acknowledgement of this pain now, in the space of the poem, shows how she recognized this painful experience in the future. Through this poem, Fatemi accesses past and future knowledges and the knowledge of others. Perhaps her parents feel reluctant to embark on language world-travelling with their children due to painful memories of being separated from their homeland, out of protection for young Farnaz and her sister, or lack of community support ("as they moved away / from the people who loved them."). No matter the reason, Fatemi sees her parents' decision, this darkness, as a world which affects her as well, though she is not self-centered in this recognition. The lived intimacy of this knowledge allows Fatemi to hold grace for the worlds navigated by her parents and herself.

Similarly to Fatemi, I move between parental knowledge and multiple worlds in my poem "Running from Me." In this poem, I imagine my Iranian father as the child and young adult I see in photos. To get there, I follow the rabbits my father had in early adulthood as they "Pop through a dimension where windowsills are painted red with dust." After I describe the photo of my father in his trailer, working on remodeling his house, I write

> There are many worlds to know about him and I worry that I'm far from them
> all
> or maybe I've never known him The trick ends and ends and ends
> (8-9)

Here, I address the versions of self that displaced immigrant parents share, or choose not to share, with their children. The image of my father years after his displacement, just before I was born, wearing a red and grey tank top and covered in wood dust, fills me with profound sadness over my unknowing of him in that world. I wonder how much I truly know of him and what

worlds he chooses to share with me. It is here that "the trick ends and ends and ends"—the trick is my feeling of closeness to my father through my lived experience of his knowledge, and it ends as I recognize the worlds I cannot be a part of.

I travel again to his green card photo, taken when he was 11 years old. I write

How he looks like a new carnation and so blue at the same time

that rich fearful lifeblood blue SweetheartandJones

If a curtain was thrown over my palms maybe I could make him appear there (15-17)

His photograph was taken only months after being exiled from Iran. I wonder if there is some way I can access his being and his knowledge at this age, like a magic trick: "If a curtain was thrown over my palms maybe I could make him appear there." If I could conjure him in this way, perhaps I would gain the insight into his worlds which I long for so deeply. The structure of this poem also represents my traveling through worlds. I leave gaps between phrases in each line, representing my intermittent fluencies with and distances from my Persian cultural identity through my father.

At the end of the poem, I express my desire to bridge the gaps in his world(s). I make an offering, saying

If stuffing memories into the hat doesn't work this time

I'll be a home I'll be the pressure of blood I'll be the wet soil between here and there (20-23)

Here, I express a childlike desire to fix the empty spaces between the worlds my father has lived. I try to offer the comfort of home, kinship, and a viable ground for my father to thrive in, demonstrating how I conceptualize my identity as a second-generation member of the Persian diaspora to be simultaneously of "here" and "there," of myself and my father. I am willing to occupy these double positions if it brings me closer to my father—the bearer of my cultural identity and knowledge—or if it mends the sadness I see in him. However, my offerings do not heal any longings:

> But somehow it's all wrong somehow it looked just right
> to see Baba run through the front door leave it ajar gift me a vacuum night
> (24-25)

In these last two lines, I lose sight of my father as he leaves the portal, or door, through which I have been viewing various versions of him. My understanding of this action as "just right" and a "gift" shows my familiarity with his evasion and the pattern of knowing and (be)longing it creates. In his absence, I am left with "a vacuum night." The simultaneous emptiness and fullness of this space is my father's gift to me, as it is now time for me to conceptualize my own identity without the complexity of navigating his. However, I know this type of separation will never be feasible for us, nor do I want it to be. Our identities have been entangled since my birth. While it saddens me to see him disappear through the door, once again removed from his world, I anticipate finding him again, for it is through my father's worlds that I shape my cultural identity.

As seen in these five close readings, multiplicitious subjectivities take many shapes and forms. Self-understanding through memory, through place and position, through multiple worlds, through contradiction, through language, through knowledge of loved ones' worlds and

struggles—all of these concepts are explored within the space of these poems, and I find that the uniquely flexible boundaries of a poem allow these poets to express how the multiple lives they live are simultaneous and, at times, imaginary. Lugones' world-travelling provides an especially helpful framework through which to understand the navigation of a multiplicitous identity. In this chapter, we understood "world" multiply: in its more literal sense, examples of place-based worlds are seen in Cervantes' navigation of the US-Mexico borderlands and Fatemi's explicit discussion of Las Vegas and Tehran. More conceptually, we have seen worlds as a metaphor for complex emotional networks, seen for example in Sadr's description of her sensory transportation to her aunt's kitchen; Cisneros' depiction of the emotional worlds navigated by the speaker and Abuelito; and my longing for and navigation of my father's multiple worlds post-displacement. There are infinite ways to contend with and write multiplicity, especially for the displaced writer or writer with knowledge of displacement whose identity exists in proximities to physical, cultural, and emotional worlds and versions of self.

Chapter 4: Embodied Knowledge: The Poet's and Poem's Body

This chapter builds upon poetic self-(re)envisioning and multiplicity by discussing how displaced poets explore embodied knowledge and realities in their writing. Writing is a fundamental tool in reclaiming the seeing, feeling, relational body—a body that finds recognition in multiplicity. This power is discussed by embodied women of color feminists when they describe the role of language in re-understanding one's body and experiences. As discussed earlier, Chicana feminist theorists combine creative and academic writing to enact a strategy of self-understanding that is based in what is lived and known. In the preface to the fourth edition of *This Bridge Called my Back*, Moraga describes the concept of "theory in the flesh," a practice of centering of the body and lived experiences in writing. She writes: "The body—that site which houses the intuitive, the unspoken the viscera of our being.—this is the revolutionary promise of 'theory in the flesh;' for it is both the expression of evolving political consciousness and the creator of consciousness, itself" (14). Through the knowledge of the body, Moraga provides a framework for developing a personal, political consciousness that holds space for emotional, sexual, and spiritual suffering experienced by women of color due to multiple oppressions, ruptures, and disruptions.

Suffering and violence is experienced by women of color in particularly conceptual and embodied ways. On oppression and embodied feminisms, Moraga writes:

> It acknowledged that the oppression we experienced as human beings was not always materially manifested, and that we also suffered spiritually and sexually. Women of color have traditionally served as the gateways—the knowledge-holders—to those profoundly silent areas of expression and oppression. (Moraga 2015, 11)

As knowledge-holders, as world-makers, as visionaries of decolonial and multiplicitous realities, women of color and their experiences cannot be seen or represented fully through academic frameworks of writing which strive towards objectivity. Such writing erases the lived and embodied quality of women of color's experiences with violence and otherness. Theory in the flesh provides a crucial framework through which to understand how the bodily ruptures and separations experienced by displaced poets are reflected in their poetry. By writing through their multiplicitous subjectivities and knowledge, displaced Persian and Chicana writers give name and voice to these "profoundly silent areas" of displacement, which can include their personal experiences of displacement, the conditions which caused their displacement, or the generational consequences of displacement.

Through this focus on bodily experiences, theory in the flesh names the knowledge-building displaced poets embark upon within the poetic space. Though Moraga speaks specifically toward theory-making spaces through her terminology of *theory* in the flesh, her point extends to creative writing by women of color generally. She considers writing to be a "liberation tool" for women of color, an act which "bring[s] into consciousnesses what only the body knows to be true" (Moraga 2015, 14). This consciousness "make[s] sense of the seeming paradoxes of our lives; that complex confluence of identities—race, class, gender, sexuality—systemic to women of color oppression and liberation" (Moraga 9). This attention to the complexity of identity and experience demonstrates how Moraga understands writing as a tool of liberation, coalition, and self-understanding. Her poetic work shows how she applies her theory to her creative work—this will be explored in depth in a close reading of her poem "Just Vision."

Regarding poetry, specifically, I see connections between Moraga's theory in the flesh and Lorde's understanding of poetry's capacities. At the beginning of "Poetry is Not a Luxury," Lorde describes that "when we view living, in the european mode, only as a problem to be solved, we then rely solely upon our ideas to make us free" (1). This mode of living describes the foundation for theory as abstraction. Lorde then writes:

> as we become more in touch with our own ancient, black, non-european view of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and therefore lasting action comes. (1)

Like Moraga, Lorde centers feelings as "hidden sources of our power" which hold our "true knowledge." Embodied perception and experiences are central to this way of living. Because struggle is a result of living as a "situation to be experienced and interacted with," Lorde's language affirms Moraga's acknowledgement of oppression as lived, felt, and suffered spiritually and sexually. Internally. Bodily. Lorde describes this as an "ancient, black, non-european view of living," demonstrating how her Blackness shapes her understanding of living as something to be interacted with. For Lorde, writing from this internal source of power is how poetry becomes a resistive act. She writes, "At this point in time, I believe that women carry within ourselves the possibility for fusion of these two approaches as keystone for survival, and we come closest to this combination in our poetry" (Lorde 1). Lorde does not necessarily reject the mode of living as "a problem to be solved," but instead argues for the fusion of these approaches. Through this fusion, poetry holds our deepest sufferings, feelings, and knowledges *while* creating language and action for problems that need solutions.

Another way to express the oppressions and sufferings and affinities that are true to us, bodily and emotionally, is testimony. The Latina Feminist Group, a collective and coalitional group of Latinx writers and activists, draws upon theory in the flesh in their politicization of *testimonio* (testimony). *Testimonio* is reclaimed as a vital methodology of recording oppressions, building community, understanding sufferings, and rejecting homogenization of Latinx people and their experiences. They explain that "testimonio was critical for breaking down essentialist categories, since it was through telling life stories and reflecting upon them that we gained nuanced understandings of differences and connections among us" (11). Developing self-understanding through *testimonio* is considered equally important to understanding others' experiences. The Latina Feminist Group writes that "through testimonio we learned to translate ourselves for each other" (11). In this thesis, I understand poetry as a method of *testimonio* through which displaced Persian and Chicana poets translate their experiences of (be)longing for themselves, others within their communities, and cross-communally. Though the Latina Feminist Group's theorization of *testimonio* emerged after Anzaldúa's work was published, the interwoven poetry, prose, and theorization in *Borderlands/La Frontera* provides an earlier example of this politicized re-telling of self. When speaking about the United States's imperialistic and colonial acquisition of Mexican land, Anzaldúa writes "*Con el destierro y el exilio fuimos desuñados, destroncados, destripados*—we were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, dispossessed, and separated from our identity and our history" (Anzaldúa 1987, 30). Anzaldúa's testimony communicates her material, emotional, and physical experiences of displacement—embodied experiences of displacement.

When I talk about embodied knowledge in Persian and Chicana poetry, I employ multiple interpretations which are rooted in women of color feminist teachings. One interpretation

analyzes the poet's use of sound, metaphor, and self-visualization. Through this type of reading, I attend to the ways a poet uses poetic devices to incorporate their being and perception into a poem. In this sense, the poem and the poet become intertwined through the use of poetics to communicate one's ways of being and lived experiences. Another interpretation centers the poet's use and treatment of the space of the poem itself. Here, I read the poem as a living, created form as I analyze how the physical shape of the poem may reflect a theme or experience of displacement. This type of embodiment is more visual than the former method of analysis due to its appearance on a page. Through these varied analyses and interpretations, the poems discussed in this chapter reflect how Persian and Chicana poets hold space for their experiences of displacement through their lived experiences. The personal is made political through poets' navigation of corporeality.

Anzaldúa begins *Borderlands/La Frontera* with a poem which addresses the colonial and imperial legacies at the borderlands through her own, and the poem's, body. The poem opens the first chapter of the book, titled "The Homeland, Aztlan/*El otro México*," meaning it converses with a larger body of text, or an essay-poem. Meandering choppily across the page, this poem is filled with images of rupture and doubleness. Its structure resembles the shape of the US-Mexico border itself, though not precisely, speaking to the movement of this border during the past 200 years due to the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The shape of this poem powerfully and visually ties this contested terrain together with Anzaldúa's body and self-conceptualization. In the first stanza, she writes

> Wind tugging at my sleeve
>
> feet sinking into the sand
>
> I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean

where the two overlap

a gentle coming together

at other times and places a violent crash. (Anzaldúa 1987, 1, 1-6).

Anzaldúa describes the physical sensations of standing in the borderlands through the wind and the sand which interact with her body at "the edge where earth touches the ocean." The movement of the ocean against the sand is sometimes gentle and other times violent, reflecting the multiple violences, places, and opportunities for harmony Anzaldúa exists in and navigates through her Chicana identity. The ocean image is made tangible through the lineation of the poem—the short-short-long composition of the lines visualizes the waves encroaching upon the shore, extending toward Anzaldúa, and retreating back to the body of the ocean. As Anzaldúa interacts with the natural elements, her corporeal experience is subtly emphasized by the rhythmic composition of these lines, where the two short lines read almost as a heartbeat, then interrupted by Anzaldúa's consciousness of her position ("I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean"). Throughout the poem, Anzaldúa plays with a tension between the natural and the imposed, comparing the fluctuating border between earth and ocean to the imposed border between the US and Mexico. Just as she understands that "the coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision" in her Chicana identity, her experience of the borderlands moves fluidly between realities of violence and harmony, mediated by her bodily perception (Anzaldúa 1987, 100).

Later in the poem, Anzaldúa addresses the border explicitly. She writes:

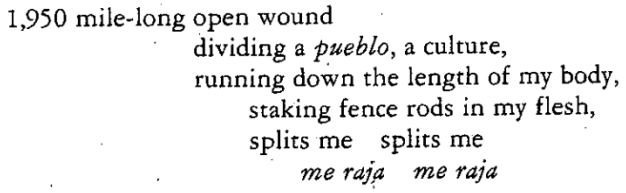
1,950 mile-long open wound
dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence rods in my flesh,
splits me splits me
me raja me raja

Fig. 1. Photograph of Anzaldúa's "Wind tugging at my sleeve," (1987, 1, 40-45).[27]

Here, earth and Anzaldúa's body are inseparable—the border becomes an "open wound" on the skin of the *pueblo* and her body, as well as the body of the poem, seen through the physically jagged lines of the poem. The violence of Anzaldúa's experience of bodily division is held with more clarity at this point of the poem than in the opening stanza, represented by the border "staking fence rods in [her] flesh." Though Anzaldúa conceptualizes the border as a space of radical possibility through *mestiza* consciousness and a tolerance for ambiguity, she remains attentive to the lived violence imposed by the border, violences which are tangible, corporeal, and bloody. The language of "splits me," both in English and Spanish, and with emphasized spacing between the repetitions, works to establish a sonorous and bodily experience of being split in language, place, identity, and body. Notably, the line "*me raja me raja"* is slightly offset from the previous line of "splits me splits me," representing the incongruity Anzaldúa experiences between her Mexican and US identities through language. The rhythm and spacing of these words establish Anzaldúa on both sides of the border she describes—no matter where she is, physically and through the language of the poem, she is split. By writing in English and in Spanish, Anzaldúa addresses the distinct selves and identities which make up her *mestiza* consciousness.

[27] Here, I provide a photo of Anzaldúa's poem to properly represent the more complex form and lineation she uses. In other quoted stanzas throughout this thesis, I have been able to reproduce the lineation myself.

Like Anzaldúa, in the poem "Just Vision" Cherríe Moraga employs tactics of visuality and doubleness to express her embodied experience with the borderlands. Though Moraga's dialogue with the US-Mexico border is less explicit than Anzaldúa's, her use of images such as barriers, obstacles, sides, and halves demonstrate how she conceptualizes her body between and through the border. In the opening stanza, Moraga writes

> I once imagined
> my bones and muscles were made of steel and rotors
> and I could do it
> stretch/leap/throw myself
> across any barrier/obstacle:
> Wide and turbulent sea of snapping dragons
> Fiery pools of naked uplifted arms, sinners awaiting their
> salvation
> Ocean stiff and still as mud, pressed flat between two pieces
> of city (1993, 27, 1-11)

Moraga conceptualizes her body as hard and mechanical, equipped to handle distances, ruptures, and barriers, including the US-Mexico border. In this vision of herself, her strength is invincible "across any barrier/obstacle." The image of "steel and rotors" speaks to the materiality of the border, where imposed constructions, such as fences and walls, create an unnatural division between the US and Mexico. Moraga imagines embodying the physicality of the border as a tactic to overcome the suffering it imposes, represented by "fiery pools of naked uplifted arms" and bodies that seek salvation. By becoming hard and impenetrable, Moraga can witness and

endure the many struggles she comes into contact with. Alongside its effect on her own body and self-protection, Moraga addresses the relationship between land and colonial and imperialistic conquest through the image of an "ocean stiff and still as mud" which finds itself divided between two cities. Like Moraga, the ocean should be in motion, fluid, and dynamic, but it too contends with the imposition of the border and is therefore "pressed flat" between the different worlds which claim and shape it.

In the second stanza, Moraga describes the reason behind her self-re-imagining:

just to get to the other side,
just to keep the two halves of my self
from cracking
down
wide
open
through the center of my skull. (1993, 27, 12-18)

Moraga imagines her body through the image of halves which she struggles to keep together. In the first stanza, she is able to escape the violent splitting she encounters by hardening herself. Here, the visceral image of her split body illustrates the bodily pain and rupture she experiences when she remains soft. Moraga's softness is implied sonorously through the mellifluous vowels "L" sounds of "two halves of my self," which are then juxtaposed by the abrasive consonant "K" sound in "cracking" and "skull." The "K" sound works doubly in this stanza, both interrupting the soft vowel sounds and reflecting an onomatopoeic cracking noise.

Moraga's anxiety around this physical split, coupled with her visual, corporeal language, reflects the role of her body in her navigation of the violence of the border. With the border positioned as a threat to her skull—the keeper of her mind and theorization—Moraga demonstrates how her navigation of border violence is emotional, embodied, and deadening. Moraga makes a structural difference between the first stanza and the second stanza. In the first stanza, she clusters the actions she sees for herself in one line: "stretch/leap/throw myself." However, in the second stanza, she organizes the splitting she faces into individual lines: "down / wide / open." The one-word lines slow the poem down, adding weight to the rupture. Though the images in the first stanza are more notably turbulent, the structure and movement of the second stanza grounds the reader in the suspended threat Moraga endures.

In my poetry, I use embodiment to understand my position between cultures, people, languages, longings, and violences. "When I was formless it was a tree I became" is a poem I have written which contends with how I embody my Persian identity through revisiting childhood memories, experiences, and self-visualization. In the second stanza, I write about my mother gardening:

> When she planted the quince tree I danced for a day,
> then sat before it, confused over its purpose.
> What did she mean the fruit was too tart to savor, too bitter for a tongue.
> Then the soft antler branches, then the apple scent, then the blossoms collecting
> wetly
> at the base of the tree as the buds grew taut, heavy and dimpled. (5-10)

In this stanza, my mother plants a quince tree which embodies my curious longings for and about my culture. Though my mother is not Persian, and quince trees are not considered a traditional planting fruit tree in the US, they hold much use and significance in Persian culture. In the poem, I express curiosities about this tree, but I recognize its function as it begins to bear fruit, as I can see the signs of its change and development. Part of my understanding of and comfort with the tree comes from its familiar qualities. "Soft antler branches," "apple scent," "blossoms collecting wetly"—these qualities all remain true to the other fruit trees my mother has planted in the garden. Here, the tree is described through assonant sounds (antler, taut, scent, wetly). But there is something about this tree that still confuses me. I have trouble making sense of its fruit, and I wonder why my mother planted it. The tree acts as a metaphor for my own planting in my mother's life, and part of my confusion has to do with understanding that I am simultaneously of my mother and different from her, culturally and ethnically. I wonder how she makes sense of me in the way I try to make sense of the tree and its fruit.

Shifting from childhood to early adulthood, in the fifth stanza I write:

I have a vision now of quince paste spread over her pregnant belly.
The photos from her two weddings stuck to either side of her stomach,
Missouri on the right, LA on the left.
The way my parents made me like words, like performance, like fact and fiction,
like growing, confusing, bitter fruit. (24-28)

In my vision, the quince paste on my mother's body becomes the wheat paste (*samanú*), which is present on each *sofreh haft seen* and represents fertility. [28] Through the quince tree, I try to

[28] The *sofreh haft sin* is an altar-like table set up each *Nowruz*, or New Year, celebrated on the Spring equinox.

understand my origins, how my parents made me through the many stories of my childhood, and the questions that were left unanswered like "growing, confusing, bitter fruit." At the end of the poem, I describe how I got my name. I then make a distinction between being named and being formed, writing:

> Then it was a tree who formed me by observing my longings. I sat for hours on
> the sidewalk
> scraping a small branchlet across the glistening wet cement,
> becoming the branch as it warmed to my hand.
> Whittling myself into something unbearably soft and hard: a piece of longing,
> planted squarely between the house and the road—
> my limbs stretching up, out, there. (30-36)

In this last stanza, my identification with the tree results in my becoming the tree. The sonorous rhythms of the poem demonstrate this oneness: "on the sidewalk / scraping a small branchlet," "glistening wet cement," "becoming the branch." The continuity of sounds within a line, such as "E" and "eh," coupled with alliteration, marry experiences of place and being with the poem. The tree encapsulates my many questions and longings: the ambiguity of the quince fruit, its generative capacities, my desire to "make sense" to myself and my family, the incompatibility of the Persian fruit tree and the US landscape. Though the tree has acted as a space of reflection in the poem, it now explicitly becomes my body as the branch, or the self, is whittled, as I become the thing planted between the house and the road. In the last line, it is not the tree's branches which stretch towards the sky, but my own limbs. As a natural being I have observed, questioned, and related to, I am able to make sense of my being through embodying the tree.

Sahra Aalaei is Polish Persian poet and multimedia artist who grapples with the complexities of displacement through their poetry. In “lonely persians begin the harvest,” Aalaei describes harvesting pomegranates with their Persian elders. Pomegranates symbolize rebirth and life in Persian culture and, throughout the poem, Aalaei and the pomegranate begin to embody one another. Aalaei opens the poem by writing:

> red balloons swell and stretch towards the sky
>
> before blowing down
>
> weighted by the tart and beautiful. (1-3)

From the very start, we see the motion of displacement imposed upon the pomegranates. The “red balloons swell and stretch towards the sky,” only to be knocked down by their own weight. The pomegranates are beautiful and tart, much like the displaced experience of feeling the immense beauty of the community you have before you while tasting the sourness of being far from your homeland. As Aalaei and their elderly relative(s) pick the pomegranates, they “pull them away from unwilling limbs…bringing down too many branches and leaves.” The pomegranate’s unwillingness to let go transfers onto the tree’s branches, which are brought down in the struggle. The pomegranate tree can be understood multiply. Perhaps Aalaei refers to Iran suffering from the absence of its people. Perhaps the tree represents a family tree being torn apart by displacement. Or this image can speak to second-generation experiences of displacement—the “pomegranate” first generation experiences the removal, though the effect of this removal affects the damaged branches and leaves, or second/third generations.

Though Aalaei does not explicitly become the pomegranate in this poem, their references to the pomegranates and embodied experiences increase in depth and nuance as the poem

progresses. Aalaei's "heart feels heavier" as they continue to harvest. This feeling is accompanied by a concluding thought. In the last two stanzas, Aalaei writes:

> I remember how, if allowed,
> pomegranates crack and open to the sky
> like strange, broken eggshells that glow in the sun
>
> spreading themselves wide open
> to be picked on by the birds. (13-17)

As Aalaei attends to their embodied experience of picking pomegranates with their elders, they remain conscious of the pomegranate as a body. By picking a pomegranate before it has a chance to crack and open, they take away its chance of ripening into its fullest form. However, at the same time, Aalaei spares it the violence of being "picked on by the birds." There is something mystical and foreign about the "strange, broken eggshells that glow in the sun" at the tops of the pomegranate tree that Aalaei will not see. The whole pomegranates they pick can be understood as the young, second-generation diasporic subject who will never be able to "ripen" in the homeland, while the cracked and pillaged pomegranates reflect their elders' experience of being fully formed individuals who underwent the violence of displacement. Aalaei's tone is more somber than despairing at this point of the poem, unlike their description of their relationship to their elders ("we harvest early because you are getting older / and I am away too often / for selfish reasons" (4-6)). Their somber tone allows for a space of reflection on the multiple truths they experience: for example, craving the fullness they see in the open pomegranate and feeling grateful to be spared of its fate. The ambiguity posed by this reflective concluding thought demonstrates a second-generation diasporic desire to know one's homeland while having had the

privilege to not experience displacement firsthand. Given the incredible significance of pomegranates in Persian culture and their role as a symbol of rebirth, Aalaei's use of this embodied metaphor provides an example of how displaced Persian and Iranian poets solidify their cultural belonging by being embodying cultural symbols.

In these four close readings, we observed how Chicana and Persian poets use a poem's structure, descriptions of the body, and embodied metaphors to establish a relationship between the body and the poem. These poets enact theory in the flesh—their identities are made up of their lived experiences which are integral to their poetry. It is interesting to observe the difference in method and subject matter between Chicana and Persian embodied poetic perspectives. In the poems by Anzaldúa and Moraga, the US-Mexico border is the juncture through which the relationship between the body and poem is explored. Through the poetic voice, these poets become the border, establish distance between themselves and the border, and utilize the space of the poem to physically represent the rupture(s) they speak of. In the poems by Aalaei and myself, the poet's body is intertwined with the poem through the use of embodied metaphor. Both Aalaei and I center our poems around fruit trees which hold great Persian cultural significance (quince and pomegranate) to conceptualize how one's body partakes in their culture despite distance from the homeland. The poet becomes emmeshed with the poem as they question, explore, and embody the presence and quality of these cultural symbols.

Conclusion

There are multiple ways to understand poetry, its utility, and a single poem's performance. Chicana and embodied women of color feminist theories provide the lens through which I analyze poetry by displaced individuals and, as such, my analyses are rooted in the idea of the personal as political. To me, these poems acknowledge the personal experiences and knowledges of their authors and politicize this way of being through engaging the formal space and techniques of poetry. Through poetry, experiences of displacement take up a literal, written space which makes art from the very aspects of displaced identities that can be tricky to understand—ambiguity, in-betweenness, and contradiction, for example. Through women of color feminist theorization, we have explored the concepts of identity ambiguity; generative contradiction; multiplicitous subjectivities; nuanced ways of knowing and being through multiple identities; and the body's role in navigating one's physical and identity landscape. All of these factors are relevant to experiences of displacement and demonstrate a rich dialogue between women of color feminisms and poetry by displaced women and queer individuals.

Fundamental to this thesis is the focus on *poetry* as a site through which a displaced identity is conceptualized. Guided by Ramazani's definition of poetry (referenced in chapter one) and Lorde's "Poetry is Not a Luxury," I understand poetry to be a dialogic space, a space of possibility, a space of imagination, and a space of flexibility. In relation to each of these qualities, poetry is a space of language, voice, and, at times, silence. A poem can be a generatively ambiguous space, it can describe a frustratingly subjective experience, and it can hold and cause a visceral bodily reaction. I also find a connection between this understanding of poetry and Lugones' idea of playful world-traveling as a practice of "not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight" (Lugones 1987, 17). Though

Lugones does not speak specifically about the relationship between world-traveling and poetry, this phrase wonderfully elucidates what I see as poetry's unique capacity. In what other written spaces do we regularly challenge convention and understand ambiguities as a "source of wisdom and delight"? I believe that a poem is the most equipped and compelling written site through which to enact this concept.

I have contended with many excitements and curiosities—many unanswered questions—as I have worked on this project. In future research and work with this thesis, there are several areas I would like to explore and expand upon. I am particularly interested in the relationship between queerness and displacement. Many, if not most, of the theorists and poets whose work I center in this project are queer. It feels important to me to explore how displacement functions on multiple levels beyond one's physical location with a specific focus on queerness and queer "displacement" from cisheteropatriarchy that exists in their homelands and social contexts. Anzaldúa addresses this concept when she challenges the imposition of cisheteropatriarchy and heteronormativity upon Indigenous and Mexican people, which she traces back to Spanish colonial imposition of gender norms and society.[29]

As I have been writing this thesis, I have understood displacement as being distanced from one's homeland. But the idea of home itself holds more nuance than a land, nation, state, or memory can hold alone. In my view, home is also created and enacted through our social relations and politics. While I have grown up in the United States, I carry an affinity towards Iran as a "home" I cannot reach. At the same time, I also recognize that in modern day Iran, my expression of my gender, sexuality, and social relationships would be monitored and targeted differently than in the United States. On a related note, my ethnicity and participation in Persian

[29] See Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera,* specifically "Chapter 2: *Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que tracionan.*"

culture can be an "othering" experience within the United States and would likely be challenged in Iran as well given my "Americanness." My point here is that, when analyzing displacement and the immediate and intergenerational realities of displacement, it is important to analyze how displacement operates on levels beyond the physical location of the body, such as one's sexuality, gender (expression), ethnicity, and participation in culture. I propose considering how one's queerness specifically endures different challenges from Mexican, Iranian, and United States culture, and thus how queer individuals may undergo a more complex experience of displacement from both inside and outside their homeland.

Similarly, it will be important to expand on the unique position of displaced women in this larger discussion of self-conceptualization through poetry. My choice to focus on poetry mostly written by women was natural for me. The majority of the poetry I read is written by women, and the poetry I sourced for this thesis reflects this area of interest. At the same time, my decision was deliberate, in that I chose to center poetry by women in the interest of dialoguing with women of color feminist traditions and creating a space of potential solidarity and coalition between displaced Persian and Chicana poets. In future expansions of this project, it feels crucial to delve further into this decision and the many nuances experienced by displaced women of color as opposed to displaced men of color or displaced white individuals. I posed a thought in the Introduction that is relevant to this discussion, being that a displaced Iranian woman living in the United States may experience a different or more intense version of "world-traveling" as posited by Lugones due to her "traveling" between both gendered and cultural identities, settings, and cultures. Similarly, this woman may experience a profound sense of identity ambiguity as discussed by Anzaldúa through mestiza consciousness and Ortega through multiplicitous subjectivities. If this woman is also a poet, perhaps her writing is geared

specifically toward other displaced Persians or women of color. I believe that this explicit attention towards the experiences of displaced women opens worlds and discourses that are important to self-conceptualization, given the double alienation from the mainstream social environment and homeland. I address this concept in my thesis by working specifically with women of color feminist theorization written by and for women of color. However, there remains room for nuance, specificity, and directness regarding this topic.

There are, of course, areas of this thesis that will expand as I develop different knowledges and fluencies. The most relevant limitation I would like to address is my relationship to Farsi; though I understand Farsi fluently and can speak it conversationally, I am still learning how to read and write. As discussed in chapters two and three, phonetically spelled Farsi is a form of code-switching Persian poets employ to navigate the linguistic complexities of displacement. This is a technique I use in certain poems to speak to my experiences of cultural (be)longing. From my position as a second-generation member of the Persian diaspora situated within the United States, the linguistic distances and difficulties born of displacement are particularly interesting to me. Alongside poetry written in English, I feel this thesis would only be strengthened by analyzing poetry written in Farsi that explores identity through displacement. This voice would complicate narratives of displacement that assume or prescribe static identities to displaced individuals, an idea which I challenge through examining the complexities of displaced (be)longings, multiplicitous subjectivities, and internal-external cultural positions. Additionally, when I am able to expand the linguistic scope of the poems I analyze to written Farsi, this thesis will be better equipped to make cross-global comparisons between poetry of displacement—for example, a poem written in Farsi by a Persians travelling to Iran might speak more fluently with Chicana poetry focused on the US-Mexico borderlands because of the place

and language-based realities these poets face. This type of analysis and comparison may reveal patterns of self-conceptualization through displacement that converse with or differ from the themes identified in this thesis, especially because poems in Farsi written by poets living in Western countries imply a challenge to the USian/Western discursive privileging of English. For Chicana poets, writing in Spanish and English within one poem may provide a more meaningful challenge to English discursive privilege—this form of code-switching reveals the lasting legacies of US imperial and colonial conquest of the land currently recognized as the Southwestern United States. While a linguistic lens is not employed to its fullest potential in my readings of the poems collected here, this is more reflective of my current difficulty with reading in Farsi than a lack of interest in this type of analytical approach.

I cannot stress enough how invested I am in poetry as a tool of self-visualization and politicization, resistance against oppressive identity categorizations, and expectations of identity one-dimensionality. Though the phrase "the personal is the political" is often spoken within feminist spaces, I do not feel that method of consciousness-raising has always been used inclusively or tangibly. Whose personal stories have been privileged, and thus made the face of "the political," by mainstream feminists of the 20th and 21st century? What methods are available and offered for articulating one's personal as political? The very existence of women of color feminisms demonstrates women of color's exclusion from white hegemonic feminist designations of the experiences and stories which are worth telling and developing feminist consciousnesses from. Specific women of color feminist spaces are needed to engage the stories, presences, and theorization of women of color feminists.

Through women of color feminist discourses, women of color articulate the importance of self-telling as a method to make the personal political. This is seen The Latina Feminist

Group's emphasis on *testimonio,* which offers "an artistic form and methodology to create politicized understandings of identity and community " (3). It is seen in Audre Lorde's call for women of color to write poetry from the "dark place within where hidden and growing our true spirit rises, 'Beautiful and tough as chestnut/stanchions against our nightmare of weakness' and of impotence" (1). It is seen in Moraga's understanding of writing from the body, theory in the flesh, as a liberation tool (13). Finally, it is seen in all the work Gloria Anzaldúa has produced for her insistence on incorporating her identity, complexity, voice(s), and theorization in her writing. The personal does not exist separately from the political. A poem provides us with the space to enact this. As Lorde writes: "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action" (1). Poetry forms the ways we view ourselves, our goals, and our politics, and poetry provides us with the space of turning an idea or feeling into tangible action. What follows is my own poetry collection titled *The Sad Songs are Not Sad, Just Distant.* I hope that the theoretical frameworks and close readings I have provided will provide the tools to understand this collection of poetry which describes my second-generation experiences of displacement. This is one way I make my person political. I offer these poems to my reader now.

Appendix 1: *The Sad Songs Are Not Sad, Just Distant*

The Sad Songs are Not Sad, Just Distant is a collection of poetry I've written over the past two years. Through these poems, I observe, vocalize, and hold tenderly my experiences of (be)longing which are shaped by my Persian heritage and family situation of exile. These poems make up the first section of my full poetry manuscript.

Coin
This is a collection of selves.
There is no myth to draw upon, no house to call my own,
just voices, voices that surround me
in lush and warbled weavings.

Let's call this a tapestry of selves, then,
and these words the golden thread of fraught belongings.
The needle will pass through two realities:
feigned neatness, the knots behind,
a persistent clink against a thimble I imagine
as the beak of the birds she'd coo at, small hungry things,
a beak swallowing my grandmother's fingertip.

Swallowing my grandmother
until her life flattens to thin metal,
her limbs curled inward like a young spider's legs.
Now, standing before her glossy eye reveals
more of yourself than her soul. Death drinks her body slowly.
I wonder if it's because she cannot be placed.

We imagine only what we can bear,

like the stories I make up about the Persian coin
my sister slips in my pocket midday.
Gilded, double-sided, pressed against my left breast
for perpetual fortune. It winces against daylight,
and in this I perceive my grandmother's wink,
and in the light-liquid her voice lilts,
and upon its sound I hear a voice just out of reach—
the sound is looking at me.
Its eyes are mirrors.
I become a self.

Ghostwords

In Farsi I'm a ghost. And I'd tell you the word for ghost if it hadn't already become a silver shadow of itself in my brain. If I didn't have to ask my grandfather for the third time if he would remind me how to say it. *What word becomes half-soul shadow of human with spirit? You know, at Halloween time*. Now you've confused everyone in the room. Even so, asking only works when you trust your words enough to let him hear them. Fleeing fighter pilot, you can't mumble your ghostwords here, you must shout respectfully in formal tense towards his "good" ear. His hands 93 years old in April and strong, brown and stronger than any other grip I've felt. It must be some sinewed love grip, his hand holding mine, his face searching the half-framed questions in my eyes. He who squints to answer my question about something larger, about forgetting and remembering. About if he'd come back here to find me, far as I am. Tongueless. Today, I'm anchored to his tepid skin. When he goes, I'll be the tip of a tongue I'll be a sound I can't remember, can't say.

Art Prize

an ice cream sundae
two big eyes and a crowd
a gumball machine
and paper-mâché masks
a brown boy's "excuse me"
between indifferent bodies
this navigation
this aloneness
a stage and an award and an emcee
stumbling over his name
"hey you, you've won the prize"
through the crowd
across the table
those two brown eyes
baffled and unblinking
with eyelashes fanned like a wet rainbow
like my sister's
a plane ticket with no return date
a prize won
a suitcase of the rawest wealth
pencils
books
North American September
a half-familiar language
a half-familiar country

and through this whole story
my father's ambivalence
his amused shrug
makes my chest tighten quickly
like the fist of a weepy child

Running from Me

My parents housed two bunnies that died before I was born
SweetheartandJones always in that order
Bunny run from me Sweetheart bound lightly
Pop through a dimension where windowsills are painted red with dust

My father's upper body is strong but pliable leaning against the sepia trailer his gloves
gape at his elbows he is a magician with no more rabbit(s)
He's doing a trick called vulnerability

There are many worlds to know about him and I worry that I'm far from them all
or maybe I've never known him The trick ends and ends and ends

Fuzzy seedpod before the poppy bursts clean
In all its soft gore all its sickly scent all the anger suspended in
a single drooping dewdrop the plastic kind in Maman Lila's crinkly drawer crammed
with fake flowers and crystals
I see his greencard photo and I burst

How he looks like a new carnation and so blue at the same time
that rich fearful lifeblood blue SweetheartandJones
If a curtain was thrown over my palms maybe I could make him appear there

If stuffing memories into the hat doesn't work this time
I'll be a home I'll be the pressure of blood I'll be the wet soil between here and there
But somehow it's all wrong somehow it looked just right
to see Baba run through the front door leave it ajar gift me a vacuum night

Where is My Gun, Leili Joon?
If God capital G is the great white father,
who is this *khoda* on the doorstep of
my grandmother's tongue?
God-willing I won't turn out a disappearing act,
here and there, sweetening a glass of tea I can't drink,
the sugar cube between their teeth.
Maybe it's a kind of half-belief, the divine potential of dirty soap,
a hateful promise, one-word-and-she's-cursing-her-destiny.
The stickiness of belief is not lost on me in this stained
apartment that once sparkled with crystal swans.
With a word I take cultural communion, I address
a god whose word was used to shake her
from her country like a rat from a boot,
gave her time for one bag of coins,
her child shipped ahead of time, nose already pressed
to a pane of sky.
My father taught me the word bastard as a child and
I used it liberally, knowing its meaning.
When it got tired, I wondered what to call a girl
with her father without his country.
Where is my gun, Leili joon? is a folkloric song,
a question we sing. She's too much of a lady to take
the question from its sound, answer it,
unlike my father, who took his boy gun and shot
the revolution through the dog door. When my grandfather arrived home,
he showed little Baba where he kept the rifle.
And so it goes, Baba was born.
And so it goes, Baba trusts no *khoda*
but his own hand, his own steady steady hand.

> *On top of the roof, you fly pigeons—*
> *your thumb is lovely, Leili joon, you let go of the birds well.*

Lacquered Lady

Looking for the oxygen left by a bluebrowncrab
when it slips silky beneath the water's surface, both claws lifted toward
white light.

The ladies please me,
nails painted geranium red & taunting.
I think of my grandmother's nails & how there are no crab feasts in LA
like the ones in Connecticut. A salmon, yes—I can see its red flesh go mute.

But never the killing,
no, never the deadred pot holding eyes everywhere.
Instead, doors that stick, imploded countries, plastic covered sofas.
Songs on repeat & paused vinyl.

I'm happy when my uncle lopes the ladies over the beaten boat rim
because you'll live on, I'll get to find you again.

We've bathed her in water once removed,
flicked her flipper sepals,
lost her from her mate. Still she salutes my drifting hand.
I think I'll call her lovered loving beyond reason.

The silt is churned muddy & gold
& though I know she's somewhere below the surface
the empty space is vexing like golden green,
golden silt, golden gone.

Gone lacquered lady, you haven't been around for a while
& now you're almost gonegone.

The Song of S

The story goes that for love and recollection
the *táb táb* of a hand is enough.
That's true for a melon, but I long for more:

I want open markets, fragrant sweat,
a whole child shining loudly from the orchard,
the charm and restlessness of it all.

There was no reasonable way to explain this:
it was my enchantment with the moon
which made me tell him of crying instruments,

of mirrors and fruit, of hot netted July,
rugs losing their scent in the heat,
gasoline and sand, sugar stick teeth.

Sad sounds. Sounds of wounds. The song of S.
When I press my back to him, the shadows
gloss a silver I know, I don't really know,

though the scar aches like a blue afternoon
each misplaced dawn, each time it is traced
earnestly. Something stings in every sweet,

like when he asks me questions and
each answer is out of reach. Like the vendor
whose ripest grapes are swarmed by bees.

Silk. Enamel. Fruit flesh. Crystal. Not-home and memory.
I'd like to belong to something I know—
that's it, no resolution.

When I was formless it was a tree I became
When I was born, I was without a name for a week
in a hospital overseeing many hills, many flowers too.
When I was born, I belonged to everybody in the room,
knew them like the dappled sadness in my mother's eyes,
the photograph where she lifts her shirt to the evening light.

When she planted the quince tree I danced for a day,
then sat before it, confused over its purpose.
What did she mean the fruit was too tart to savor, too bitter for a tongue.
Then the soft antler branches, then the apple scent, then the blossoms collecting wetly
at the base of the tree as the buds grew taut, heavy and dimpled.
For months we ate membrillo and *tas kabab*.

It was in front of that tree that I trudged behind my mother
as she tended, begging her for a brother, a boy from Iran.
Was it possible? The whole while she was moving,
thrusting her shovel into the dirt,
crunching her weight upon the flat blade top. Yes and no,
the idea suspended in the pink of her work-flushed face.
I wonder why I never noticed how old she was and how young she was, too.

I have a vision now of quince paste spread over her pregnant belly.
The photos from two weddings stick to either side of her stomach,
Missouri on the right, LA on the left.
The way my parents made me like words, like performance, like fact and fiction,
like growing, confusing, bitter fruit.

When I was nameless it was my sister who named me, pardoned a flower onto me
in the hospital with family circling us.
Then it was a tree who formed me by observing my longings. I sat for hours on the sidewalk
scraping a small branchlet across the glistening wet cement,
becoming the branch as it warmed to my hand.
Whittling myself into something unbearably soft and hard: a piece of longing,
planted squarely between the house and the road—
my limbs stretching up, out, there.

Sedah (sound, voice)
Do you remember the fruit bowl brimming with plums and grapes,
cucumbers and oranges,
cherries, peaches, apricots?

Maman Lila shuffling down the hallway with
a song and a knife and a robe
and the melon she'd toss into the bathtub?

Do you remember how sugar roughs your teeth,
how music buries into your skin,
and do you remember how to say goodbye?

may god watch you with your permission I would sacrifice myself for you

Can you hear it?

And do you remember the song your grandfather sang for years
after the catastrophe? *Everything is calm oh how happy I am*
Last week, he asked you to sing to your grandmother

over the phone. You pictured her living room bed,
you remembered the words but not the melody.

He filled years of silence with a crooning sound.

So you want to know what you are.
First, you must remember that the sad songs are not sad, just distant.
Put your clean body in the water. Let the music hum
through you. Be no further than a father

and let yourself chuckle with the sound which trills on and on,
feminine fussing, light and heavy, a sickly-sweet container –

gentle nightmare
being distanced like this. The color, touch, sound you cling to.
Bowl of ever-present memory.

May God Protect You on Your Journey

In the mist of a windowless hallway, my aunt insists that my sister take her watch,
the tiniest hoop through which to jump, soar deftly and land, legs shaking.
A tremor that never lets go of you. Maybe the body is baffled that it made it through.

They fight in front of me over the ticking gold and the velvety blue, alive
as ribbon. Betrayed desire, feigned exasperation, she takes the watch. My aunt is triumphant,
the watch somehow martyred.

A cucumber leaves a bitter film on my lips and my aunt is pained joy
radiating into every bone of my body. I cannot leave her and I will.

The watch has now passed through three generations of women, two of them *khales,*
the oldest of them living loudly still. When my sister extends her wrist towards my great aunt
she sucks her bottom lip and scowls—she doesn't remember and now she does, her eyes soft as milk,
her smile blinking slowly. I notice her teeth look just like her sister's and
it's my grandmother's smile forcing me to look away.

All of the women's hands hurt. The watch band smells of cumin and the perfume drawer,
my grandmother's skin. It's a scent I want to bathe in, opaque as white water
running off uncooked rice. Cool sweet water swirling in a pot. So many times
I've wanted to follow my fingers, dip my arms up to my shoulders. To drink soft water
and let it starch me, right me from inside.

All of the women's hands hurt and there is nothing to do about it but talk,
or so they say, wrists too weak for watches and pots still workingworkingworking,

the loudness silent in the living room when she casts her unflinching gaze upon me,
joints misshapen from years of the cold pain in her hand as it closes the door in front of us
dastetoon dard nakone literally, we add in English,

may your hands not hurt, thank you, may your hands not hurt from behind that door.

Homeland

I am a being when only the color gray is watching,
when there is no body to throw myself against
and no hope for refraction.

Home is convoluted now more than ever;
images of my mother awake with the swallow
in the suffering known only by her pearly dawn,

a place I cannot want us to return to.
My father in the garage with black grease on his cheek,
black like his hair, a feeling he shouldn't be here.

I love places I've never known, and distant
knowing builds comfort not unlike the memories
of places we've stepped into, the sound and touch.

I am less timid but more afraid, fearing something
suddenly tangible. Now I prefer photos of Iran over dreams,
though the boy who is my father leaves me blurry for the day.

A man on the plane hopes I can return to my homeland
one day and my hunger startles him slightly. I see it in his eye.
The sugar between home and land dissolves so easily in the sky.

It is no small task to navigate
two forces, two memories, two selves and their bearings.
And the mourning dove always comes to mind,

cooing like a mellow baby in the midst of chaos.
Grey June morning, cooing, calling me from a shadowed window;
my bed is warm and I'm already barefoot on morning's breath.

And there is one thought as I wake to a sound
as cool as June and dew: if you hear the dove's call,
I hope you won't mention it to me. I ask no sound to fall from your mouth at all.

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