FROM THE FIELDS TO THE STREETS TO THE STAGE: CHICANA AGENCY AND IDENTITY WITHIN THE *MOVIMIENTO*

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of Romance Languages
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

December 2015

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: From the Fields to the Streets to the Stage: Chicana Agency and Identity Within the *Movimiento*

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Romance Languages by:

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Degree awarded December 2015.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The unionization of the United Farm Workers in 1962 precipitated the longest labor movement in US history, which in turn inspired all sectors of Chicana/o activism and artistic production. As the *Movimiento* gained support and recognition throughout the 1960s, grassroots and activist theater and performance played fundamental roles in representing its causes and goals. By the 1980s, however, the *Movimiento* was frequently represented and understood as a reclaiming of Chicano identity through an assertion of Chicano masculinity, a reality which rendered the participation and cultural production of Chicanas even less visible within an already marginalized cultural and historical legacy.

In this dissertation, I seek to develop historically grounded answers to questions around issues of male visibility and female and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer invisibility within the *Movimiento* and dominant Anglo culture. I work to bridge this critical gap in the treatment of plays by Chicana/o dramatists in two ways: (1) by examining plays by Chicanas without attributing or reducing their impact to their identities as women, lesbians, and/or feminists but rather by considering the performative characteristics of their works and (2) by engaging issues of gender and sexual biases and hierarchies across several decades of Chicana/o cultural production.

A primary goal of this project is to shift and expand the critical focus of scholarship and discourse on Chicana/o theater and performance in order to consider the lived experiences and creative contributions of the many participants in the *Movimiento*, many of whom are not represented through the perspective, experience, and voice of the heteropatriarchal Chicano subject. I maintain that we must take into account multiple and often conflicting representations of the *Movimiento* and of Chicana/o identity in order to more fully understand the history of Chicana/os in the US and to better confront the mechanisms of exclusion toward Chicana/os that have continued into our present moment. At stake is the equal treatment and inclusion of the contributions of Chicana and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer Chicana/o dramatists as well as a more profound and nuanced understanding of the fight for the liberation of multiple and diverse Chicana/o subjects that has continued into our present moment.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation was supported in part by a Dissertation Fellowship from the Oregon Humanities Center and by fellowships and scholarships from the College of Arts & Sciences and the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Oregon.

It was also supported by the generous and diverse Eugenians who employed me in part-time work throughout my tenure as a graduate student, as a nanny, a weeder/landscaper, a house/pet-sitter, a tutor, a restaurant worker, a translator, and a personal assistant.

My five years as a doctoral student and graduate employee were supported from beginning to end by Nat Brenner, my colleague, office-mate, and partner in all things RLGSA/GTFF and in all endeavors to resist, revolutionize, and rebel against the increasing corporatization of higher education. ¡Sí se puede!

My most recent revisions were influenced, in part, by conversations with my students in SPAN 348, whose willingness to engage with challenging and intimate topics through the study of Chicana/o cultural production reaffirmed for me the significance of continued work in the fields of Chicana/o Studies and Chicana/o theater and performance.

Much of this book was conceptualized, written, and rewritten in the company of all of the Perk regulars and especially Logan Gowen, who afforded me countless opportunities to talk through my writing process and allowed me to take up significant table space for over a year.

The final stages of writing and editing were supported by my colleague and compañera Luz Romero, whose attentive eyes and thoughtful ears helped to prepare me for my final dissertation defense. ¡Muchísimas gracias!

I am grateful to have found not only a mentor but also a friend, neighbor, and like-spirited person in Analisa Taylor, the Chair of my Dissertation Committee and a writer and thinker whose words and work always inspire in me—and others—necessary and profound (self)reflection and (self)examination. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

DEDICACIÓN

*

To my first love,

who repaired my spirit and made me conscious and loved me wholly
from the day we met,
and all the days afterward,
through adolescence,
our self-absorbed college years,
and more than a decade spent
intertwined and
working through our shit:

I remember all of it; I miss you still; I wrote this, in the end, without you.

*

To the people I once called parents,

who couldn't love any of us
or even themselves,
who missed so many opportunities
to know me,
who lack substance and consciousness and honesty,
who always met my self-awareness with repression,
my intensity with violence,
my intellect with ridicule,
my love with terror,
my empathy with cruelty,
my wisdom with ignorance,
and my honesty with denial:

I remember enough to be sure; I miss you not at all; I wrote this, from the very beginning, in spite of you.

*

To the grief that brought me deeper,

by (nearly) fracturing my insides and my optimism
and by rubbing me raw,
from the first flicker of doubt
to the agonizing hours and years spent waiting
until
I finally (nearly) believed
she was gone:

I remember only fragments; I don't know how much I miss; I wrote this, somehow, enfolded within your weight.

*

To the town I call home,

where I grow my own food and never need a car
or somewhere else to go,
where I've felt most grounded
and least alone,
where I've come closest to living the life
brought to image
in the vision board I made before my move,
alone,
to a coast and a town I'd never seen:

I remember the first summer; I miss no other place; I wrote this, from first to final word, at home.

*

To Derrick Jensen and Lidia Yuknavitch and Margaret Atwood and Cheryl Strayed,

who write of what matters most
in a way that moves me
to consciousness,
to anger,
and to write as they do,
whose lives and work compelled me
to finish this book
in order to make time to write,
finally,
of what matters more:

I remember my first encounters with your words; I miss your books; I wrote this, always, with your standards in mind.

*

To my lover and partner,

a feminist against all odds
and the sweetest man I've ever known,
who shook my hand when we met
and understands words like
heteropatriarchal,
misogynist,
and unsustainable,

who fell in love with Margaret Atwood's prose
and brought me back to life and love and loss,
in a car ride,
in Cottage,
on the train,
over morning coffee and so much tea,
and through the most (profound) sex I've ever had,
who loved me first
and loves me still:

I remember so much of everything about you; I miss our first months, sometimes; I wrote this beside, and in love with, you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This story begins before hundreds of thousands of Mexicans did not cross but *were crossed* by the expansion of the US border into Mexican territory.

It begins before that newly formed US-Mexico border became, as Gloria Anzaldúa wrote, "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (*Borderlands* 25).

It begins before the Delano Grape strike of 1965, and before the proliferation of grassroots and improvisational theater in the fields of California, in towns and cities across the US Southwest, in published works of literature and scholarly criticism, and in institutions of higher education.

It begins before the first US university approved a Chicana/o Studies course or program, before the first high school included works by Chicana/os in a US literature course, and long before I'd ever heard or read the word Chicana/o in any context.

It begins before libraries, public schools, and entire US states banned the discussion of Chicana/o books, classes, artists, and activists in the fear that they promoted an overthrow of the US government.

It begins before the first Chicana performance piece I'd ever experienced—Adelina Anthony's one-woman show, *Making Sex & Tortillas*—shook me to consciousness, laughter, and tears.

It begins before four US Congressmen introduced the Dream Act in 2001, before its many proponents fought to grant permanent residency to undocumented immigrants, and before the act failed in a divided Congress again, and again, and again.

It begins before I discovered Cherríe Moraga's play *Giving Up the Ghost: A Stage Play in Three Portraits* and before I saw a live performance of Luis Valdez's *Valley of the Heart: A Kabuki Corrido* at El Teatro Campesino's playhouse in San Juan Bautista, California.

It begins before a group of *librotraficantes* fought back against Arizona House Bill 2281, which prohibited courses and materials in Mexican American Studies in the Tucson Unified School District, and before a Federal Appeals Court finally overturned HB 2281 in June of 2015.

It begins before my department invited me to design my own version of a course on US Latina/o literature, before I pored through dozens of books, articles, and videos while preparing my syllabus around the work of Chicana/o dramatists and theorists, and before many of my students—some Chicana/o, others not—wrote in their weekly journals that they'd never encountered Chicana/o subjects, or bilingual literature, in any class before.

This story begins long before and extends far beyond my own work as a student and a scholar in the fields of Chicana/o Studies and Chicana/o theater and performance. This particular story is mine to tell only in the sense that my experiences and my education have inspired in me a passion for the study of Chicana/o cultural production and, especially, Chicana/o theater. I recognize my position of relative privilege, as a white student pursuing a doctoral degree at a university in the US. I recognize, too, the disjuncture between the challenges I've faced and those of the women and men whose lives and works I examine in this dissertation.

And yet, as a good friend and colleague said to me last year, about what else could I, *should I*, write? I could write in obedience to the ideological and practical confines of an oppressive dominant society that denies versions of US history and culture that shatter the myth of US manifest destiny[1]. I could choose not to write at all; I could continue to ignore the disparities and inequities perpetuated within the racial, class, sexual, and gender hierarchies I witness everywhere around me. So rather than ignore, deny, and disengage, I have chosen to acknowledge the responsibility and opportunity afforded to me by my educational path: to write of what matters most to me, and to write in a way that is engaging, informative, and accessible.

Several questions have informed my exploration of the *Movimiento*[2] through Chicana/o cultural production. First, what can we learn from the *Movimiento*, which does not begin in the 1960s and does not end in the 1980s, that holds relevance for us in the 21st century? What lessons can we learn from consideration of the ways in which the Chicano Movement, like other horizontal social movements, manifests hierarchical issues even as it tries to confront them within dominant culture? Why is the reassertion of heteropatriarchal subjectivity so prevalent in Chicano cultural production, and how has that tendency been addressed by Chicana/o dramatists and scholars in more recent decades? Finally, what can theater reveal, teach, and represent to us that we cannot glean from other forms of cultural production?

Consideration of these questions ultimately illuminated for me significant inequities in the treatment of Chicana/o dramatists and their works within dominant

[1] Here I am referring to the 19th century belief that US settlers and institutions, due to their particular virtues as "Americans," were destined to expand west to the Pacific Ocean.

[2] I use the term "*Movimiento*" as synonymous with the Chicano Movement throughout this dissertation. It has the advantage of being gender-neutral, unlike the term "Chicano."

academic and popular discourse, inequities that have rendered the cultural production of Chicanas and lesbian/gay/queer/bisexual Chicana/os even less visible. Consideration of Chicana/o theater broadens our understanding of how Chicana/o history has been repressed in US historical discourse; it also demonstrates the continued existence of significant obstacles to the visibility of Chicana/o history.

In this dissertation, I set out to bridge a critical gap in the treatment of plays by Chicana/o dramatists in two ways: I examine plays by Chicana dramatists without simply attributing or reducing their impact within the field to their identities as women, lesbians, and/or feminists, but rather by considering the literary and performative features of their works; furthermore, I problematize representations of gender and sexual identity in what are considered foundational and representative works in the fields of Chicana/o Theater and Chicana/o Studies.

A primary goal of this project is to shift and expand the critical focus of scholarship and discourse on Chicana/o Theater, in order to include the lived experiences and creative contributions of *all* of the major participants in the *Movimiento*, many of whom are not represented through the perspective, experiences, and voice of the heteropatriarchal Chicano subject. At stake is the equal treatment and inclusion of the contributions of Chicana and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer dramatists, as well as the reconceptualization of the fight for the liberation of multiple and diverse Chicana/o subjects.

In the fall of 2015, I observed a course taught by an instructor in my department. On this day, that instructor told a group of seventy undergraduate students that "Chicano" is a problematic identity label because it is exclusionary. He explained that because it

refers only to people with ties to Mexico and its relationship with the United States, it excludes other ethnic and national groups who might identify with the labels of "Latino" or "Hispanic." As a person from a region of Latin America far from Mexico, this colleague had self-identified as Mestizo earlier in the same class, a term which through his own logic would also be deemed exclusionary because it necessarily "excludes" those who identify as indigenous or Spanish.[3] In fact, I recall thinking to myself that any term would be too exclusionary by those standards. Our respective positions—me, a female, white graduate student working as his graduate teaching assistant; he, a male, Latin American instructor—were enough for me to silence the responses that flooded my mind as he turned to discuss the pros and cons of the terms Latino and Hispanic.

If I had been invited to weigh in on the topic of discussion, I might have responded by first asking him to clarify for whom the term Chicana/o is problematic, and in what specific ways? I might also have asked the students themselves—many of whom were not monolingual, English-speakers, some of whom were born in the US to parents born in Latin Americans countries, predominantly Mexico, and some of whom had already identified as Chicana/o and Mexican American in a previous class discussion—how they understand and use the term Chicana/o. I might have questioned this instructor's assumption that broader identity labels are by nature more inclusive and that more specific or in-group terms are always more problematic. I might have offered that

[3] In her introduction to *Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination: Thresholds of Belonging* (2009), Analisa Taylor discusses how this kind of identity assertion, articulated through the modern framework of "indigenismo," is problematic in its denial of a more complex multiethnicity in Latin America: "indigenismo racializes the dichotomy between traditional and modern life and frames the conditions under which people are included or excluded from the nation. As a way of seeing Latin American society, indigenismo grafts this binary opposition between past and present onto ethnic differences, casting the Indian as a residual figure – an anomaly – and the mestizo as a modern citizen. The dichotomy effaces the existence of ethnic differences among indigenous groups and among other groups whose identities fall outside the Indian past/mestizo present binary."

what he calls exclusivity I would, in fact, call inclusivity: being Chicana/o in the sense of belonging to a particular community, as an expression of a shared history of both colonization and liberation, or as an acknowledgment of a rich legacy of activism and cultural production. I might have mentioned Gloria Anzaldúa, who describes being Chicana/o as a state of inhabiting Borderlands, "not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions," as "life on the borders, life in shadows," and as a life "*sin fronteras*" in which one must "be a crossroads" (*Borderlands* 19, 217). I might have suggested he read one of the many sources[4] that have helped me to understand how Chicana/os conceive of themselves as a people with a shared history of colonial occupation. At the very least I might have encouraged him, along with the rest of the class, to read any book—a play, some poems, an anthology—by a Chicana/o writer before labeling the term exclusionary and problematic.

This recent experience led me to think more deeply about boundaries and borders. Even within academia, it can be easy to forget that we don't all come equipped with the same frames of reference. We haven't all read the same books, we haven't taken the same courses, and we haven't participated in the same discussions. We don't all believe in the same causes, share the same ideological framework, or experience the same emotional reactions to the world around us. We don't all have the same goals, inhabit the

[4] I would include among these sources of recommended reading many of the books that have been banned in Arizona and in other states in the US South and Southwest. My recommendations include, in no particular order: Rodolfo Acuña's *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*; *500 Años del Pueblo Chicano: 500 Years of Chicano History in picture*, compiled by Elizabeth Martínez; *Message to Aztlán: Selected Writings* and, in particular, "I Am Joaquín," by Rodolfo "Corky" González; *Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, both the published book and the PBS documentary by the same name; Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*; *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, co-edited by Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga; "La Plebe," Luis Valdez's introduction to *Aztlán: An Anthology of Mexican American Literature*, Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* and *The Road to Aztlán: Art from a Mythic Homeland*, a pictorial and narrative exploration of art from and about the US Southwest and Northern Mexico before the imposition of the present-day US-Mexico border, edited by Virginia M. Fields and Víctor Zamudio-Taylor and with a preface by Miguel León-Portilla.

same bodies, or live the same lives. In conspicuous and invisible ways, our uniqueness, our individuality, and our particularities are constantly carving out spaces between us as we move through our daily lives.

In the editorial remarks to *E-misférica—Borders: Hybrid Imaginaries/Fractured Geographies*, Ulla D. Berg and Roberto Varea reflect on the ubiquity of borders in our everyday life:

> Borders are everywhere. They surround us. They divide us and allow us to come together. They mark our territories, our bodies, and our speech. They are real and imagined, porous and hard, visible and invisible, dominant and subtle, but above all political. Just as they hinder and impede our expansion and our growth, so they also shape our identities and senses of self. They become socially and culturally meaningful by the way in which they signal an end to possibility, but they also encode the very possibility of that which they deny: the performative and necessary act of being crossed. Virtually, physically, legally or illegally, as long as borders exist, so will border crossers. (3)

I too have come up against borders in my own academic work in the field of Chicana/o Studies, a subject that is often excluded or underrepresented within US literature courses and programs and even within the fields of Latina/o and Latin American Studies. It has proved challenging for me to earn outside funding for research on literature that is written neither solely in English nor solely in Spanish. I have had to justify how my work fits in, how it belongs, within cultural production created on either side of the US-Mexico Border. In some cases, I have had to prove that Chicana/o cultural production exists in the first place, and then that it has value within an academic context. I've experienced these challenges two-fold in terms of my study of cultural production by Chicanas, as their accomplishments are often erased or overlooked even within the *Movimiento* itself.

These challenges I've faced as a student and a scholar, along with other experiences I've encountered as a teacher, have ultimately crystallized for me what I see

as two major obstacles to our understanding of the history of Chicana/o cultural production and to the visibility of works by Chicana writers.

The first obstacle relates to the history of Anglo-American expansion into Mexico, the appropriation of Mexican land and labor, and the cultural and legal construction of whiteness into the 20th century. These series of events fueled and inspired much of the Chicana/o activism and cultural production of the 1960s and 1970s in the US. As Analisa Taylor has affirmed,

> [w]ithout an understanding of the historical conditions of colonization of what is today the greater Southwestern United States, and the disenfranchisement of the Mexican people on both sides of the new national border at the Río Bravo, or the Río Grande as it is commonly called in the US, we cannot grasp the significance of Chicana/o activism and cultural production of the 1960s and 1970s, and we also can't fathom the cultural and political claims to nationhood, to indigeneity, imbued within the terms Chicano, Chicana, Aztlán, and Raza. (Personal interview)

In my second chapter, I outline the mid-19th century process through which the US usurped half of Mexico's territory in order to expand into what we know today as the South and Southwestern US. Through US expansionist policies and practices, former Mexican citizens became "not-quite-US-citizens" on land that had once been called Mexico. "Mexicanness," in the context of US coloniality in and toward Mexico, became constructed and, later, institutionalized as "otherness," as non-whiteness, within the US. The neocolonial construction of Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicana/o as "other" throughout the 20th century is a central preoccupation of many Chicana/o scholars who have undertaken decolonizing projects—both theoretical and artistic—that facilitate

deeper and more nuanced consideration of the far-reaching implications of the history of the US-Mexico border.[5]

My focus in this dissertation is Chicana/o cultural production—especially in the form of theater and performance—beginning in the 1960s. Although Chicana/o cultural production predates the mid-20th century, the late 1960s and early 1970s marked a significant moment of change in cultural production by Chicanas and Chicanos living in the U.S. As the documentary *Chicano! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* attests, before that period very few people of Mexican heritage held positions of power within the U.S. establishment, in part due to what Henry Cisneros, the film's narrator, calls "the legacy of poverty and discrimination" of Mexican Americans: "Half of all Mexican Americans had less than eight years of education, and a third lived in poverty. Politically, they were underrepresented. In 1967, only four Mexican Americans served in Congress." In a filmed interview, Vicente Ximenes, Chair of the Committee on Mexican American Affairs founded by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1967, articulated his support for President Johnson's efforts to address the underrepresentation of Mexican Americans: "And [President Johnson's] message came to me too, that '*Hey, you've gotta do something*', because there's this young radical group out there. They've got

[5] *Decolonial Voices: Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies in the 21st Century*, edited by Arturo J. Aldama and Naomi H. Quiñonez, is an anthology that addresses contemporary issues of Chicana/o identity, representation, and cultural production through interdisciplinary essays that together explore "how Chicana and Chicano cultural productions articulate a resistance to the multiplicity of oppression across race, class, gender, and sexuality and perform a cultural mestizaje and hybridity in the age of transnational globalizations" (Aldama 3). In their introduction, Aldama and Quiñonez emphasize the influence of what they call "a new wave of mestiza/o cultural workers" whose work has informed the conceptualization and organization of this anthology: "These 'seers' into the world of 'mestizaje consciousness' deconstruct, reinvent, and affirm the multiple subjectivities of a dynamic cultural contextualization. [This anthology] is about the messages issued by those voices. They are voices that sing praises and question authorities; that recover subjugated histories and knowledge(s); that critique and contradict master narratives of racial and patriarchal orders; and finally, that (re)claim space and place for Chicana and Chicano cultural discourses. Most significantly, they are voices engaged in extracting meaning from a cultural aesthetic that has long been omitted from Euro-Western cultural canons, signaling new directions in Chicana and Chicano cultural studies" (2).

something on their minds, and I happen to believe that they're right. Establishment," Ximenes adds, gesturing to himself, "you've gotta do something" (*Chicano!*).

One manifestation of socio-political activism in the 1960s were the protests, demonstrations, and eventual labor strike by Mexican American farm workers in California. The unionization of the United Farm Workers [UFW] in 1962 precipitated the longest labor movement in U.S. history, which in turn inspired all sectors of Chicana/o activism and artistic production. The first farm labor union rallied against numerous abuses perpetrated against farm laborers, including: a pay rate of 85 cents per hour, annual incomes well below the poverty level, and widespread racial and sexual harassment. These conditions and others contributed to an average life expectancy of 54 years for farm laborers (Broyles xi). Labor organizers César Chávez and Dolores Huerta spent the years following the formation of the farm workers' union "painstakingly building up the membership of [their] infant organization," assuming that field strikes and union contracts were still years, if not decades, in the future (UFW). Only three years later however, in 1965, the 1,200 member families of the Latino NFWA (National Farm Workers Association) joined the largely Filipino American union members of the AWOC (Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee) in what would come to be known as the five-year Delano Grape Strike. In March of 1966, Chávez, Huerta, and hundreds of striking farm workers began a 340-mile pilgrimage for justice, from Delano to the California state Capitol in Sacramento, a march which culminated in the union's first contract. By 1967, the UFW had successfully executed strikes and boycotts of grape and wine companies in the name of *La Causa*, the farmworkers' cause.

As the *Movimiento* gained support and recognition, Chicana/os began to speak out and assert their subject positions as US citizens with the right to active and visible participation and representation within all arenas of US society. In response to the racialization of Mexicans in the U.S. following U.S. occupation of Mexican territory, the *Movimiento*'s most vocal participants began to assert their status as non-white, as mestizo, and as indigenous, fostering political solidarity through their connection to a shared history of colonization and deterritorialization. In *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement*, Yolanda Broyles-González explains that "[t]hese events inspired and directly influenced all sectors of Chicana/o artistic and political activism, such as opposition to the war in Vietnam; efforts to secure equality before the law; and demands to end discriminatory practices in the schools, universities, and labor market" (xi-xiii). Theater and performance art played fundamental roles in representing the causes and the goals of the *Movimiento* in the 1960s and, over time, in problematizing their underlying assumptions and limitations in terms of the representation of multiple Chicana/o subjects.

Chicana/o activist theater was instrumental in the consciousness-raising and organizing efforts of the broader Chicano Movement. Although *teatro chicano* and the *Movimiento* were not always synonymous in terms of their participants, goals, and successes, the rise of the Chicana/o Theater Movement did coincide with the first UFW strikes of the mid-1960s. The historical exclusion toward people of Mexican heritage was represented in some of the earliest *actos*—improvisational skits—performed by and for farmworkers in California from the mid-1960s and into the 1970s. Theater and performance, as opposed to other literary genres or narrative styles, not only permitted

but in this case depended upon the participation of Chicana/os who had experienced the discrimination, racial profiling, and disenfranchisement that the earliest *actos* portrayed through informal, satirical, and didactic performances. Broyles-González notes that Chicano theater spread across the US during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the US Southwest, in Chicana/o communities and on college campuses, portraying "the life, heritage, and problems of Chicana/os in this country" (xii). In particular, Chicana/o dramatists-activists drew from the oral and performative traditions of the *campesinos* who worked in the fields in California.

El Teatro Campesino [ETC] was a collective theater ensemble founded in 1965 by Luis Valdez and with involvement from Chávez and Huerta. Based in Delano, California, ETC of the 1960s performed primarily short, improvisational skits that underscored through satire the poor working and living conditions of farmworkers (Broyles xii). In its earliest stage, ETC utilized the Mexican performative tradition of *teatro de carpa*[6] and became a tool for political organizing and consciousness-raising in the fields in which the *campesinos* worked. Broyles-González describes how ETC of the 1960s produced a kind of "interventionist drama" born from the civil rights and farmworkers' movements of the period. In *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherríe Moraga*, Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano describes the broader Chicana/o Theater Movement's incorporation of popular and folk forms of representation interspersed with theatrical devices and traditions from the "high" cultural genre of theater (24). Above all, Chicano theater and performance events succeeded in bringing working-class Mexican characters

[6] In *Del Absurdo a la Zarzuela: Glosario dramático, teatral y crítico*, Gerardo Luzuriaga defines "teatro de carpa" as: "Espectáculos teatrales presentados en carpas o tiendas como de circo en México y en el Suroeste estadounidense a comienzos del siglo XX. Dichos espectáculos tenían lugar en barrios populares. […] Eran fáciles de montar y desmontar. […] Con frecuencia, las obras propiamente teatrales eran acompañadas de números de acrobacia y otras atracciones propias del circo" (24).

center-stage, in non-traditional and accessible venues, for audiences that identified with the struggles of these characters, thereby allowing audience members to view their own lives within the framework of a larger liberation struggle. Despite limitations in terms of the representation of women and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer Chicana/os, the Chicana/o Theater Movement of the 1960s and 1970s did succeed in challenging some of the hierarchies embedded in the tradition of "universal" Western theater. The development and geographical expansion of Chicana/o theater represents one conscious response to the invisibility of Chicana/o cultural production and liberation projects within the dominant narrative of US history.

A second obstacle to the visibility of Chicana/o cultural production is encompassed within the first, as it relates to the conditions of possibility under which the *Movimiento* ultimately emerged as a reclaiming of Chicano identity through an assertion of Chicano masculinity. As the *Movimiento* expanded in the 1970s, Chicana theorists and activists began to speak up about the ways in which the *Movimiento* itself was reproducing the coloniality of heteropatriarchal US culture. If we consider some of the most well-known works of Chicano literature from the 1960s and 1970s[7], we find that the protagonist of Chicano liberation is invariably male and straight, while female and lesbian/gay/queer/bisexual characters occupy secondary and more silent roles. We find that femaleness, as represented within Chicano cultural production of that era, is often split in two, effectively reduced to the binary roles of the muse or the mother, the virgin or the whore, the mother or the daughter. These essentialized female characters, when

[7] These works might include: "I Am Joaquín," by Rodolfo "Corky" González; *Early Works: Actos, Bernabe and Pensamiento Serpentino*, published by Luis Valdez under his own name in 1990, despite the collective and improvisational development of the *actos* by ETC in the mid-1960s; *Zoot Suit*, also by Valdez; and the activist poetry of Alurista Baltazar Urista Heredia, more commonly known as Alurista.

they appear at all, tend to be portrayed in literature and in activist discourse as vessels or concepts that exist as counterpoints to or in support of the heteropatriarchal masculinity of the Chicano male subject.

As Broyles-González and Yarbro-Bejarano affirm in their discussions of the gendered and heteronormative policies and practices of ETC, the political and artistic face of the *Movimiento* in the 1960s was hypermasculine. Political and cultural agency as a male domain manifested in multiple ways within theater ensembles, one of which was that women's organizing and labor were devalued and negated; Chicano theater tended to foster an ideology and practice of women in supportive and less visible roles. Within the *Movimiento* and other liberation movements of the same era, we find that the liberation of people in general was often prioritized over internal issues of further marginalized, silenced, and oppressed groups. Such limitations and exclusionary practices are visible not only in theater ensembles but also in the plays written and staged by those groups. ETC's internal organizational and creative practice of regarding women as secondary to men— both on and off the stage—reflects an overarching historical precedent of the era, namely the disavowal of women's issues within radical and leftist groups in the US in the 1960s and 1970s. In many plays from that period, female characters are removed from the main action, limited in number, type-cast into gender-specific supporting roles, or represented only in terms of their relationships with male characters. Today, the male-centered legacy of the Chicano Movement is apparent in the sheer volume of books, anthologies, and articles published on the theater collective El Teatro Campesino [ETC] and its director Luis Valdez. This legacy stands in stark contrast with the dearth of critical space afforded to Chicana and

lesbian/gay/queer/bisexual Chicana/o playwrights and articulations of radical and queer Chicana feminism within and outside ETC. These tendencies all speak to the conditions of possibility under which Chicana women and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer Chicana/o subjects came to articulate the double-consciousness of the intersectionality of racial, class, gender, and sexual oppression.

Within the academy, these obstacles have challenged scholars' abilities to register the complexities of the fight for Chicana and non-heteronormative Chicana/o representation and liberation. Productive and innovative discussions of these issues, although not in a theater or performance-specific way, can be found in the scholarship of Gloria Anzaldúa and María Lugones. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Anzaldúa describes US institutional and cultural misogyny and homophobia as an effect of colonial culture, a tyrannical culture which effectively colonized the Chicano man in two senses: externally, by taking his land, raping his women, and casting him as a foreigner on US soil, and internally, by rendering him powerless—in effect, by emasculating him. Anzaldúa suggests that, in a struggle to regain and assert his own subjectivity and agency, the Chicano man has inflicted the kind of dehumanizing violence and heteropatriarchal violation—literally and in terms of his cultural production—upon the women of the very community he seeks to liberate.

For the lesbian of color, Anzaldúa underscores that "the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality" (41). Anzaldúa describes her own path as a queer, Chicana feminist and what she calls a "half and half," a person who is "not suffering from a confusion of sexual identity, or even from a confusion of gender"

but rather "an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other" (41). Despite, or perhaps because of, the Chicano's complicity in the colonization of the Chicana, Anzaldúa underscores that the fight for Chicana/o liberation must also involve Chicano-identified men.

María Lugones' more recent scholarship supports Anzaldúa's position in her deconstruction of what she calls "the modern/colonial gender system" that has worked to subjugate women and men of color "in all domains of existence" (Heterosexualism 189). Lugones takes issue with other scholars' acceptance of the heterosexualist patriarchy as an ahistorical framework of analysis. She seeks to historicize gender formation during the colonial era in the Americas; "Without this history," she maintains, "we keep on centering our analysis on the patriarchy; that is, a binary, hierarchical, oppressive gender formation that rests in male supremacy without any clear understanding of the mechanisms by which heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification are impossible to understand apart from each other" (187). By historicizing the formation of gender during the colonial era in the Americas, Lugones seeks to move beyond analyses of gender that focus only on the patriarchy. She accomplishes this by bringing into dialogue two theoretical frameworks, Aníbal Quijano's work on the "coloniality of power"[8] and the work of Third World and women of color feminists on gender, race, and colonization.

Lugones notes that others (including Quijano) have tended to naturalize gender and heterosexualism within analyses of the coloniality of power. In her own work, she complicates her experiences as "someone engaged in liberatory/decolonial projects" in a way that engages the "indifference" to the intersection of race, class, gender, and

[8] See "Heterosexualism and the Colonial / Modern Gender System" for Lugones' synthesis and critique of Quijano's depiction of the intersection of race and gender in his scholarship on coloniality from 1991 through 2002.

sexuality that she encounters in much feminist analysis (187). She problematizes modern understandings of both gender and heterosexuality as colonial constructs and consequences that are often simplified by "politically-minded white theorists" (188). In order to explore "our allegiance to this gender system" toward the end of rejecting it, Lugones proposes a comprehensive investigation of

> the indifference that men, but, more important to our struggles, men who have been racialized as inferior, exhibit to the systematic violences inflicted upon women of color. […] The indifference seems to me not just one of not seeing the violence because of the categorial separation of race, gender, class, and sexuality. That is, it does not seem to be only a question of epistemological blinding through categorial separation. (188)

Like Anzaldúa, Lugones identifies the need to motivate colonized men, "who have themselves been targets of violent domination and exploitation," to recognize "their complicity or collaboration with the violent domination of women of color" (188). Both Anzaldúa and Lugones characterize their work as only the beginning of a long-term collaborative and participatory project that demands serious personal and theoretical consideration of the limitations of approaching the oppression of people of color as separate from gender and sexual oppression. It is for these reasons—and others that I explore in this dissertation—that 20th and 21st century Chicana writers and activists have increasingly asserted that the fight for decolonization and liberation must be addressed both within and beyond the Chicana/o community.

With notable exceptions, scholarship in the field of Chicano Theater has tended to overlook issues concerning the representation of gender and sexuality, especially in discussions of the work of ETC and Luis Valdez. One of my earliest encounters with scholarship on Chicana/o theater was the work of Jorge Huerta, a prolific and highly respected scholar who himself was involved in the performance/activist side of the

Movimiento in the 1960s and 1970s. Within the field of Chicana/o Studies, and especially the field of Chicana/o theater, Jorge Huerta stands out for his scholarly consideration of Chicana/o dramaturgy in the form of reviews, anthologies of plays, books, and introductions to many of the published works of Luis Valdez. Today, he is known as a prolific and respected scholar whose work has helped bring visibility to the cultural production of Chicana/os within the fields of Latina/o and Latin American Theater and has ensured critical and cultural recognition of the name Luis Valdez.

Yet his work has also helped to set the critical stage for a continued disavowal of women and issues of gender and sexuality within the *Movimiento* and in theatrical representations of Chicana/o history and identity. In *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms* (1982), Huerta uses the term "Chicana" only eight times; only one of these uses relates to Chicana dramatist Estela Portillo-Trambley, whose play *The Day of the Swallows* (1971) marks one of the earliest publications of a play by a Chicana/o—female or male—dramatist. Almost all of the section headings within the book's six chapters incorporate the name Valdez, the titles of ETC *actos* and plays, and/or the term "Chicano" in a male-specific sense. Throughout the book, Huerta largely ignores issues of the representation of Chicana/o gender and sexuality within *teatro* ensembles and in the plays he discusses. He dismisses—or misses—the contributions and roles played by women within the *Movimiento* and ETC by affording Valdez nearly all of the credit for the creation and development of Chicano theater. On the whole, the book creates the very distinct sense that the fight for Chicano liberation through theater and performance in the 1960s and 1970s was a male-inspired and male-directed endeavor.

In *Chicano Drama: Performance, Society and Myth* (2000), Huerta concludes with a chapter ("Rebelling against damnation: out of the closet, slowly") that discusses what he categorizes as "homosexuality in Chicano literature and theatre," "early representations of (homo)sexual characters," "plays with secondary gay Chicano characters," and "plays with gay/lesbian central characters" (vii). At first glance, the inclusion of this chapter perhaps suggests that issues of the representation of Chicana/o sexuality have registered for Huerta. Yet his choice to separate these issues into a chapter organized around Chicana/o "homosexuality" seems to perpetuate the notion that these issues are a more recent and secondary development within Chicana/o theater and the fight for Chicana/o liberation, and that the topic of sexuality is one reserved for female and non-straight dramatists. While Huerta does discuss plays by Chicana dramatists Estela Portillo-Trambley and Cherríe Moraga in this chapter, he does so in a way that suggests that their works merit critical consideration first and foremost, if not only, because of their representation of lesbian characters. It would be unusual to read an analysis of Valdez's published plays that centers explicitly on his representation of heterosexual, male Chicanos. I am not suggesting that we *shouldn't* look at these issues in works by Valdez; I propose exactly that with this dissertation. My point has more to do with the fact that Huerta tends to consider certain features—the representation of Chicano history and Chicano oppression, the evolution in theatrical form throughout the second half of the 20th century, the aesthetics of a given production—in plays by Chicano dramatists and other features—the representation of gender and sexuality, how these plays are distinct from plays by Chicano dramatists, the gender and sexual identities of the dramatists themselves—in plays by Chicana and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer

Chicana/o dramatists. Huerta's scholarship on Chicano theater portrays Valdez and his theatrical works as the norm and the focal point against which other "alternative" Chicana/o dramatists and themes are compared.

In his introduction to *Chicano Drama*, Huerta addresses his previous lack of attention to the role of Chicanas within Chicana/o theater ensembles and as dramatists by stating that "women's issues were not as prominent [from the mid-1960s into the early 1980s] as they are today. As my discussions of each of the Chicana playwrights in this book reveals, most of them began to write plays because there were so few substantial roles for women" (11). He explains that he couldn't write about Chicana plays and playwrights in his earlier book "because there was only one Chicana playwright in print, and, unfortunately, the Chicano Theatre Movement was male-dominated" (11). He addresses his lack of consideration of sexuality and the representation of lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer Chicana/o subjects in a similar way:

> The theme of homosexuali(ties), like women's issues, came late in the development of contemporary Chicano theatre. With the exception of Estela Portillo-Trambley's *Day of the Swallows*, plays about gay, lesbian or bisexual central characters did not appear until the 1980s, led by lesbian playwright, Cherríe Moraga, whose plays have dealt with varieties of male and female sexualities. (178)

He notes that concerns expressed in the early 1980s over a lack of attention paid to what he calls "gay and lesbian plays" continue to be addressed in the 21st century, "however slowly and cautiously" (179).

What is most telling in these citations is the fact that Huerta continues to conflate analyses of gender and sexuality with analyses of plays by women and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer playwrights. His remarks suggest that it was not possible (for him) to consider the representation of gender and sexual identity in plays by Chicana/o

dramatists until (1) more than one play was published by Chicana and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer Chicana/o playwrights or (2) more than one play was written that deals expressly with issues of Chicana/o gender and sexual identity. While it's true that *The Day of the Swallows* was the only play by a Chicana playwright in print when Huerta published *Chicano Theater* in 1982, Portillo-Trambley's singularity does not seem to me a reason to exclude her cultural production from critical consideration, especially when it would seem that Valdez has been afforded critical attention in large part because of his singularity as a Chicano dramatist. Moreover, I find it revealing and problematic that Huerta would choose not to consider the representation of Chicana/o gender and sexuality in plays by Valdez and other straight, Chicano dramatists.

The scholarship of Nicolás Kanellos, for example in *Mexican American Theater: Legacy and Reality* (1987), reveals similar issues. He tends to portray Valdez as the god-like creator of all *teatro chicano* and he generally chooses not to address the internal gender and sexual politics of the *Movimiento*. On the whole, his scholarship on the Chicana/o Theater Movement tends to reproduce, rather than problematize or complicate, the portrayal of the protagonist of Chicano liberation as a heteropatriarchal subject. Just as the Spanish language allows the masculine form of a noun (*Chicanos*, for example) to represent the whole or a collective (*Chicanos* + *Chicanas* = *Chicanos*) so too do Huerta and Kanellos encourage consideration of the works of Chicano dramatists as representative of the whole of Chicana/o cultural production and identity.[9]

[9] The term "Chicano," in Spanish, denotes a male, or collective gender. Within the Spanish grammar system, the masculine form of nouns and adjectives can be used to represent groups that include masculine and feminine people, concepts, or words. "Nosotros," for example, can be used for groups of men and for groups of women and men. "Nosotras" refers particularly to a group of women; as long as there is one male-gendered person present, the term "Nosotros" is used. In this way, the grammar of the Spanish language itself reinscribes the tendency to refer to men as representative of the whole and women as only representative of the particular. The cultural and scholarly tendency to refer to the "Chicano Movement"

Some theater criticism does highlight the more recent shift in focus by Chicana and lesbian/queer Chicana dramatists to issues of gender and sexual identity and representation within the *Movimiento* and in Chicana/o cultural production. Yet many critics still approach the field as an *either-or* scenario: *either* displace or ignore female subjects and considerations of gender and sexuality in plays by Chicano dramatists, *or* focus exclusively on plays by Chicana dramatists in pieces that prioritize issues of gender and sexuality above all else. One manifestation of this tendency is evident in the appearance, beginning in the 1980s, of anthologies and critical volumes whose titles and organization perpetuate the notion of Chicana, as compared to Chicano, as "other," as an afterthought, as secondary to scholarship of the "original" or "real" Chicano writers.[10] I recognize that in many cases this type of anthology is necessary, unfortunately, in the sense that it represents a first step toward an inclusion of the work of Chicana and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer playwrights in the "canon" of Chicano cultural production that itself remains marginalized within the context of US and Latina/o literature. At the same time, I question the continued assertion that the contributions of women and lesbians as scholars and dramatists should necessarily be grouped together simply because of the gender or sexual identity of the playwrights, or those of their characters.[11] We would be hard-pressed to find an anthology or compilation of the work of male dramatists whose

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and "Chicanos" in the generic (masculine) form is one lexical indication of the invisibility of Chicana/o subjectivities and identities within the *Movimiento*.

[10] There are many significant exceptions to this tendency, particularly in publications from the late 20th and early 21st century, among them *Decolonial Voices: Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies in the 21st Century*, edited by Arturo J. Aldama and Naomi H. Quiñonez, Emma Pérez's *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999), and Laura Pérez's *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (2007).

[11] Recent reconceptualizations of certain academic disciples—the shift from "Women's Studies" to "Gender and Sexuality Studies", as well as the shift from "Ethnic Studies" to that of "Critical Race Studies"—have begun to address this issue within the academy, through the conscious examination of the construction of masculinity, whiteness, and heterosexualism.

title or introduction identifies their gender or sexual identities as a unifying feature of the collection of works.

When I reflect back upon what drew me to theater and performance as a lens through which to consider the fight for Chicana/o liberation, two reasons stand out. The first relates to the inherent theatricality of many of the recorded and documented leaders of the *Movimiento* in the 1960s and early 1970s. By that era, access to cameras and voice recorders allowed people to record events and to comment directly on what they saw happening in video footage and interviews that could be archived for future generations. Reies López Tijerina, for example, was a lawyer and former preacher whose charisma and performed masculinity has been captured in live video footage that has helped to solidify his characterization as a protagonist in the struggle to reclaim Chicana/o territory in the US Southwest. César Chávez and Luis Valdez also epitomize this phenomenon, as their names and successes in the fight for Chicana/o liberation have often eclipsed the histories and accomplishments of the women (and men) with whom they worked. As I discuss in my second chapter, the legacies of men like Tijerina, Chávez, and Valdez have taken on mythic proportions within scholarly and popular discourse alike. Through their socio-political "performances," these men and others are known today as the founding fathers and the spokesmen of the *Movimiento* and Chicana/o theater within that wider struggle; they have become protagonists of the *Movimiento* in ways that perpetuate the portrayal of the (lone) subject of the fight for Chicana/o liberation as male and straight.

I have also found it productive to consider the *Movimiento* through theater due to its inherently performative and dynamic nature as compared to other literary genres. The characters in the plays I discuss are written to be represented on stage, by flesh-and-blood

actors; they are characters whose identities are performative in a literal sense of the term. When they represent themselves as Chicana/o, they are doing so publicly, vocally, and also within the relative safety afforded them by the construct of performative events. They assert themselves through their voices, through their bodies, and through face-to-face interactions with other characters, with themselves, and, perhaps most importantly, with their audiences. The interactive nature of theater necessarily involves spectators in a way that other literary genres do not; likewise, a performance is not static, predictable, or finite in the same way other literary genres might be. By representing their characters' identities and histories on stage, in the flesh, the Chicana/o dramatists whose works I engage make doubly (perhaps triply, in the case of Chicana and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer characters) visible the stories they choose to tell. They also underscore the ways in which we are all implicated, whether we understand it or not, whether we'd like to be or not, in the fight for Chicana/o liberation that is still very much alive today.

In the following three chapters, I consider the lives, theatrical visions, and works of Estela Portillo-Trambley, Luis Valdez, Cherríe Moraga, and Josefina López, all of whom have been pioneers in the field of Chicana/o theater and performance. With the exception of *Zoot Suit*[12], the plays I analyze represent the earliest published play by each dramatist, a commonality that helps us to consider the characteristics of Chicana/o theater throughout several moments of Chicana/o cultural production. I also consider two literary works that are not plays but that shed light on the goals and challenges of Chicana/o cultural production within the *Movimiento*: Luis Valdez's poem *Pensamiento*

[12] Although *Zoot Suit* is not Valdez's first published play, it does mark the beginning of his career as a professional and solo dramatist and screenwriter.

Serpentino: A Chicano Approach to the Theatre of Reality, and Gloria Anzaldúa's complex and path breaking book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* Both of these works are early articulations of each writer's particular view on the history of Chicana/o oppression. More important to this project, the portrayal of the subject of Chicana/o liberation as singular and individual, in *Pensamiento*, reflects the tendency of Chicano dramaturgy of the 1970s to portray the *Movimiento* through individual Chicano protagonists who take center stage. In *Borderlands*, the portrayal of multiple and multi-faceted Chicana/o subjects mirrors the representation of Chicana protagonists who share the stage in dramaturgy of the 1980s and 1990s.

I begin each chapter by describing an interview with a Chicana/o activist or artist whose experiences and perspectives both contextualize and complicate the historical period of consideration for that chapter. In Chapter II, "Setting the Stage: On the History of Chicana/o Oppression, Activism, and Cultural Production," I discuss the history of Chicana/o oppression by putting into dialogue the scholarship of Tomás Almaguer, on racial and class-based oppression in North America, and that of Judy Helfand, on the construction of whiteness in the US. Although they do not address issues of gender and sexual oppression like the scholarship of Anzaldúa and Lugones, Almaguer and Helfand do offer valuable insight into the conditions of possibility that have influenced the lives and cultural production of Chicana/os into the 21st century. After considering the history of Mexico in relation to the US, I turn to a discussion of the growth of the *Movimiento* and Chicana/o cultural production in the mid-1960s. An exploration of the etymological development of the term "Chicana/o" is central to this section, beginning with the work of Chicano scholar and activist Tino Villanueva. In the second half of Chapter II, I

engage in a detailed analysis of Valdez's *Pensamiento Serpentino*, one of the first published articulations of a Chicano mythos and a poem which employs theatrical metaphors in order to incite the Chicano subject to act(ion), to liberate himself, and to reclaim his agency in the present by recuperating the history of his people. This poem is particularly significant in its gendered depiction of the protagonist of the fight for Chicano liberation as a decidedly male subject.

Chapter III, "Taking the Stage: On the Representation of Chicana/o Identity, Family, and Community," focuses on two plays written in the 1970s: *The Day of the Swallows*, published in 1971 by Estela Portillo-Trambley, and *Zoot Suit*, which debuted in 1978 by Luis Valdez. In the late 1960s and early 1970s many Chicana/os began to assert their identities as Mestizo or as indigenous and began to express solidarity through a shared history of colonization. Within Chicana/o theater, however, issues of male dominance and heteropatriarchal tendencies within the *Movimiento* meant that the contributions of Chicanas were often eclipsed by those of Chicano men. The scholarship of Broyles-González and Yarbro-Bejarano on the roles of Chicanas within theater ensembles and in Chicano plays is fundamental to this chapter, as both scholars analyze the gendered politics of Chicana/o creative and socio-political representation of the era. My analysis of *The Day of the Swallows* and *Zoot Suit* includes a discussion of each playwright's unique vision of the role of theater and performance within the *Movimiento*. Although the plays seem to fit each playwright's particular articulation of the role of theater within the *Movimiento*, *Day* is formally traditional and thematically progressive, while *Zoot Suit*'s innovation comes more from its experimental form rather than from the themes it engages and the characters it represents. As a result, while Portillo-Trambley

reproduces certain formal features of European-derived theater, Valdez portrays Chicana/o identity and culture in a way that often fits, rather than challenges or deconstructs, popular and problematic conceptions of Chicana/o culture in the US. Although his portrayal of the Pachuco stereotype is done through irony and a manipulation of the Anglo gaze, his presentation on stage of the criminalization of Chicano identities also reinscribes popular stereotypes regarding the violent and criminal nature of Chicanos, and particularly of male Chicano youth.

In my fourth chapter, "Sharing the Stage: Beyond the Heteropatriarchal Paradigm of Chicano Theater and Performance," I turn to the 1980s and 1990s to examine more recent contributions to Chicana/o theater and Chicana/o studies. As in earlier decades, dramatists who began writing and staging plays in the 1980s and 1990s share a preoccupation with the representation of Chicana/o history and identity. Unlike many male-centered and male-dominated performances and plays of earlier decades, however, this new period of writing and theatrical production tends to self-reflexively complicate issues of representation within the *Movimiento* itself. A detailed analysis of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* precedes my discussion of *Giving Up the Ghost* by Cherríe Moraga and *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* by Josefina López. My consideration of *Borderlands* serves to contextualize and characterize Chicana/o cultural production of the 1980s and beyond, particularly in its formal, thematic, and linguistic hybridity, features we also find in plays by Moraga and López. My review of this book within this dissertation theoretically and historically grounds a central feature of Chicana cultural production from this era: a conscious departure from the individual, male protagonists of plays from earlier decades to plays that feature a diversity of

Chicana and lesbian/gay/bisexual/queer characters who collaborate and share center stage in a project of liberation from what Anzaldúa refers to as "despot dualities" (*Borderlands* 41).

In "You Mean, There is Theater in Latin America?" (2004), Adam Versényi outlines the relatively recent development of the field of Latin American theater from a performance-based perspective:

> When I began to work on Latin American theatre, there was virtually no one else working on the region from the perspective of theatre studies. Both scholarly research and translation of theatre texts had been undertaken almost exclusively by academics from literature and language departments. While much good work was done, *the tendency was to approach dramatic literature primarily as literary text, and translations were undertaken for meaning rather than for produceability*. […] Whatever courses existed in Latin American theatre were conducted in Spanish or Portuguese in language and literature departments. Today, a great deal has changed. A small but steadily growing, number of Latin American theatre scholars and theatre practitioners with an interest in the region in US university theatre and performance studies departments approach their work informed by profound knowledge of the theatrical process and the demands of performance. Perhaps even more importantly, the larger number of Latin American theatre scholars from language and literature departments has increasingly produced *work imbued by an understanding of performance*. (446, emphasis mine)

My hope is that, within the next decade, the same can be said for the fields of Chicana/o Studies and Chicana/o theater in particular. Within the humanities, Chicana/o Theater occupies a hybrid and relatively new disciplinary space; it is often excluded from US Latina/o Studies and Latin American Theater anthologies, courses, and scholarship. The contributions of Chicana dramatists are even less likely to be included, particularly in scholarship on Chicana/o activist theater. As I hope to establish in this dissertation, the complex obstacles to the visibility of Chicana/o theater and dramaturgy do not stem from an absence of Chicana/o plays being written and performed, in professional venues and

alternative performance spaces, in the 21st century. Rather, they underscore the importance of new and continued investigations into the diversity and breadth of Chicana/o theater and performance in our present moment. Through my analysis of plays by Chicana/o dramatists from distinct historical and socio-political contexts, I seek to develop historically grounded answers to questions around issues of male visibility and female and lesbian/gay/queer/bisexual invisibility within the *Movimiento* and in broader US culture.

In order to consider the complex and multifaceted obstacles to the visibility of Chicana/o production in the US, we first must recognize and problematize the complex history of Mexico and the United States. It is through that critical and socio-historical—as well as ultimately human—vantage point that we can (and must!) call into question representations and articulations of the Chicana/o subject as immigrant, as non-American, as nationless, as homeless, and ultimately as foreigner and "other" within the present-day United States. By articulating and giving critical space to an alternate and often repressed history of Mexico and the US-Mexico border, we can begin to situate Chicana/o Theater—and its full diversity of playwrights and protagonists—within a much broader literary, artistic, and intellectual movement that has continued into the 21st century.

CHAPTER II

SETTING THE STAGE: ON THE HISTORY OF CHICANA/O OPPRESSION, ACTIVISM, AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

"THIS USED TO BE MEXICO, THIS USED TO BE OUR LAND"

In 1966, a group of Mexican Americans who called themselves *La Alianza* [The Alliance] arrested two US forest rangers for trespassing on their land. *La Alianza* claimed that, as per a federal treaty granted decades ago, the rangers were not on federal land but in fact on private property. "Quest for a Homeland," the first episode of the documentary *Chicano! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*[13], includes footage of the altercation that transpired between *Alianza* activists and US law enforcement agents who arrived following the citizen's arrest. Amid vocal protest from white onlookers and law enforcement, *Alianza* leader Reies López Tijerina declared the group's legal right to the land on which they stood: "We're taking full responsibility. […] We've been citizens of the United States for one hundred and twenty years and we know the law. We're taking this upon our shoulders in the name of the town of San Joaquín" (*Chicano!*). In this case and many others, the Mexican Americans were ultimately denied ownership of land they had inhabited for centuries and had been

[13] This four-part documentary was released through PBS in 1996 on VHS. It is designed as a pedagogical tool to accompany units on the Civil Rights Movement, Mexican American and Chicana/o history, and Chicana/o political activism taught in high school and university classes. Part I, "Quest for a Homeland," explores the roots of Chicana/o nationalism in the United States. Part II, "The Struggle in the Fields," discusses the creation of the UFW labor union in the 1960s, with an emphasis on the role played by César Chávez. Part III. "Taking Back the Schools," centers on the high school student walk-outs in Los Angeles in 1968, during Kennedy's presidency. The focus of Part IV, "Fighting for Political Power," is the formation of a third political party, the Raza Unida party. The entire series can now be accessed free of charge on YouTube.

granted in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo[14]. Providing the voice-over narration for the film, Henry Cisneros points out that in 1965 "the US Forest Service revoked half the grazing permits for small farmers, pushing them to the point of desperation" (*Chicano!*).

A Mexican American leader had emerged in New Mexico in response to failed attempts by *La Alianza* and others to reclaim the territory legally promised to their ancestors by the US government more than a century before. Born in 1926 to migrant workers, Reies López Tijerina had experience as both a preacher and a lawyer, which enabled him to assume a leadership role in the fight to restore New Mexican land grants to their rightful owners. In video footage included in this episode of *Chicano!*, Tijerina asserts the legitimacy of land grants created and made constitutionally legal by the US government in the first place: "[a]ll the treaties made by the US government are the supreme law of the land." By 1967, Tijerina faced charges for his involvement in the *Alianza* occupation of Carson National Forest in northern New Mexico. As tensions between Anglo officials and *La Alianza* escalated, Tijerina was increasingly blamed, persecuted, and demonized (*Chicano!*). On June 5th, 1967, Tijerina and a group of armed men entered a local courthouse to make a citizen's arrest of the District Attorney, whom they claimed was violating their constitutional right to assembly. Shortly thereafter, shots were heard from within the courthouse, shots that wounded a state patrolman and a jailer; a reporter and a deputy sheriff were held captive throughout the afternoon. According to Cisneros, "[r]evolution, it seemed, had come to New Mexico" (*Chicano!*).

In the documentary, motion picture producer Moctesuma Esparza remembers the general attitude among Mexican Americans toward Tijerina's actions as overwhelmingly

[14] I discuss the significance of this treaty, as well as the US war in and against Mexico, later in this chapter.

optimistic and celebratory: "It was like Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa were alive again, and they had gone and had claimed their land again. It was like wildfire in the Movement when we heard about it. We heard it like that [*snaps fingers*]!" Community organizer María Varela recalls a similar socio-political climate within the *Movimiento* as a whole: "Among land grant people there was kind of a victorious sense, that finally…our cause is out in the open and finally, maybe, we can galvanize the nation such as the African American Movement has done." These interviews attest to a growing sense of triumph and, more importantly, solidarity born from shared experiences and successes in the face of adversity and injustice experienced by Mexican Americans living in the United States. As writer Elizabeth "Betita" Martínez recalls, "Out of this whole movement was emerging the feeling we had—*this used to be Mexico, this used to be our land*—but it was a growing sense of a people and a collective history of struggle against an invasion and occupation and take-over, and everything like that." The film's narrator also cites the creation of a *corrido* in commemoration of the Tierra Amarilla Land Grant struggle as evidence of a burgeoning socio-political movement fighting for civil rights for Mexican Americans.

In this chapter, I aim to show that the history of Chicana/o oppression is grounded in the development of colonialism and capitalism in North America and the social construction of the term whiteness throughout the history of United States. I explore several factors and historical events that have resulted in the continued colonization of Chicana/os into the 21st century. Among these are the 19th century US invasion and appropriation of Mexican territory and, as a result, the two-fold deterritoralization of people of Mexican descent: first, from their Mexican territory and, later, from land

promised to them in treaty and through US land grants. I then discuss the etymological developments of the term Chicana/o, from popular, academic, Anglo, and Chicana/o perspectives, in order to contextualize the cultural productions by Chicana/os that I analyze later in my dissertation. Finally, I demonstrate how Luis Valdez's poetic articulation of a Chicano mythos in *Pensamiento Serpentino*, a poem inspired by Chicana/o activism of the 1960s, can help us to approach the role played by performance and theater within the *Movimiento*. More importantly, my analysis of *Pensamiento* reveals limitations in terms of the representation of the diverse Chicana/o subjectivities through an individual, Chicano male subject. By considering the construction of a heteropatriarchal Chicano subjectivity in *Pensamiento*, we can begin to address the silencing of the Chicana and lesbian/gay/queer/bisexual Chicana/o experience within literary and scholarly works, as well as in popular discourse around Chicana/o history and identity in the US. I also hope to demonstrate in this chapter the need for further explorations of the breadth and depth of Chicana/o cultural production, within the context of broader US society but also in theatrical representations of Chicana/o identity within the *Movimiento* itself.

In a 1974 publication of the journal *Aztlán*, Tomás Almaguer addresses issues of Chicano history and oppression within the United States in an article titled "Historical Notes on Chicano Oppression: The Dialectics of Racial and Class Domination in North America." His methodological and theoretical approaches are grounded in Marxist theory and a study of dialectics; he contends that in confronting the history of Chicano oppression, "it is essential to examine both capitalist and colonial structures. It has been through the institutional apparatus of these structures that both racial and class

domination has unfolded" (27). Almaguer underscores the centrality of the dialectical method and historical materialism, emphasizing both as fundamental to the analysis of the systemic oppression of particular groups of people and the development of colonialism and capitalism:

> It is through the historical dialectic of colonial and capitalist development that racial and class oppression have become integrally bound. The establishment of colonial systems of domination (be they either 'classic,' 'neo-,' or 'internal') have dialectically fed into the development of capitalism from inception to its present monopoly stage, and capitalism has in turn reinforced and perpetuated the colonial situation in all parts of the world. (37)

Citing the 19th century transition to an agribusiness economy in the US, Almaguer ultimately concludes that any examination of racial oppression also necessitates an analysis of class oppression.

Research undertaken in the field of Chicana/o Studies highlights the relevance of considering the codependency of US colonial and capitalist development and interests in order to understand the history of Chicana/o oppression and activism. Almaguer emphasizes the importance of further investigations within that emergent academic field, both for an uninformed readership as well as for Chicana/os themselves. "All too often," he writes, "the history of the Chicano has not been seen as an integral part of the larger forces that have been at work in the shaping of the modern world" (27). Almaguer contends that the erasure of Chicano identity and history from dominant, Euro-American narratives has both engendered and normalized critical blind spots and historical gaps. He characterizes his own historical work as "schematically outlin[ing] the development of racial and class domination in North America" and "historically trac[ing] the salient aspects of this dual oppression as it has affected the Chicano and his historical

forefathers" (27). Almaguer approaches the subject of Chicano oppression through a chronological discussion of coexisting colonialist and capitalist ideologies and practices in North America, with a focus on Chicana/o communities and identity within the US.

Judy Helfand's scholarship offers a productive lens through which to consider Almaguer's analysis of the history of Chicano oppression. Her article "Constructing Whiteness" was first published online in 1995 as part of *Race, Racism and the Law*, a website created in the same year whose mission is to "examin[e] the role of domestic and international law in promoting and/or alleviating racism" (Randall). Although not explicitly in dialogue with one another, I find that consideration of Almaguer and Helfand's articles stimulates a productive discussion of the roots of Chicana/o oppression throughout the history of the United States, particularly for readers not yet familiar with the specifics of Chicana/o history and artistic production. Both Almaguer and Helfand offer valuable insight into what I describe as the conditions of possibility that have affected the lives and cultural production of Chicana/o activists, artists, and playwrights into the 21st century. Their contestations of dominant historical narratives, as well as their incorporation of long-occluded historical details and events, are features we can also observe in plays by Chicana/o dramatists, albeit through distinct forms and, in many cases, to different ends.

Although she does not focus primarily on issues particular to the deterritorialization and criminalization of Chicana/os, Helfand does demystify the construction and institutionalization of "whiteness" in the American colonies and throughout US history. Her central scholarly concern is both personal and socio-political, as she aims to demonstrate through historical examples and straight-forward

discourse "that whiteness consists of a body of knowledge, ideologies, norms, and particular practices that have been constructed over the history of the American colonies and the US with roots in European history as well" (Web[15]). She underscores the fact that whiteness is a term which has worked to "preserve the position of a ruling white elite who benefit economically from the labor of other white people and people of color" (Web). Like Almaguer, Helfand highlights the complexity of factors and forces that have perpetuated the construction of racial hierarchies and race-based oppression, both of which ultimately benefit a white-identified ruling elite.

Helfand examines the social construction of whiteness from the side of the racially and socially privileged, a shifting social class which she argues exists as "white" only in relation to the existence of its "non-white" counterparts. She traces the evolution of whiteness from its (pre)colonial origins in the sixteenth century to its far-reaching consequences and implications in the 20th. She also elucidates the ways in which whiteness is a fluid construct—rather than a biological fact—that has been conceptualized, implemented, and institutionalized throughout the history of the United States. In her introductory remarks, Helfand makes clear the personal and professional relevance for her readers, for academic institutions, and for humanity in general by problematizing the repercussions of socialization and life in a world understood through the lens of whiteness: "[Constructions] of whiteness affect how we think about race, what we see when we look at certain physical features, how we build our own racial identities, how we operate in the world, and what we 'know' about our place in it" (Web). She also emphasizes the dynamic nature of whiteness, "[which is] is constantly shifting, remaking

[15] As this article is published only online and integrated into a webpage, rather than as a document, it does not include page numbers or section divisions of any kind. As such, my citations will not include any page numbers.

itself as necessary to counter our efforts to undermine the system of racial oppression at its heart" (Web). The evolutionary nature of whiteness, Helfand concludes, is what enables the perpetuation of social, economic, political, and legal systems grounded in and maintained by an inequitable distribution of wealth, income, and power—"[with power] defined as the ability to influence outcome"—within the United States (Web). As I mention in my introduction, the ability of white law enforcement to deny Tijerina and others rights to the US land grants given to their Mexican ancestors a century before is but one example of the power denied to those not considered "white".

Let's consider with Helfand the turn of the 16th century and the beginnings of European colonization of the Americas, a period Almaguer describes as already defined by the systematic domination of people of color (28). Although financial gain was a primary motivator for European colonizers, their desire for territorial and political expansion also perpetuated and justified the oppression of people of color. As Almaguer points out, this mindset and the practices it encouraged were often rationalized post-facto: "[s]ince racial differences were the most obvious distinguishing factors between the European colonizer and the colonized, it soon became the basis upon which economic exploitation and the social organizations of colonial society were to take shape" (31). The very organization of colonial life in the Americas depended upon the establishment and maintenance of strict racial hierarchies, each group occupying a particular social and economic role within society. If we consider Helfand's definition of race and whiteness —as social constructs that have perpetuated class-based hierarchies throughout US history— it becomes easy to understand how those so-called "racial differences" were

constructed and institutionalized by white-identified Europeans in power to fit and further their colonialist agendas.

According to Helfand, the creation of government-backed institutions has been fundamental to the perpetuation of the white/non-white binary into the present. She contends that the social construction of whiteness in the United States and the Americas as a whole have depended upon

> the full array of social institutions—legal, economic, political, educational, religious, and cultural. As individuals and in groups, affected by whiteness, we in turn influence and shape these institutions. Thus, whiteness is constantly evolving in response to social forces and the constellation of people who are seen as white may change over time. (Web)

In these ways, those included and excluded from the racial category of "white" have never been static; nor can we trace the origins of the concept of whiteness to a single historical moment or biological reality. Even before the establishment of the Virginia Colony, Europeans had a long history of viewing non-Europeans as "other" and therefore inferior. Helfand cites as evidence the institution of slavery in Africa, which was transposed and adapted to suit the conditions of colonial Virginia, among other US colonies. The Virginia Colony, in turn, served as a foundation for the social construction of whiteness in the United States, as the planter class fostered an emerging system of racial oppression upheld through laws in which the term "white" was often euphemized through terms like "Christian" or "free." Since the founding of the United States, Helfand asserts, "Liberty was, within whiteness, reserved for white people" (Web). We find a salient example of the early construction of whiteness established and upheld by law in the US Constitution, a document which guaranteed the indisputable liberty, equality, and rights of *white*, landowning men.

Helfand also discusses the construction of "Mexicanness" as non-white in the US in a way that supports the claims made in the documentary *Chicano!*: "although Mexican Americans have at times been granted legally the status of white, this status has never been fully accepted by other white Americans" (Web). She mentions the history of land grants following the US appropriation of Mexican territory as "another example of constructing the economic foundations and geographic boundaries of whiteness on exclusion" (Web). According to Helfand, Mexican American claims in mining areas in California were similarly disavowed by white miners, which caused them to accept jobs working as physical laborers in the mines owned by white men.

Spanish control of Mexico, beginning in the early sixteenth century and ending with Mexican Independence in 1821, offers another significant example of racial and class oppression implemented in the colonial world (Almaguer 34). Familiarity with dialectics—defined by Almaguer as the process by which the development or implementation of one system leads to and reinforces that of another—is central to understanding Almaguer's unpacking of the systematic oppression of people of color, and particularly to understanding the oppression of Chicana/os in the US. As Almaguer attests, "the development of racial and class oppression in colonial North America ties the Chicano experience to Spanish colonization in Mexico" (29).

Following Spanish control of Mexican territories into the early 19th century came the second major phase in the colonization of Mexico: the development and expansion of US capitalism. Almaguer highlights six significant examples of westward expansion that characterize this period of US colonialist and capitalist development: (1) the Louisiana

Purchase (1803), (2) Spain's cessation of East Florida (1819), (3) the Oregon Treaty[16] (1846), (4) the initiation of the US war against Mexico[17] (1846), (5) the US appropriation of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, California, Nevada, Utah, and part of Wyoming (1846-1848), and (6) the Gadsden Purchase[18] (1853). "To sum it up," concludes Alonso Aguilar in *Pan-Americanism from Monroe to the Present: A View from the Other Side* (1968), "in the course of half a century, the United States increased its territory tenfold—not including Alaska. This is to say, nearly 2.3 million square miles were acquired by various means for the 'reasonable' price of a little over $50 million." As the above list of US territorial gains demonstrates, the second half of the 19th century brought an increased focus on US expansion into Mexican territory. It also featured a transition away from an agrarian slave-labor economy to an industrial wage-labor economy. By the turn of the 20th century, Almaguer notes, the solidification of the rapidly developing United States empire was underway (39-40).

In *Chicano!*, narrator Cisneros describes the promises made to Mexican Americans by the United States government in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Signed in 1848 following the US invasion and appropriation of Mexican territory, "the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo promised these new Americans free enjoyment of their liberty and property of every kind" (*Chicano!*). Yet despite the legal guarantees to land and freedom delineated in that treaty, newly stateless Mexicans in the US were often forced by

[16] A treaty between the US and the United Kingdom in order to resolve disputes over land we know today as Oregon State, Washington State, Vancouver Island, and British Columbia.

[17] As I mention in Chapter I, this war is commonly called the Mexican-American War north of the US-Mexico border, while south of the border it is often referred to as "la Guerra de invasión norteamericana" or "la intervención estadounidense en México."

[18] Known in Mexico as "Venta de la Mesilla," this treaty granted the US territories known today as southern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico.

speculators, lawyers, and cattle barons into selling their land for an unfair price. As Cisneros points out, some of their property was even taken by force (*Chicano!*). A dispute over the Tierra Amarilla land grant provides one notable example of what quickly became common practice toward Mexicans-turned-US citizens by default, as well as insight into one of the motivations for socio-political organizing by Chicana/os in the 1960s. According to Dr. Sabine Reyes Ulibarrí, a major figure in this documentary and a teacher, writer, critic, and politician who was born in Tierra Amarilla, the deed to Tierra Amarilla in New Mexico was sold back to the US government for the equivalent of $200, a team of horses, and some flour. According to Ulibarrí, this exchange was unfair not only in economic terms but in legal terms as well, as only one of the Nuevomexicano land heirs had signed the deed to the Tierra Amarilla grant before it was sold; in other words, the US effectively flouted the law in order to rob the family of their land. In this case and many others, Cisneros attests, "the people of northern New Mexico lived as tenants on land that once was theirs" (*Chicano!*). By 1960, titles to millions of acres of land originally granted to Mexican American citizens of the US had been illegally funneled into the hands of the US government and non-Chicano US citizens.

These expansionist, extra-legal practices ultimately led to what Almaguer describes as the "internal colonization of the Chicano" (40). He asserts that "the colonization of the Mexicano unfolded *within* political boundaries of the colonizing metropolis nation [the United States]" (40). As "Quest for a Homeland" establishes, by the 20th century Chicana/os had become a politically and economically marginalized group on territory that had been, and in many cases still was, their own land. At the same time, Almaguer notes that the development and continued stability of US capitalism

increasingly depended upon Chicano labor and migrant communities. In the first place, Chicano labor facilitated the accumulation of capital and the development of a strong agricultural base in the US, thereby advancing US capitalist interests. Chicano labor and technical skills were also central to the development of the mining and railroad industries, both of which provided a necessary infrastructural base for the spread of capitalism. Finally, the mobile and seasonal nature of the Chicano workforce became a "reserve army of labor," and the Chicano worker and community served as what Almaguer calls a "shock absorber" that shielded the so-called "first world" from social and economic crises (41-42).

Helfand cites immigration policies as essential to the construction of the "economic dimensions of whiteness" in the 19th and 20th centuries. In the first half of the 20th century in California, only US citizens could own land, and only those considered legally "white" could be granted citizenship, thereby ensuring the continued oppression of people of color and the continued construction of whiteness to benefit the ruling class. Helfand maintains that by this point in US history, a white/non-white binary had been firmly established and institutionalized: "The dualism inherent in whiteness is clearly illustrated in the foregoing discussion of immigration policy. There are only two categories that matter—white and non-white. Whiteness is defined by determining who is not white; it is defined as the superior opposition of non-white" (Web). Here Helfand is referring to the California Alien Land Laws of 1913 and 1920. Also known as the Webb-Haney Act, these laws prohibited non-citizens from owning or leasing land. Although the 1913 act allowed for 3-year leases, the 1920 revision prohibited even these temporary opportunities to lease land. The law was intended to restrict primarily

Japanese immigration, as well as to worsen the living conditions for immigrants already living in California at the time the laws were passed. In 1923, the US Supreme Court upheld the laws, which were determined not to violate the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. The Alien Land Laws were not invalidated until 1952, when they were found to be in violation of the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.[19] As a result of legislation like that in California, Mexican Americans were never fully afforded the legal status guaranteed by law to those considered white.

In his discussion of the internal colonization of Chicanos, Almaguer explains that "the brunt of social oppression and class contradictions of monopoly capitalism have been largely carried over on racial terms and fall on the backs of colonized people of color" (42). The false promises made through land grants never honored also highlight an important point regarding the perpetuation of Chicano oppression within the US. Rather than simply the result of "culture conflicts" or racist ideology—both of which certainly have played a role—, Almaguer argues that "[t]he foundation of Chicano oppression is based on the organization of the social relations of production" (43). Capitalism is predicated on making a profit, which in turn necessitates the exploitation of a largely non-white, working class. Following Almaguer's logic, we see how colonialism produces and perpetuates capitalism, which in turn fuels neocolonialist efforts into the 20th century, and so the cycle has continued into the 21st. Almaguer describes this cyclical phenomenon as the "institutionalization of dependent colonial relations"; it is

[19] On a related note, in the fall of 2013, Chicano dramatist Luis Valdez debuted his first new play in fourteen years at El Teatro Campesino in San Juan Bautista, California. *Valley of the Heart: A Kabuki Corrido* is set in Santa Clara Valley, CA, in 1941 and features two immigrant families—one Japanese, one Mexican—struggling to survive through conflicts related to land-ownership, the Great Depression, and World War II. The creation of the play a century after the passing of the original California Alien Land Law demonstrates the continued effects such legislation has had, not only with communities of Japanese-Americans but for Chicana/o communities as well.

through such institutionalization that the colonized and oppressed classes become dependent upon the very "colonial-capitalist" institutions that guarantee their continued oppression (44).

By the mid-20th century, the US shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy had caused increased contact between Chicana/o communities and other communities within the US. Both Helfand and Almaguer attest to the fact that racist ideologies were increasingly articulated and enacted in cultural, rather than purely biological, terms. This trend continued throughout the 20th century, in large part through the institutionalization of such racist ideologies and practices. Almaguer describes this phenomenon as a shift from overt to covert forms of racial oppression: "Racism and racial oppression are steadily being transformed from overt forms of expression (biologically and culturally based racial ideology and widespread racist exploitation of colonial labor) to covert, institutional forms of oppression (institutional racism and institutionalized dependency and racial containment)" (46-47). Helfand makes a similar claim, arguing that "the social construction of whiteness does not proceed along only one front, but is occurring constantly in the social, cultural, political, legal, educational, and economic arena" (Web). I would add that we continue to live in a world saturated with covert racial and ethnic oppression and that, in many ways, this transformation from explicitly legalized racist practices to those more subtly enacted has ensured the perpetuation of the debilitating and racist white/non-white dichotomy in the 21st century. Moreover, the institutionalized racism and oppression of people of color described by Almaguer and Helfand are precisely what motivates the work of many of the playwrights I consider in later chapters.

Both Almaguer and Helfand identify the work that needs to be undertaken in order to first understand and then counteract such racial and class oppression. For Almaguer, the ideological battle facing Chicanos (in the 1970s) revolves around the portrayal of their history, their past, and their legacy on the land they inhabited long before the existence of the United States. In order to combat a long history of racial and cultural oppression, Almaguer urges Chicanos first to seek to understand the nature of that oppression and how and why "the racial struggle in the US must become a class struggle as well" (47). Helfand stresses the need for continued work toward social justice on a more universal and global scale, toward the end of "a more equitable distribution of wealth, income, and power" (Web). She underscores the centrality of education in order to gain a more nuanced and accurate understanding of how and why the construction of whiteness ensures the large-scale continuation of such inequities.

For Helfand, an academic who self-identifies as a "white, middle-class woman," her academic study of the construction of whiteness and white privilege has also inspired her to reassess the privileges afforded to her because of her racial and class identity:

> [I am] better qualified…to engage with the dominant culture in an effort to rewrite the script that is laid out for me. Or rather, I am tearing up my script and looking to others on both sides of the white/non-white boundary to help create a new one for all of us.

I find her use of a theatrical metaphor particularly apt given the literary focus of my own project: Chicana/o theater and performance. Helfand's statement also speaks to a preoccupation I observe in the cultural production of many of the Chicana/o writers whose work I consider in this dissertation. Despite their diverse theatrical forms and themes, the works I analyze throughout my dissertation all engage with dominant culture and its accounts of history, sometimes by appealing to it, more often by contesting its

claims and practices. Estela Portillo-Trambley, Luis Valdez, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Josefina López all undertake a complex and often personal process of rewriting dominant, problematic, and homogenizing scripts—both theatrical and discursive—that tend to either (1) represent Chicana/o culture as homogenous and secondary to Anglo culture in the US or (2) fail to represent Chicana/o identity, culture, and cultural production at all. Some of these Chicana/o authors also rewrite—and, when necessary, tear up—the dominant scripts in circulation within Chicana/o communities, in order to restage and make visible issues that affect non-male and non-straight Chicana/o subjects.

One example of an act of historical rewriting is Luis Valdez's free-verse poem *Pensamiento Serpentino*; although not a script to be staged, the poem incorporates a theatrical lexicon and allegory of life as a stage on which the newly conscious Chicano subject, conceived as male, can reclaim both his identity and his civil rights. Before discussing the poem, as well as several plays by Chicana/o dramatists, however, I first need to discuss the history of the term *Chicana/o*, in both popular and academic contexts, throughout the history of the United States.

The term *Chicana/o* has remained difficult to define in scholarship written by and for non-Chicana/os; conflicting accounts of its origin(s) and its historically varied connotations have existed throughout popular and academic discourses alike.[20] In an article published in 1986, Armando Miguélez defines "lo chicano" as an identity that "se va configurando dialécticamente y las formas se localizan o universalizan según los

[20] This is not to say that Chicana/o scholars, artists, writers, and activists are unable to define the term of their own identities through their cultural production. My point is more that, even in our present moment, the term Chicana/o is not often well-understand, particularly in Anglo academic and popular discourse alike.

gustos y las corrientes ideológicas predominantes del grupo social en un momento histórico determinado" (9). In an article published in 1997, W. B. Worthen emphasizes the unbreakable link between identifying as Chicana/o and the history of the US-Mexico border:

> [T]he use of the term "Chicano/a" to identify a population, an attitude toward social identity, or a body of literature is a complex one, one that often assumes the complex colonial and imperial history of the US-Mexico border region as a symbolic (and historical) foundation for the dynamics of Chicano/a subjectivity, even when—as is the case today—many Chicana/os do not live along that geopolitical border. (102)

Many Chicana/o scholars and playwrights would seem to agree with Worthen's description of the centrality of the US-Mexico border, as well as a host of non-physical borders that permeate the lives of Chicana/os living in the US. For Gloria Anzaldúa, a self-identified queer, Chicana feminist, being Chicana means enacting life through her greater Mestiza self, a self that embodies the consciousness of what she describes as the Borderlands she inhabits every day:

> Because I, a *mestiza*,
> continually walk out of one culture
> and into another,
> because I am all cultures at the same time,
> *alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,*
> *me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.*
> *Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan*
> *simultáneamente.* (99)

As I discuss in greater detail in my review of her book in Chapter IV, Anzaldúa also maintains that her own identity as Chicana is one "grounded in the Indian woman's history of resistance" (43).

Many scholars agree that the term *Chicano* originates from the word *Mexica*, a Nahuatl word for the indigenous people who inhabited what is often referred to in

English as the Aztec Empire. From *Mexica*, it's conceivable that the word *Mexicano* and, eventually, the diminutive *Xicano,* were created by Spanish-speaking Europeans. The term *Xicano* was likely mispronounced in Spanish, its spelling morphing from *Xicano* to *Chicano* to reflect the absence of the "sh" sound in Spanish. As Miguélez, Worthen, and Anzaldúa suggest, however, it is both impossible and unproductive to define *Chicana/o* solely in terms of its etymological development. What brings into dialogue the sometimes disparate selection of plays I consider in this dissertation is the fact that each playwright, in her/his particular way, offers multifaceted and often overlapping representations of what *Chicana/o* means and of what it has meant to be *Chicana/o*.

Published in 1980, Tino Villanueva's *Chicanos: Antología histórica y literaria* is a seminal text in the field of Chicano Studies. Today, Villanueva's anthology is often cited by scholars in the field of Chicana/o Studies as the most comprehensive source that treats the etymology of the term *Chicano*, as well as the literary and cultural production of Chicana/os in the United States. When compared to articles—both academic and popular—published between 1900 and 1980, Villanueva's anthology demonstrates a different quality of writing and research, as well as an unprecedented—in 1980—capacity and willingness to discuss issues of Chicano history, language and identity with nuance, integrity, and complexity. Villanueva asserts in his prologue that by the late 1970s in the US, "los pocos y sumarios comentarios sobre él[21] [el término *chicano*], cuando no llevan la estampa del sensacionalismo, resulten muy parcialmente desarrollados" (7). Beyond his criticism of dominant scholarly views, his prologue challenges the positions of the many 19th and 20th century writers whose works espouse what Villanueva describes as

[21] Villanueva also traces the evolution of the terms *pocho* and *pachuco*, alongside that of *Chicano*, in order to consider their differences, points of intersection, and relationships to one another.

racist, ignorant, or otherwise misinformed theories of the origins, etymology and present-day connotations of the term *Chicano*.

Villanueva contextualizes the essays and literary works that comprise the anthology by first providing the reader with his own definition of the term Chicano in the context of the 1960s, a decade of Chicano activism in which he himself took part: "a mi ver, *chicano*, tal y como emerge en los 60, es un término ideológico de solidaridad que pretende abarcar, idealmente, a todo norteamericano de ascendencia mexicana" (11). He disagrees with many 20th century scholars when he contends that in 1911[22] the word *Chicano* did not seem to have a negative connotation but rather was used as a consciously assumed name by a specific in-group that resisted North American cultural norms[23] (15). He cites the call-to-action "¡Viva la Raza!" as evidence of a positive articulation of Chicano identity and solidary which had been used for decades within Chicano communities, thereby contesting the argument that *Chicano* evoked a specific and consistent social class throughout the 20th century. According to Villanueva, throughout the 20th century "[the term] *Raza* no se compromete a especificar la clase social del individuo, por lo que se emplea tanto por una generación como por otra" (15).

At the same time, Villanueva also notes that the term *Chicano* has maintained a notably pejorative connotation over three-quarters of the 20th century, which is one of the reasons why older generations of people of Mexican heritage living in the US have chosen to identify as Mexican Americans or *mexicano-norteamericanos* (15). It was a younger generation in the 1960s that began to adopt the term *Chicano* in a way that

[22] This is the year often cited as the first known published use of the term *Chicano*, by anthropologist José Limón.

[23] Villanueva cites Limón's "*Chicano* as a Folk Name: An Historical View" to support this particular claim, among others.

signifies, for Villanueva, "no sólo una autovoluntad y autodeterminación, sino también una decisiva postura de autodefinición" (16). After that historic moment, Villanueva affirms that *Chicano* "serviría de ahí en adelante de divisa personal y de emblema colectivo, como también de oración mitigadora y, en momentos de acción social, de grito animador" (17). Throughout this section of his prologue, Villanueva's tone and word choice work together with his extensive research and bibliography to portray the *Movimiento* as ground-breaking and innovative in its ability to unite Chicana/os under a common emblem through acts that assert their own agency.

By the 1980s, many books addressing the Anglo reader had been written by Anglo scholars, in English. In Villanueva's estimation—and I wholeheartedly agree—most of these books offer, at best, a paternalistic view of the cultural history of Chicana/os; "[han] terminado por reducirnos a una mezcla de curiosidad y estorbo" (41). In direct response to that kind of scholarly and cultural bias, his anthology offers the Spanish-speaking reader an historical, cultural, and linguistic counterpoint to the studies that, in Villanueva's words, "por haber sido hechos desde posiciones de seguridad y privilegio, es decir, desde arriba, y las más de las veces desde afuera, nos han llegado ostensiblemente enturbiados por el racismo y el clasismo, o bien por la mera ignorancia" (41). He describes his own anthology as a forum in which to present essays and literature of and about the complex and heterogeneous experiences of Chicana/os; in order to do that, he chooses to first contest and then contextualize nearly a century of writing, both literary and critical, that has relegated the Chicano subject to the status of "other"—non-white, non-lingual, lowest-class, and generally inferior in all ways cultural, linguistic, and political.

In his prologue, Villanueva clears a critical space for a more contemporary, informed, and nuanced articulation of the term *Chicano*, a space long overdue by 1980:

> el término *chicano* abarca todo un universo ideológico que sugiere no sólo la audaz postura de autodefinición y desafío, sino también el empuje regenerativo de autovoluntad y de autodeterminación, potenciado todo ello por el latido vital de una conciencia de crítica social; de orgullo étnico-cultural; de concientización de clase y de política. Ello, en conjunto, coincide con un decidido y sincero afán por cambiar estructuras sociopolíticas, y con una verdadera pasión humanística que obran en aras de conseguir la justicia, la igualdad, la calidad de la vida, y de volver al individuo concreto la conciencia entera de la dignidad personal. (17-18)

In a single paragraph, Villanueva communicates for the reader the many contexts in which Chicana/os have had to fight for and asserts their rights, in the name of justice, equality, quality of life, and personal dignity. Throughout the prologue, he educates the reader on instances of racism, classism, and ignorance both represented and perpetuated by the works of many canonical 20th century critics and literary writers who discuss or reference the term *Chicano*. Villanueva discredits those powerful voices and names not by engaging their arguments in a debate that seriously considers their ill-informed claims, but rather by affording their portrayals of Chicana/os little to no consideration in the first place. This is an important distinction to make, as Villanueva rejects a defensive critical stance—contesting prior claims about Chicana/os while ultimately engaging with those perspectives he works to refute—in favor of what I call an uncompromising critical re-scripting of popular cultural narratives surrounding the term *Chicano*. Like the rewriting and restaging I describe above in the context of Helfand's "Constructing Whiteness," Villanueva rescripts the dialogue surrounding the history of Chicana/os in the US by presenting well-researched claims and information. At the same time, he provides an alternate model for other Chicana/o writers who seek to assert new approaches to history

and identity in their own artistic and literary endeavors. For the scholarly reader, he also provides an extensive bibliography which he references throughout the prologue, thereby supplying an alternate canon from which to approach the field of Chicana/o Studies and the history of Chicana/os in the US in general.

Villanueva synthesizes other popular interpretations of the term *Chicano*, ranging from socio-cultural to literary to political to philological approaches to the term. Beyond these more commonly accepted etymological discussions[24], he offers his own "mera intuición de cómo *chinaco* pudo llegar a ser la base de 'chicano' como afirman algunos" (33). Although Villanueva concurs with other scholars that the word "chicano" is of indigenous origins, he also notes the importance of its appearance as "chinaco" in Texas around the time of the first armed conflicts of the Mexican Revolution in 1910. After this historic moment, he posits, "chinaco" could have crossed the border into the United States. The English-speakers perhaps mistakenly heard "chicano," instead of "chinaco," and began to use the latter term as a derogatory name for Mexicans living in the South Western United States. "Chinacos" themselves then began to embrace the term "Chicano" in an act of cultural reclaiming, effectively guaranteeing its perpetuation into the present-day. Once more, Villanueva ultimately links this timeline to Chicano activism of the 1960s; he also mentions that the term eventually resurfaced in the 1960s as a result of the Bracero Program[25] and in communities of Mexican students who began

[24] For a comprehensive look at these varied etymologies, see pages 22-34.

[25] The Bracero Program took its name from the term *bracero*, or emigrant worker, and was an agreement between Mexico and the United States to support the importation of temporary workers into the US. The program was terminated by Congress in 1964, in large part due to mounting criticism of the exploitation of Mexican workers and a loss of job for US citizens.

to identify, politically and culturally, with the Chicana/os living in the US Southwest (32-33).

Villanueva concludes this discussion of the term *Chicano* by underscoring the tenacious spirit of the Mexican-American *pueblo*. Theirs is *not*, he emphasizes, a case of a systematically repressed and humiliated people who suddenly and all at once acquired a social consciousness through the implementation of the word *Chicano*. Rather, Villanueva characterizes Chicanos as a people who have fought for their rights since the very beginning: "Lo cierto es que el espíritu luchador contra las estructuras discriminatorias y colonialistas estadounidenses ha estado siempre vivo, expresándose a través de huelgas, protestas civiles y legislativas, manifestaciones callejeras, y por la vía del bandidaje social a lo largo de este siglo y en el XIX" (41). The use of the phrase "bandidaje social," in this context charged with a markedly affirming and activist connotation, is significant. I read his choice of words as a means of legitimizing the efforts of Chicana/os as far back as the United States has endorsed and institutionalized discriminatory and colonialist practices toward people of color.

Villanueva's prologue and all of the scholarly entries included in the anthology are written in Spanish, which necessarily limits his readership to Spanish-speakers. While it is symbolically and literally significant that Villanueva articulates his more nuanced discussion of the term Chicano in Spanish, it does not necessarily imply that those readers he might most wish to inform have access to his work. As I write this thirty-five years after the publication of *Chicanos*, Villanueva's introduction remains one of few scholarly sources to address the etymological and cultural history of *Chicanismo* in the US in Spanish and for a scholarly readership.

In my own research into the term's origins and history, I uncovered materials dating back to the 1930s —journal articles, periodical and newspaper articles, book chapters, and encyclopedia entries— all of which attempt to define, both linguistically and socio-politically, the term *Chicano*. What many of those sources share are their paternalistic, racist, and generally ignorant perspectives and sources regarding not only the term Chicano but also Chicana/os as a cultural group within the United States. More troubling is the fact that the rhetoric and the etymological discussions presented in many of these sources have continued to inform popular understandings and recognition of Chicana/os in the US. The discussion that follows is not meant to provide an exhaustive account of all relevant scholarship on the term *Chicana/o*. Rather, I have limited my focus to a selection of sources that, along with Villanueva's anthology, represent a variety of publishing media and articulate the predominant viewpoints and discourses circulating in the second half of the 20th century and into the 21st.

The 1969 issue of the journal *American Speech* features a piece titled *Miscellany*, which includes etymologies and cultural definitions of several unrelated terms. Included in this collection is Edward R. Simmen's brief piece on the term *Chicano*, which begins as follows:

> Another minority group—the Mexican American—is presently being heard on campuses in the Southwest and West. Following the blacks, this new voice—the Chicano—is now asking for special ethnic studies programs. […] And with it all, a new word has come into the printed English vocabulary: *Chicano*. (225)

Several aspects of this opening paragraph merit comment. First, Simmen employs the terms "Mexican American" and "Chicano" interchangeably, a tendency which was not unique to Simmen during this time period. Yet Mexican American (or *mexicano*-

norteamericano) and Chicana/o were not in the 1960s, nor are they in 2015, synonymous or interchangeable, particularly not by those who have identified with these terms. Mexican American tends to refer to one's national identity, as in a person of Mexican descent living in the United States; it tends to be employed as a fairly straightforward and apolitical identity label. As we find in Villanueva's introduction, the term *Chicana/o* has tended to reflect a social or political choice, or agency, on the part of the person identifying as such; it tends to be an identity label chosen, or assumed, for specific social and/or political aims. It follows that a person could be Mexican American but not Chicana/o, while another person could identify as Mexican American and also as Chicana/o. Although Simmen's conflation of these terms is not necessarily indicative of a conscious effort to dismiss the socio-historical connotations of the word Chicano, it does suggest that he was not well-versed in the lexicon of the *Movimiento* already in full-swing by the time he published the piece.

Simmen's choice of words in other moments reveals his Anglo perspective and personal bias toward Chicana/os. For example, he employs the phrases "special ethnic studies program" and "into the printed English vocabulary." The former effectively marks the Chicano as "other," as marginal, as a non-essential subject and subject matter within educational institutions.[26] The latter suggests that only by appearing in print, and in the English language, does the term Chicano (and the people to whom it refers) merit comment in this journal entry. In terms of the audience who would have had access to and interest in Simmen's piece, this is likely true; his readers were arguably white,

[26] An appeal for a Chicana/o Studies program in many departments is often still viewed as a request for a "special" ethnic studies program, a program which could be included more efficiently by a course or two tacked on to already existing departments and degree programs. This continues to be the case at the University of Oregon, a campus with a significant Latina/o, Chicana/o, and Latin American undergraduate population.

educated, English-speaking academics, many of them writers and scholars themselves. It may also be true that the term Chicano had entered the printed English vocabulary by the year 1969. Nonetheless, his piece does not dispel dominant myths and stereotypes regarding the term Chicano and the people it describes; rather, it reinscribes dominant and racist ideologies and assumptions in circulation in US in the 1960s and 1970s.

Although Simmen acknowledges the term's challenging etymology and the public's general ignorance regarding its existence, he proceeds to define and explain its history in two and one half pages. His first "plausible theor[y] of origin" defines *Chicano* as a Nahuatl word that became a term of ethnic identification as it morphed into the word *mexicano* and, more recently, into a word used by Mexican-Americans of a "lower class who identify more with the Mexican-Indian culture than with the Mexican-Spanish culture" (226). He fails to cite the source for this explanation and others. His second theory explains the term as the result of adding the suffix "ano" to the word "chico" (meaning "young boy"); he then adds that it may instead be more related to the term "chicazo, a poorly educated young man who aimlessly, as a vagabond, roams the streets" (226). Once more, to an uninformed and Anglo readership these generalizations and unsupported theories would serve only to affirm pre-existing assumptions or misinformation about Chicana/os.

Toward the end of the article, Simmen dedicates a paragraph to considering the meaning and use of the term throughout the 1960s. In response to his own question of "Today, who is a Chicano?" he explains that the term "today [in 1969] describes the more radical and youthful Mexican-Americans whose controversial actions and statements often make the headlines" (226). He concedes that there do exist some Mexican

Americans "who would never be considered by the general public as lawless or irresponsible political activists" and who have begun to call themselves Chicanos in an attempt to move away from other cultural and ethnic labels (227). He depicts the young Chicano activist as the antithesis of the reformed, lawful Chicano, who has more potential to be accepted by the "general public" than his radical, activist counterpart. Simmen's not-so-subtle critique of 1960s Chicano activism is grounded in ethnic profiling and essentializing discourse; he does not discuss the reasons why so-called "radical" Chicanos felt compelled to organize, nor does he consider the results and implications of their activism.

Simmen concludes the entry by offering a final dichotomous definition of the term Chicano, differentiating how it *should* be defined—according to the meaning and use in 1969—from how it *could* be defined in the coming years:

> Today, the noun *Chicano* should be defined thus: 'A dissatisfied American of Mexican descent whose ideas regarding his position in the social or economic order are, in general, considered to be liberal or radical and whose statements and actions are often extreme and sometimes violent.
>
> Yet even as the word is being used, the meaning is changing; amelioration is taking place as more Mexican-Americans in responsible educational, governmental, and professional positions begin to refer to themselves as *Chicanos.* It is reasonable to assume that as more and more of these individuals use the term, the word will be defined as follows: 'An American of Mexican descent who attempts through peaceful means to correct the image of the Mexican-American and to improve the position of this minority in the American social structure. (227)

In this homogenizing depiction of the Chicano subject, Simmen once again distinguishes the "Good Chicano" from the "Bad Chicano". He suggests that "Bad Chicanos," plagued by controversial activist involvement, a nondescript radicalism, a tendency toward violence, irresponsibility, and a lower-class status, have the opportunity to become "Good Chicanos," characterized as lawful, more mainstream, pacifist, responsible, arguably

more educated, and potentially middle-class—in other words, more "white". His use of the word "amelioration," in particular, helps to foster the anti-Chicano sentiment of the final paragraphs; it implies that Chicanos need improvement, for the betterment of society and even for their own social progression in the US.

Although Simmen comments on the role of Chicanos in US society, he does so without a single mention of the *Movimiento*, already in full-swing when this article was published. This is a telling omission, as by the late 1960s the term Chicano and the *Movimiento* were very much interrelated, not only etymologically but also in terms of the daily socio-political realities and events activism. Published in 1970 in the Los Angeles *Times*, Chicano journalist Rubén Salazar's article "Who is a Chicano? And What Is It the Chicanos Want?" speaks directly to that relationship and social reality. Only several months after the publication of that article, Salazar was gunned down by Los Angeles Police during the National Chicano Moratorium March, a peaceful protest against the Vietnam War organized by Chicana/os. As the documentary *Chicano!* describes in detail, Salazar was also the first Chicano journalist to cover issues of Chicana/o communities and identity through the mainstream media. Unlike Simmen, Salazar wrote about a cultural group with which he identified and his writing clearly addresses a wider, less academic audience.

In response to the question posed by his own title, Salazar begins by defining the term "Chicano" as "a Mexican-American with a non-Anglo image of himself" (B7). The rest of the article highlights the so-called contradictions and inconsistencies found not in popular discourse on the Chicano but rather within Chicano communities themselves. To an informed or Chicana/o-identified readership, the article calls attention to all the ways

in which Chicana/os' claims to the present-day West/Southwest of the United States predate the linguistic, cultural, ethnic, spiritual, and political claims of the Anglo majority. According to Salazar, Chicanos resent the fact that Columbus is lauded as the man who discovered "America" and instead assert the primacy of their Aztec and Mayan ancestors. When asked, Salazar adds, Chicanos point out that their culture and their language predate those of the Pilgrims, a point which potentially could serve to validate their experiences and claims.

Yet Salazar's tone and his choice of verbs—Chicanos "resent," "contend," "complain," "scoff," "argue," "smirk," "flaunt" and "fight"—tend to depict the Chicano as a hostile adolescent, in effect infantilizing the Chicano male, particularly for a readership already disinclined to be intellectually or emotionally swayed by pro-Chicano discourse. The article paints a homogenized image of an aggravated male Chicano with a propensity for radical activism, cultural resistance, and a specific brand of violence. Midway through the piece, Salazar states without explanation that Chicanos "have always had difficulty making up their minds what to call themselves" (B7). While this is perhaps a statement informed by personal experience, his rhetoric does little to enlighten potentially uninformed readers or to inspire such readers to engage with the issues at stake for Chicanos; rather, it works to undermine the solidarity and collective strength of the *Movimiento* by depicting its participants as incapable of agreeing upon their own identity labels in the first place. If Chicanos cannot agree on what to call themselves, a non-Chicano reader might question, how can the general, non-Chicano public understand and support their cause?

In an abrupt change of tone, Salazar concludes by providing the reader with a brief description of the context behind the Chicano activism of the 1960s:

> Mexican-Americans average eight years of schooling compared to the Negroes' 10 years. Farm workers, most of whom are Mexican-American in the Southwest, are excluded from the National Labor Relations Act unlike other workers. Also, Mexican-Americans often have to compete for low-paying jobs with their Mexican brothers from across the border who are willing to work for even less. Mexican-Americans have to live with the stinging fact that the word Mexican is the synonym for inferior in many parts of the Southwest.
>
> That is why Mexican-American activists flaunt the barrio word Chicano—as an act of defiance and a badge of honor. (B7)

Here, Salazar does offer a legitimate and concrete explanation for why such activism has been and continues to be necessary. The last sentence also suggests the distinction discussed earlier between the identity labels Mexican American and Chicano. Salazar's article was published in Los Angeles, California, the state with the largest Chicana/o population and the central location of Chicano activist events throughout the 1960s (and into today). As it was published in a well-known newspaper, it surely would have reached a much wider popular audience than would have Simmen's (or any academic) article. And yet a troubling question still remains in my mind, as a reader: what effect would this article would have had within Anglo communities in Los Angeles and across California? In an effort to avoid isolating potential non-Chicana/o readers, Salazar's article perhaps runs the risk of not providing enough contextual material and information to encourage a broader understanding of—if not support for—issues surrounding Chicana/o identity and activism at the onset of the 1970s.

In my investigations into the origins and evolution of the term *Chicana/o*, I also came across a linguistic-literary study of Spanish words in Anglo-American literature, published in 1996 in an anthology titled *Spanish Loanwords in the English Language: A*

Tendency Towards Hegemony Reversal. In the preface, editor Félix Rodríguez González outlines the goal of the volume, namely to explore the many hispanicisms used in the English lexicon, especially within the U.S, that are often less apparent than anglicisms used in the Spanish lexicon. Although "such loans have their roots in the early period of the Spanish colonization of America," Rodríguez-González clarifies that one chapter—that of José Antonio Burciaga—is centered on hispanicisms documented in Anglo-American literature from the mid-19th through the late 20th centuries (vii). Burciaga's first-person anecdotal introduction puts into words a feeling that had been growing within me as I read all of the aforementioned articles and scholarship: "Words in themselves, in whatever language, are political entities and one of the reasons for synonyms and antonyms, adjectives and verbs is to give the words more than meaning, to give them color and a political end" (213). Many of the journalists and academic writers who published pieces about Chicana/os in the US in the mid-20th century effectively perpetuated the dominant and degrading myths and stereotypes which many of them claimed to seek to dispel with their writing. The vast majority do not state, as Burciaga does, that "[t]he racism, prejudice, or ignorance in early Anglo-American literature concerning Mexican American people and culture is fact" (213).

Burciaga references several articles published in the 1970s and 1980s that address the reductive and ignorant portrayals of Chicanos in modern literature. In 1972, John Womack Jr. published a piece in the *New York Review of Books* titled "Who are the chicanos." He addresses the dichotomous differentiation of national characters in early Anglo-American literature as follows: "They were Spaniards if they were prosperous and pale, 'greasers,' 'spics' or Mexicans if they were brown and poor" (Burciaga 215). In a

scathing critique of John Steinbeck's misguided attempts to portray Chicanos in a positive light, Francisco A. Rios writes:

> [T]o sentimentalize about people in poverty, to give them exaggerated speech and manners is not to praise them; especially when these same people are also portrayed as a drunken lot, inundated in cheap wine, sleeping in ditches, fighting for the enjoyment of it, stealing at every turn, and living in rampant promiscuity. (Burciaga 224)

Burciaga also notes the exceptions to these tendencies in the 20th century; in his estimation, the *Movimiento* of the mid-1960s and early 1970s would eventually "[give] birth to a different type of literature in the United States" (226). As I'll consider in my analysis of plays by Chicana/o dramatists in Chapters III and IV, the rise of the *Movimiento* fostered a greater familiarity with and appreciation for the entire spectrum of languages, ranging from English to Spanish and including everything in between. According to Burciaga, the Chicana/o literary movement "resurrected the study and appreciation of its indigenous ancestry and the Nahuatl language" and made possible the continued evolution of Spanish words within Anglo-American literature as well (227).

In the list of formative figures within the burgeoning Chicano literary movement, I was surprised to find that although Rodríguez González does not mention Luis Valdez (generally the sole Chicana/o dramatist/activist mentioned in anthologies such as this one), he does include Chicana playwright Estela Portillo, whose work I discuss in Chapter III, an anomaly in a list comprised largely of male writers. What I find most valuable about Burciaga's article is the fact that he succeeds in highlighting the *non*-homogeneity of Chicana/o writers and instead portrays Chicana/os and Chicana/o literature as a potential bridge, a kind of connection between two worlds or realities that share and inhabit the same universe (229). I share a similar approach to my own research

in the field of Chicana/o theater and performance; a central goal of this dissertation is to afford critical space and consideration to a multiplicity of voices, writers, and theatrical works in order to consider the distinct—and in some cases conflicting—representations of Chicana/o identity brought to life by Chicana/o dramatists.

Pensamiento Serpentino: A Chicano Approach to the Theatre of Reality

In 1973, El Teatro Campesino [ETC] founder, director, and dramatist Luis Valdez published *Pensamiento Serpentino: A Chicano Approach to the Theatre of Reality*, a multilingual and free verse poem that spans two-dozen pages, several centuries, and wide range of literary and socio-political concepts and frameworks. In *Pensamiento Serpentino*, Valdez defines his neo-Mayan philosophy as a Chicano scholar and activist and articulates his evolving dramaturgy as a Chicano playwright and director. The poem represents one of the earliest articulations of a Chicano mythos and the founding principles and goals of the Chicano Theater Movement. In many ways, it foreshadows the varied and complex issues surrounding Chicana/o identity in the US that Valdez will treat several years later in *Zoot Suit* and which I will discuss in my third chapter. Throughout the poem, Valdez incorporates a wide range of politically-charged, multilingual statements about: European colonization in the 16th century; peoples indigenous to present-day Mexican/US territory; the ways in which language informs culture and cultural production; Neo-Mayan cosmology; theater, in , as a metaphor for life; Chicano theater in particular, and the destiny he envisions for the Chicana/o people. In many ways, *Pensamiento* dialogues with Helfand—in terms of Valdez's poetic deconstruction of the construction of whiteness in the U.S—and with Almaguer—in

terms of the way the poem's speaker challenges both the external world and the Chicano's own self-positioning.

I structure my analysis around what I identify as twelve thematic sections of the poem, all of which culminate in "that Great Spiritual ReBirth" that the speaker of the poem envisions for all Chicano people (196). Although not formally divided or numbered as such, each section builds up to and eventually leads the reader into the section that follows. The thematic and structural effect is a kind of spiraling of ideas and form that mirrors the serpentine imagery evoked by the speaker in the title and throughout the poem. The theme of the first section, and indeed the first word of the poem, is *teatro*. The theatrical terminology and references developed in this brief, opening segment work to construct an elaborate—and at times contradictory—extended metaphor, which throughout the course of the poem becomes an allegorical representation of *Teatro* as life (and life as *Teatro*):

> Teatro
>
> eres el mundo
> y las paredes de los
> buildings más grandes
> son
>
> nothing but scenery. (170)

In the seven stanzas that follow, Valdez incorporates a wealth of theatrical terms that call to mind Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *El gran teatro del mundo*, first published in 1655. Among them are included: "teatro," "scenery," "the dialogue / de esta gran pantomima," "a giant improvisation / con role-playing," "materia" and "Dios / El Director de la Great Force / o Gran Tragedia / depending on your predilection" (170-171). By the end of this introduction, we experience the sensation of a curtain being drawn back, slowly and

deliberately, to unveil a stage comprised of the entire world, the entire range of human experiences, and the entire spectrum of cultural identities. We also feel as if we've been pulled backward in time, to a land and an era that predate modern civilization, to a time and a place in which an innate and ancient spirituality rumbles beneath the earth and throughout the surrounding cosmos:

> pero underneath it all
> is the truth
> the Spiritual Truth
> that determines all materia
>
> la energía that creates the
> universe
> la fuerza con purpose
> la primera cause de todo
> even before the Huelga
> la First Cause de Creation (170-171).

Valdez revisits the motifs of the Chicano's cosmological destiny and *life as theater* / *theater as life* in the final pages of the poem; throughout the poem, they are recurring tropes that work to weave together its distinct sections.

The stage set and the allegory of the *teatro* set in motion, the speaker then situates the reader at the beginning of a more specific chronology and history: that of "los indios" who "hace muchos años que cantaban / en su flor y canto / de las verdades / CIENTIFICAS Y RELIGIOSAS" (171). Here the theatrical imagery gives way to an impassioned poetization of the consequences of European colonization in the Americas:

> We were conquistados
> and COLONIZADOS
> and we (de la raza de bronce)
> began to think we were EUROPEOS
> and that their vision of reality
> was
> IT. (171)

Valdez employs this *we / they* dichotomy throughout *Pensamiento* in varied contexts; it is one of the most effective rhetorical devices he develops to enact the kind of historical, spiritual, and socio-political rewriting necessitated by the present-day reality of Chicana/os in the US.

In what I call the second section of the poem, the speaker makes reference to the serpentine and regenerative nature of reality and asserts the potential for a better and different kind of future, a future in which "los oprimidos del mundo / continue to become / los liberadores / in the true progress of cosas / and the Chicano is part of the / process" (172). The male Chicano speaker portrays history and evolution as cyclical in nature, not in the sense that we fail to learn from our mistakes but rather in the sense that there always exists the possibility of evolution and change:

> But REALITY es una Gran Serpiente
> a great serpent
> that moves and changes
> and keeps crawling
> out of its
> dead skin
>
> despojando su pellejo viejo
> to emerge
> clean and fresh
> la nueva realidad nace
> de la realidad vieja. (171-172)

Although Valdez tends to depict reality in universal and collective terms, he reveals a vested interest in articulating the past, present, and (imagined) future of Chicana/os. It is they who have the most at stake, the speaker stresses, and thus the most to gain from the kind of reawakening of spirit and consciousness he proposes throughout the poem.

In the third section of the poem, the Chicano subject himself becomes the clear interlocutor of the speaker's proclamations and calls to action. Here the speaker appeals

to the Chicano's inner sense of self and urges him to initiate the "proceso cósmico" that will "LIBERATE OUR CONQUISTADORES / or their descendants" (172). He emphasizes the Chicano's responsibility to his own evolutionary journey, reminding him that the Chicano "must MEXICANIZE / himself / para no caer en cultural trampas" (172). Valdez constructs an antithesis over the following stanza, through which he asserts the agency of Chicanos as the new liberators and with indisputable rights to their own history and cultural memory. Not Thomas Jefferson nor Karl Marx nor Mahatma Ghandi nor Mao Tze Tung can liberate, nor speak for, the Chicano. Instead, the speaker invites his Chicano reader to remember his Mayan ancestors and heritage through a process of getting to know himself that evokes the words of José Martí in *Nuestra América*, written nearly a century earlier:

> IF HE IS NOT LIBERATED FIRST BY
> HIS PROPIO PUEBLO
> BY HIS POPUL VUH
> HIS CHILAM BALAM
> HIS CHICHEN ITZA
> KUKULCAN, GUCUMATZ, QUETZALCOATL.
>
> Y qué lindo es estudiar
> lo de su pueblo de uno (173)

In order to be truly free, the Chicano must know himself, study himself and his own people, and reflect upon the spiritual heritage of his Mayan and Aztec forbearers. In addition to the unwavering tone and the speaker's choice of indigenous words and figures, Valdez's use of punctuation and typography is atypical and stands out in stanzas like these. He often capitalizes words and entire verses, a formal technique which helps to ensure that the reader prioritizes the most important words, often those with embedded cultural and historical significance or those least familiar—linguistically and culturally—

to an Anglo reader. In my own readings of the poem, the capitalized words and verses also offer moments for pause, processing, and reflection before moving forward in the poem; they force me to hold on, for a fraction of a second longer, to those words and their significance in the context of the poem.

Valdez's use of punctuation is infrequent and inconsistent, as the two stanzas above reveal. The first concludes with a period, in a place where we as readers might expect one, and yet the second stanza, also a complete sentence and thought, does not conclude with a period or any form of punctuation. In this way, the creative use of capitalization plays a larger role in how one reads this poem, particularly aloud, than does the use of standard punctuation marks. Like many of the Chicana/o artists and writers of the 20th century, Valdez consciously rejects many of the formal and structural constraints of poetry at the same time as he blurs the line between the literary and the scholarly. In this case and throughout the poem, the contrast between a capitalized stanza, followed by a two-verse stanza with more traditional capitalization, makes the rhetorical climax to which these verses build—that the Chicano people have their own past, their own religious figures and their own history which they must recall in the process of becoming "NEO-MAYAS"—that much more striking (173).

The fourth section of the poem introduces the Mayan concept of "IN LAK'ECH: *Tú Eres Mi Otro Yo* / which they derived from / studying the sun spots" (173). Once more the speaker highlights a cultural difference between Anglo/Christian society and that of the (Neo)Mayans by characterizing the latter as a cosmovision that predates Christianity and yet, at its core, shares a similar, although more innate, morality:

> Their [Mayan] communal life
> was not based on intellectual

agreement
it was based on a vision
of los cosmos
porque el hombre pertenecía
a las estrellas

Así es que the Christian
Concept of Love Thy Neighbor
as Thyself was engrained into
their daily behavior

they wouldn't think of
acting any other way (174)

Implicit in this comparison is a tongue-in-cheek criticism of culture and society in the United States, in which the intellect trumps all things spiritual and morality must be studied and practiced rather than understood innately from birth. In light of this difference, the speaker offers the reader the double-edged concept of IN LAK'ECH, a kind of universal understanding that how one treats others mirrors how one views and treats oneself: "That, carnales, was LEY AND ORDER / whatever I do to you / I do to myself" (174). From one vantage point, this declaration suggests the potential for common ground between the Anglo and the Chicano and even evokes the Christian Golden Rule of *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. Considered in the context of US-Mexico border politics in the 1960s and dating back to the 16th century, however, I read this stanza as a kind of cautionary pronouncement regarding the far-reaching implications of the kind of discrimination, racism, and violence toward Chicanos still condoned by the state when Valdez first published the poem.

The fifth section expands upon the concept of IN LAK'ECH by elaborating on the danger and repercussions of the kind of neocolonialist violence inflicted by the US throughout the 20th century:

Even the United States
of America will someday learn
that it cannot bomb Hanoi
without inflicting violence on itself (174)

With this example, Valdez broadens the scope of his critique in order to speak to violence inflicted by the US in South East Asia. The centrality of the Chicano is not lost here; this section works to expose the many ways in which the US, and particularly the US government, are out of touch and out of synch with the Chicano's way of life. The kind of violence perpetrated by the US will unquestionably return "back to you / somewhere / sometime / en alguna forma" because it is the "LEY of the universe" (175). Valdez explores the nuances between the words LEY and LAW throughout this section, in order to eventually describe what it means to be Chicano, both spiritually and in the context of the present-day reality:

To be CHICANO is not (NOT)
to hate the gabacho or the
gachupín or even the pobre
vendido…

To be CHICANO is to love yourself
your culture, your
skin, your language

[…]

But, above all
to be CHICANO is to LOVE GOD. (175)

Visually speaking, the capitalization of the word Chicano across the page leaves the reader with that word resonating rhythmically into the next section of the poem; it works to revive and reclaim a term long used by non-Chicana/os in derogatory, racist, and ignorant ways. At the same time, it is worth noting that Valdez often describes his own people through homogenizing terms, particularly in his articulations of Chicano

spirituality, pacifist ideology and practices, and cultural legacy and cosmology. A salient example in this section of the poem is the lack of any reference (linguistic or thematic) to women within the *Movimiento*. This is a cultural tendency, if not outright expectation, that Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa addresses in *Borderlands* a decade and a half later and which I consider in my fourth chapter.

The sixth and middle section of the poem is one of the most lengthy. Here Valdez returns to the serpentine imagery and metaphor, likening the growth of the *Movimiento* to that of the ever-evolving serpent and the movement of the cosmos, "el quinto sol," the earth, the morning star, Quetzalcóatl, even "Jesucristo": "it must move with GOD," the speaker concludes (176). In this section, the reader senses that the activist and more politically-minded *Movimiento* is intimately connected with the spiritual rebirth of the Chicano people. As in other verses throughout the poem, the speaker poeticizes the etymology of the word religion ("nothing more than the / tying back / RE-LIGARE / with the cosmic center") and proclaims that only through "AMOR Y FUERZA" can true justice be achieved (176-177). The pulse of the poem picks up in this section, mirroring both the increasing urgency of the socio-political situation for Chicanos and the climactic inversion of power and cultural norms that, according to the speaker, will soon come to pass. The speaker rejects once more the cold, reason-based, European approach to interpreting reality in favor of the way of "el indio," who "DANCES his way to truth / in a way INTELLECTUALS will / never understand" (177). Valdez's overt critique of European and Anglo culture and intellectual practices in these verses reflects an anti-intellectual strain I find through *Pensamiento* as well as in the plays I discuss in my third and fourth chapters. In the "Chicano Approach to Theatre of Reality," as the poem's

subtitle evokes, heart and spirit are stronger even than "flesh and bone and stone / and death" (178).

In this section, the speaker calls into question the entirety of Judeo-Christian history; he identifies Jesus as the first to speak in "MAYA YUCATECO" and as someone who understood the Mayan way of life, the way of the *indio* (179). Although the words Jesus spoke from the cross are translated into English as "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST / THOU FORSAKEN ME?", the speaker rejects what he describes as a linguistic (and cultural) misinterpretation of the words Jesus actually spoke in his dying moment: "AHORA ME SUMERGIO EN LA / ALBORADA DE TU PRESENCIA"[27] (179). The speaker concludes the sixth section by poeticizing for the reader an era in which Jesus and the Mayan people knew one another, thereby calling into question the entire foundation of Western/Christian culture, religion, and history. By the end of this section, it is clear that Valdez is constructing an alternate, multilingual *historia*, told through poetry and a blending of Spanish, English, quechua, and nahuatl.

The seventh section begins with the characterization of the Chicano as someone who identifies with and loves everything—except the devil—and therefore *is* everything. Here the speaker writes the newly articulated Chicano subject into the cultural space traditionally reserved for Jesus/God in a Western/Christian context. As we have seen thus far, *Pensamiento* is an activist and potentially polemical poem, in multiple senses. Valdez questions, criticizes, and rejects Anglo conceptualizations of religion, intellectualism, morality, history, and daily life. Yet the poem also brings up issues of gender representation within the *Movimiento* that Valdez fails to problematize throughout the piece. As much as I'm moved and convinced by the speaker's calls-to-action, it is

[27] "Now I immerse myself in the dawn of your presence" (translation mine).

impossible to ignore the heteropatriarchal assumptions and institutions at work in this section, as a white male figurehead is replaced by a brown-skinned male symbol of authority and power, even as the speaker asserts that for "el hombre cósmico"[28] "the lust for power / no exist[e], / not even the lust for / CHICANO POWER" (180). Valdez is able to see beyond the neocolonialist and imperialist model of governance in the United States, onto a horizon that opens onto a different kind of future for the Chicano people. Yet he falls short of taking a more critical look at just who is marginalized, silenced, and relegated to the status of second-class citizens at the hands of a patriarchy he never calls into question. It is clear in this section, and throughout the poem, that the Chicano who is everything, who has agency and power, whose destiny stands before him, is a decidedly male subject. I bring up this limitation not to discredit the importance of Valdez's poem and articulation of a Chicano mythos, but rather to introduce a point of contrast between *Pensamiento Serpentino* and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, an analysis which I undertake in Chapter IV. The male-focused speaker and subject matter in *Pensamiento* also highlight problematic notions within the earlier goals of the *Movimiento*, in terms of the rights and experiences of non-male subjects, which I consider in more depth in my later chapters.

We have seen throughout the poem the ways in which Valdez inserts himself into the running discourse of the 1960s and 1970s regarding the etymology and meanings of the term *Chicano*. The seventh section concludes with what I consider to be the most poetically complex and evocative section of *Pensamiento*, as Valdez pulls the reader through a veritable lexical and mental tongue-twister beginning with the Nahuatl word

[28] This verse evokes José Martí's characterization of "el hombre natural" or "el mestizo autóctono," in contrast with "el aldeano vanidoso" or "el criollo exótico." More relevant to the subject matter, it also makes indirect reference to Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelo's "La raza cósmica," published in 1925.

"MEEXICANOOB" and concluding with Einstein's theory of relatively, "E=MC2" (181-182). As the speaker points out matter-of-factly,

> Mexico, after all, means
> Feathered serpent
> or, if you are mathematically
> trucha, it means
> E=MC2 (180-181)

This syllogistic reasoning ultimately equates Mexico with the theory of relativity, which was utilized in Aztec culture in conjunction with astronomy and astrophysics in the prediction of astrological phenomena. Mexico itself, the speaker insists, holds the answer for Chicanos in search of the truth about who they are and where they come from. For the first time, Valdez obliquely refers the reader to a series of academic works written by Domingo Martínez Paredes in the 1960s on the subject of Mayan philology and cosmology[29], as an alternate, non-Anglo body of scholarship directed at the kinds of intellectuals he critiques throughout the poem. According to the speaker, Martínez Paredes has written about the Mayan roots of the words *México* and *Chicano* in Spanish, which both evolved from the word "MEEXICANOOB":

> Así va la onda:
> MEEXICANOOB
> is an old word
> pronounced MESHICANOB
> y quiere decir
> SERPIENTES BARBADAS
> porque la word
> MEEX means barba (beard)
> and combines with KIN
> (sol) to give us the
> concept of BARBAS DE
> LOS RAYOS DEL SOL

[29] The books he mentions are: *Un continente y una cultura: unidad filológica de la América prehispana* (1967), *El Popol Vuh tiene razón: teoría sobre la cosmogonía preamericana* (1968), and *El idioma maya hablado y escrito* (1967). These books have proved incredibly difficult to find listed in library catalogs, let alone to locate physically.

which refers to the
golden feathers of QUETZALCOATL. (181)

Beyond the striking serpentine logic and imagery employed here, these verses assert the agency of a uniquely Chicano discourse and reasoning. The reader is granted access to an intricate philological and poetical understanding of the words *México* and *Chicano* written not by a(n Anglo) journalist or an academic critic but by a Chicano activist-poet. Moreover, the speaker once more asserts a pacifist framework for the *Movimiento* by concluding that the entire evolution outlined above "simply means / that LOVE is stronger than HATE" (182).

A change in tone marks the eighth section, as the speaker now addresses the reader directly—as *tú* and as *you*—through a series of suggestions that gradually become commands directed at the poem's interlocutor. The overarching message communicated in this section is the importance of liberating oneself *now*, in the present, to escape the inevitable repeat of the same challenges and obstacles in a future lifetime. I read these stanzas as one of the most direct calls-to-action for Chicanos that appear in the poem. Although Valdez utilizes the theme of liberation as a metaphor for self-actualization, rather than a literal, physical uprising, his physically-charged lexicon— "LIBERATE," "fighting," "STRUGGLE," and "LA LUCHA"— contrasts sharply with the pacifist dogma espoused in the first half of the poem. The speaker also invokes the eternal presence of all the cosmic revolutionaries in a kind of pre-*lucha* pep talk:

And if you die
in the struggle

pos a toda madre
También
porque los
revolucionarios cósmicos

NO MUEREN

I don't mean they live
in the memory of the people
or something like that

I mean: NO MUEREN! (184)

This is perhaps the most literal reference to revolution that appears in the poem, and it seems in many ways a drastic departure from the conclusion of the previous section, in which the speaker emphasizes the power of love over hate. Yet the subject of revolution is abandoned as abruptly as it is introduced, as the ninth and tenth sections of the poem revisit and expand upon the theatrical metaphors introduced in the opening stanza. From the first act, so to speak, of this poem, Valdez propels the reader backward in time in order to engender a new kind of historical, spiritual, and cultural narrative that is serpentine in both form and content.

The ninth stanza brings an end to the psycho-spiritual reflections that ground and unify the previous sections; instead, the speaker resituates the reader in the present-day of "este mundo" (184). This is the first moment of the poem in which the speaker directly commands the reader to do something, namely to act:

Don't pretend
ACT (ACTUA) in reality
and that means in the
greater reality beyond
the limited world or
reality of the gabacho or
European intellectual.
ACT on the stage of the universe (184).

Once more, Valdez develops an antithetical relationship between Western reality and the "greater reality" of the Chicano, between the limited academic knowledge of Europeans and the ancient and more profound cosmological wisdom of the Mayas. Over the

following two pages, the speaker is quick to warn the reader—who seems here to be a non-Chicano and specifically Anglo person—against any kind of exploitative, institutionalized efforts to gain access to Mayan wisdom because "por ahí no hay nada / Tienes que cruzar el Puente / and BELIEVE" (186). According to the speaker, the only way real way to do anything in life is through believing, through faith. In this way, the word "ACT" becomes synonymous not with imitation nor a constructed identity or way of being, but rather with being just, being authentic, being fully oneself. This is an interesting twist on the adage "the theater of life"; it suggests that the roles we are given to play are not limiting or restrictive but instead full of potential for liberation, self-exploration, and improving the world around us.

In the tenth section, Valdez expands upon the theatrical imagery initiated in the opening stanzas by equating God with a theatrical director, among other roles, in the performance of life:

> EL SEÑOR
> El great playwright del universe
> el scene designer y costume maker
> El make-up man del teatro
> infinito
> […]
> The point is to participate
> in the play
> not to reject the parts
> we are given to play.
> Es toda improvisación anyway.
> Make your own play. (187)

According to the speaker, this great playwright of the universe has already written into the cosmos all of the plot lines that possibly could come to pass. In this way, it becomes conceivable for life to be both directed by and beyond the control of *el señor*. Although each individual has been granted a particular and unique role, the speaker also insists

upon the absolute autonomy of the individual, so long as he remembers that "[t]iene que comenzar con lo suyo" (188). The Chicano, in particular, is reminded to play his own part, rather than imitating a cultural or ethnic role with which he doesn't identify. In "El Mero Mero del Teatro / Universal," Valdez writes, the ultimate sign of the Chicano's evolution and enlightenment becomes evident at the moment in which he is able to pronounce the following assertions aloud:

> Raza, te comprendo y te
> quiero because I know
> where you're coming from
> and where you're going. (189)

Valdez once more transitions out of present in order to foreshadow the future, all the while asserting the irrefutable destiny of the Chicano to finally become the subject of his own life. The Chicano is whole in this desired future that has not yet come to pass, because he sees himself in that way and thus has inspired a change in the way the world sees him:

> ENTONCES EL CHICANO SE
> SALE DE SUS HUESOS,
> SE SALE DE LA PINTA DE SU
> CARNE
>
> Y ya no es "minority group"
> ya no es un hyphenated
> Spanish-speaking person
>
> Es un HOMBRE, un SER HUMANO,
> un hijo de Dios. (189)

It seems significant that Valdez opts to communicate this unwavering declaration of Chicano male agency and power primarily in Spanish, relegating English only to the verses that convey stereotypical and generic depictions of Chicanos (and Latinos) in the United States. According to the speaker, access to one's potential stems from first

learning one's own limitations and then through knowing oneself. As the speaker asks the Chicano reader, "how could it be otherwise?" (191). The serpentine rhetoric and form are visible here, as Valdez layers the narrative on top of itself, in an ever-unfolding spiral, and eventually revisits the trope of IN LAK'ECH: "Somos espejos para cada uno. / We are mirrors to each other" (191). There is something inherently pacifist in the Mayan concept of In Lak'ech, which Valdez employs as a mantra for the *Movimiento* throughout *Pensamiento*. It follows that he grounds the penultimate section of the poem in historical examples of pacifist resistance as well as cases of ethnically marginalized groups and non-Western peoples who have turned the other cheek, so to speak, and emerged from the struggle with a "fuerza moral" that has carried them into the modern age with dignity and self-respect (193).

The speaker continues to improvise around the metaphor of life as theater in the 11th section, once again underscoring that in "el gran / anfiteatro de los / cosmos" the Chicanos "are meant / to be active" (192). By this point in the poem, the prior references to pacifism and universal love are more concretely grounded in the context of both the Chicana/o Movement and the Vietnam War. In order to "learn to/ handle the contradictions / in reality," love and non-violence must always be called upon in the face of hatred and violence (193). Valdez's own politics come through most strongly in this section; he asserts the distinction between the *gabacho* presidents of the United States—Nixon, LBJ, Kennedy—and the US government, the latter being truly culpable and the former merely figureheads or scapegoats for a larger system that is racist, violent, and dependent upon the tenets of capitalist imperialism. Through it all, the speaker reminds us that César Chávez's "NON-VIOLENCE / is one of the most / violent forces around /

porque es positive y porque / comienza con Dios" (192). He advocates once more for a conscious Chicano agency born from conscious passivity:

> Instead of hating (fearing)
> that GABACHO CULTURE is
> swallowing us alive
> WE MUST SWALLOW IT
>
> as easily as a candy coated pill
> and then continue being ourselves (194)

Describing hatred as synonymous with fear, the speaker then proposes a kind of universal love synonymous with self-acceptance and the ability to confront and assume one's reality. He explores both the Chinese and the indigenous peoples of the Americas as models of moral strength and conviction in the face of the large-scale devastation those civilizations have endured. Appealing to the Chicano reader, the speaker maintains that racism must be fought with non-racism, violence with non-violence. Above all, the Chicano must remember always to act and to evolve in accordance with his own spiritual and cultural past, in order to fully realize his potential as he steps into his own destiny. He must realize the future he deserves through his own agency.

The twelfth and final section brings the argument full circle, both thematically and historically, by reminding the Chicano reader to live without fear—"sin miedo del gabacho / sin miedo de los pigs / sin miedo del diablo" –and to have faith "[e]n la Gran Evolución de las Cosas" (197-198). The final pages of the poem feature many capitalized words and verses, all of which function to forcibly reorient the reader back to the beginning of the poem and, even further back in time, to the era during which Quetzalcoatl still ruled Mesoamerica with a strength and foresight not understood in European and Anglo communities. The speaker reminds the reader of the prophecy of

Quetzalcoatl, who "está por volver / al mundo" on the 16th of August in 1987: "La profecía says that the / entire world will be / enlightened / and so it is" (198). He also reveals that as a result of the "Great Spiritual ReBirth" which has begun at last, LA CONQUISTA is about to come to an end (199).

The poem concludes in the style of a moralistic fable, by condensing the overarching poetic message into its simplest meaning, conveyed through a prophetic, bilingual voice. The speaker maintains that the vision of the future proposed throughout the poem has been written already into the cosmos and thus will come to pass:

> Así lo dispone la Evolucion [sic]
> Así lo dispone THE GREAT
> FEATHERED SERPENT OF THE
> UNIVERSE.
>
> Así los dispone DIOS.
>
> Así sea. (199)

Each time I read these verses, I visualize a stage upon which stands a single actor, illuminated by a single spotlight, that grows smaller and smaller until all that remains is the audience, the reader, who experiences the final verses in total darkness as the curtain is slowly and deliberately pulled closed.

By the end of the poem, words like "Evolucion" and "DIOS" are perhaps imbued with more nuanced significance for the reader, whether or not s/he is Chicana/o. Considered through the lens of the *Movimiento* as depicted by Valdez, the concept of *evolution* now recalls a great number of historical and personal transformations, including: the physical evolution of the serpent, mirrored in the formal structure of the poem itself; the call to act(ion) and to evolve, in terms of the Chicano accepting and actively engaging with his own role in life; and the evolution of the *Movimiento*, which is

integrally connected to the greater cosmological history described throughout the poem: "In order to fully / EVOLVE / (evolucionar con la / serpiente) / the Chicano Movement / must / MOVE / con el MOVEMENT / of the Cosmos" (176). On the whole, Valdez asserts in *Pensamiento* an affirming and pacifist notion of a Chicana/o consciousness and collective identity in the United States.

In his introduction to Valdez's *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*, theater critic Jorge Huerta synthesizes the poem's content and effect on Chicano readers:

> In the opening lines [of the poem] Valdez describes Chicano theater as a reflection of the world; a universal statement about what it is to be a Chicano in the United States. Recognizing the many injustices the Chicano has suffered in this country, the poet nonetheless attempts to revive a non-violent response. [Throughout the poem,] Valdez creates a distinct vision of a "cosmic people" whose destiny is finally being realized as Chicanos are capable of love rather than hate, action rather than words. (Huerta 10)

I agree with Huerta's assertion that Valdez brings to life for his readers both the real injustices experienced by Chicanos and the real potential of the Chicano people to embrace the more enlightened destiny that exists before them. What is telling, however, both in the above passage and the poem itself is the gendered lexicon and imagery that prioritize the Chicano—male—experience over that of the Chicana—female—experience. Like Valdez, Huerta prioritizes the male-gendered term "Chicano" in this description and throughout his introduction to Valdez's life and work as a Chicano dramatist and activist. If the poem is, as Huerta describes, "a universal statement about what it is to be a Chicano in the United States," what does that say about the value of women?

While Valdez himself certainly identifies as Chicano—in the specifically male sense of the term in Spanish—, he consistently overlooks or silences the histories, voices,

and preoccupations of Chicanas who have just as much—I'd argue more—at stake as their male counterparts in the fight for civil rights and representation in dominant US narratives. Issues inclusive of or particular to Chicanas simply don't figure into his allegory of Chicano theater as a representation of the world. What, then, does Valdez—and to a lesser extent Huerta—imply about the roles of Chicanas within the *Movimiento*, as members of El Teatro Campesino, as characters written to be staged, as cultural producers, and as subjects doubly marginalized—by their gender and their cultural identity—from dominant Anglo society? Seen through the lens of the speaker of *Pensamiento Serpentino*, the Chicana experience and voice seem invisible and silent.

My point here is not to reject *Pensamiento Serpentino* for its heteropatriarchal focus, nor to disavow the role Valdez has played in the articulation of a Chicano mythos and model for (r)evolution. The poem's formal hybridity and multilingualism, recuperation of repressed and occluded histories, and rejection of dominant Anglo narratives are distinctive features that we see echoed in many of the plays written by Chicana/o playwrights in the following decades. What I hope I have shown, however, is that *Pensamiento Serpentino* is useful not only in its representation of the focal points of both the activist and literary branches of the Chicano/a Movement; it also reveals considerable detail as to whose voices have been excluded, not just within broader Anglo society, but also within the *Movimiento* itself.

In the fourth chapter of *Mexican American Theater: Legacy and Reality*, Nicolás Kanellos summarizes "Chicano Theater in the Seventies" by focusing almost entirely on the history of "Valdez and El Teatro Campesino," or "Valdez and Campesino" as he abbreviates the descriptor. Kanellos credits Valdez not only with the creation of Chicano

theater but also the concept of a "Chicano nation," in his estimation "a people envisioned by Valdez and other grass roots organizers of the sixties" (9). Although he affords credit to the entire ETC collective for the development of "*teatro chicano*" in the United States, he classifies the *acto* as Valdez's invention and as a means of representing *all* of the civil rights issues relevant to Chicanos:

> Almost overnight, groups appeared throughout the United States to continue down the path opened by Valdez. In streets, parks, churches and schools, Chicanos were spreading a newly found bilingual-bicultural identity through the *actos*, one-act pieces introduced by Valdez that explored all of the issues confronting Mexican Americans: the farmworker struggle for unionization, the Vietnam War, the drive for bilingual education, community control of parks and schools, the war against drug addiction and crime, etc. (9)

Perhaps we are meant to assume that the "etc." that concludes Kanellos' list of "all of the issues confronting Mexican Americans" refers to gender and sexual discrimination and oppression. As for "the path opened by Valdez," Kanellos suggests that by the end of the 1970s there existed a single approach to the role, style, and content of Chicana/o theater within the broader Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement. Later in the same chapter, Kanellos attributes "the inauguration of a true grass roots theater movement" to Valdez (11). He further idealizes Valdez's concept of *teatro* by describing it as "the perfect vehicle for communing artistically with their [Mexican Americans'] culture and environment. […] The creation of art from the folk materials of a people, their music, humor, social configurations and environment represented the fulfillment of Luis Valdez' vision of a Chicano national theater" (11). In the conclusion to this chapter, Kanellos remarks that the existence of Chicano theater and performance within the academy was "spearheaded by Luiz Valdez" as well (15).

Today, Valdez continues to be characterized by many scholars and activists as the founding father of the Chicana/o theater movement. Kanellos and Huerta are not alone in their tendency to subsume the collective accomplishments of ETC, as well as other individual Chicana/o dramatists and directors, under the name of Luis Valdez. In the following chapter, I turn to issues of hyper-masculinity and female invisibility in the context of ETC in order to contextualize my analysis of two plays by individual Chicana/o dramatists who works demonstrate conflicting notions of the role of Chicana/o theater within the *Movimiento*.

CHAPTER III

TAKING THE STAGE: ON THE REPRESENTATION OF CHICANA/O IDENTITY, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

"58 SEXIST COMMENTS"

Growing up in a central California farm worker community, Dolores Huerta did everything the boys did. She and her two brothers were often left without adult supervision, and she recalls playing all the games boys played when she was a little girl. In a series of interviews filmed for the online archive *Makers*, Huerta speaks fondly of being allowed into her brothers' "Boys' Clubhouse" in the role of club secretary. In one interview, Huerta recounts how surprised she was to realize, later in life, that most women she knew spent their time in the company of other women and rarely with men. Throughout the interviews, Huerta reflects candidly on her experiences as a woman in the United Farm Workers Union. "At some point," she confides, "I remember being in a meeting of the United Farm Workers [UFW] when all of the guys were just making sexist comments. And so I just started jotting down every time somebody made a sexist comment." At the end of that meeting, UFW co-founder César Chávez asked if there were any final remarks. Huerta responded by calling out the men directly: "During the course of this meeting, you [the men on the board] have made fifty-eight sexist comments." During the next few meetings, Huerta observed the number of sexist comments drop from fifty-eight to twenty-three to five and finally to three. "Then it was like we would come into the room and they [the men] would just all be really careful

about what they were saying, but I think it was important. We had to start from somewhere" (*Makers*).

Dolores Huerta founded the Agricultural Workers Association in 1960 and co-founded the UFW with César and Hélen Chávez in 1962. She was a leading organizer in the Delano Grape Strike from 1965 to 1970 and in the enactment of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975, which established collective bargaining rights for farmworkers. Huerta has been awarded the Eugene V. Debs Foundation Outstanding American Award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States Presidential Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award, the Ohtli Award from the Mexican Government, and nine honorary doctoral degrees from US universities. Huerta continues to be known as a leading advocate for social justice and change, in a variety of labor-related contexts. In 2015 at the age of eighty-five, she remains dedicated to workers' rights, women's rights, and human rights through her work as an activist and as president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation[30], which she founded in 2002. As the following remarks show, she continues to speak up against the appropriation of the work and ideas of women by men:

> I believe that it's almost natural that especially men will appropriate the work of women as theirs. And I think women, often, we don't think in terms of fighting for our ideas or fighting to make sure that our work is recognized. And again, when we think of the quote-unquote *team effort*, it's kind of natural that we just give our ideas and give our work away, and don't even think about how we put our name or our stamp on that work. We as women have to figure out a plan to make sure that we get credit for the work that we do. (*Makers*)

[30] She established the Dolores Huerta Foundation [DHF] with $100,000 she was awarded for the Puffin/Nation Prize for Creative Citizenship. The DHF homepage describes its mission as "creating networks of healthy, organized communities pursuing social justice through systemic and structural transformation" (Dolores). Huerta's youngest daughter, Camila Chávez, is the DHF's Executive Director. Huerta is Acting President of the organization and works full-time as an unpaid volunteer. The DHF operates out of Central Valley in California, with its primary office in downtown Bakersfield, California.

Dolores Huerta is one of many Chicana women whose stories and roles have been largely downplayed, silenced, or coopted by those of Chicano men and of Anglo men and women, within both academic and popular discourse. Within popular media and film representations of the Chicano Movement, César Chávez is often named or represented as the sole leader or organizer. In 2014, Canana Films released the biopic film *César Chávez*, which premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival. As the title suggests, the film centers on the real life and accomplishments of labor organizer and activist César Chávez, whose name overshadows the collective nature and contributions to the UFW Movement and the formation of a labor union. While Dolores Huerta does appear as a character in the film, her role in the movement and in the film itself are relegated to secondary and not given the depth of coverage and credit afforded to Chávez. Like popular and scholarly representations of Luis Valdez I will discuss later in this chapter, Chávez's role in the UFW continues to eclipse that of Dolores Huerta, among other active organizers and activists in the *Movimiento*.

We find this same dynamic in Chicano theater; scholarship to date has focused on and reasserted the patriarchal character of the *Movimiento* and of Chicano theater and performance within that movement. Academic and popular discourse on Chicano theater and performance have tended to be male-centered and heavily influenced by Anglo perceptions and criticism. As a result, the voices, contributions, and cultural production of women remain obscured and not well understood. How do we read the *Movimiento* differently when we bring into focus the intersection of its socio-political agenda and goals, the inherently heteropatriarchal structure of the *teatros*, and the male-centered scholarship written over the past fifty years? How do we understand the Chicana/o

theater movement differently when we consider representations of gender, sexuality, and Chicana/o identity on and offstage? What would it look like to afford critical space for the lived experiences and creative contributions of all of the major participants in the Chicano Movement, many of whom were women, gay, or more visibly identifiable as indigenous?

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the socio-political climate around issues of Chicana/o identity and political representation in the 1960s and 1970s. Next, I explore issues of gender politics and representation within the Chicana/o theater movement, and within El Teatro Campesino [ETC] in particular. In the second half of this chapter, I analyze two plays published and staged in the 1970s, both of which challenge Anglo stereotypes and perceptions—one formally, the other thematically—and at the same time reveal a Chicano, and broader US, patriarchy at play. My consideration of Estela Portillo-Trambley's *The Day of the Swallows* and Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit* serves, in part, to demonstrate the existence of multiple and divergent manifestations of Chicana/o theater in the 1970s, an era often characterized solely in terms of the career trajectory and cultural production of Valdez. While Portillo-Trambley adheres to many of the characteristics of European-derived representational theater in *Day*, the play features a lesbian, Chicana protagonist who struggles to come to terms with her relationship with a woman from the opening moments of the play. Her representation of a non-heteropatriarchal subject as a theatrical protagonist in a play first published in 1971 provides a counterpoint to the dual Chicano/Pachuco male protagonists of *Zoot Suit* and to the invisibility of issues related to gender and sexual identity within the *Movimiento* and Chicano cultural production.

The late 1960s and early 1970s marked a significant moment of change in cultural production by Chicanas and Chicanos. As I address in my introduction, at this point in history very few people of Mexican heritage were acknowledged or held positions of power within the US establishment. *Chicano! A History of the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement* is a four-part documentary that utilizes filmed interviews, video footage, and photographs juxtaposed with narratorial commentary. The film presents and discusses the multi-faceted ways in which the mid-19th century US takeover of the Southwest territories converted Mexican Americans into second-class citizens on what was once their own land. Episode 1, "Quest for a Homeland," presents an historical overview of the rise of the *Movimiento* framed through interviews with a wide variety of Chicana/o activists, artists, political leaders, historians, students, and teachers. Many of the interviewees speak to what the film's narrator calls "the legacy of poverty and discrimination" of Chicano people that became more apparent in the 1960s. During that period, a variety of external factors and forces—including increased Anglo economic prosperity, the growth of industrialized agribusiness, and the Vietnam War—highlighted the inequities and injustices perpetrated against people of color, and against Chicana/os in particular.

Artist and scholar Amalia Mesa-Baines recalls the pejorative charge of the word "Mexican" that she often experienced first-hand when she was young:

> Certain things you knew, stores you shouldn't shop in, movie theaters you'd probably best not go to, and still the synonymous sense that the word "Mexican" went with the word "dirty." I remember as a child people feeling that the best thing they could say to me was "Well, you're a Spanish girl, aren't you?" and I'd say "No, I'm Mexican." (*Chicano!*)

Motion picture producer Moctesuma Esparza speaks of the personal and political marginalization and alienation experienced by people of Mexican descent living within the geopolitical boundaries of the US:

> I hated being Mexican. There was no respect. There was no status. There was no participation in the society. My father not speaking good English was an embarrassment when I would go to school as a child. Now these were things that I wasn't able to intellectualize. These were things that I felt. We were walking around with the tremendous burden of being Mexican in a country that didn't want us, except as labor. (*Chicano!*)

The film also features footage of an earlier interview with Edward Roybal, a Mexican-American Congressman who served from 1975 to 1993; he had been the first Latino Congressperson from California since Romualdo Pacheco was elected in 1879. Roybal describes the humiliating experience of being interrogated by the police on a public street because of the way he looked. After being frisked, one police officer demanded he show his credentials. The officer began dropping the cards from Roybal's wallet onto the sidewalk and then told Roybal to pick them up himself. "I remember getting on my knees and picking them up," Roybal reflects. "This is something, of course, that a man that had just asked his best girl to marry him will not forget" (*Chicano!*).

As the film's narrator attests, "the legacy of poverty and discrimination was abundantly clear. Half of all Mexican Americans had less than eight years of education, and a third lived in poverty. Politically, they were underrepresented. In 1967, only four Mexican Americans served in Congress." For Mesa-Baines, Esparza, and Roybal, growing up Mexican American entailed a life of feeling *in-between*, in multiple senses of the phrase—in between countries, languages, cultural identities, races, and even factions of the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement itself. This liminal existence signified multiple levels of exclusion from society; from politics, from legal protection, from access to

education, and from a sense of belonging to the places in which Chicana/os people lived. As we observe in the interviews cited above, even identifying as Mexican or Mexican American was dangerous and signified a risk, physically and legally but also psychologically and internally. All three interviews provide examples of the kind of "internal colonization" described by Tomás Almaguer and which I discuss in Chapter II. They also illuminate several of the reasons why Mesa-Bains, Esparza, Royal and others would choose to identify as Mexican American, rather than Chicana/o, if they identified with either term at all.

The endemic disenfranchisement of Chicana/os portrayed in *Chicano!* is also represented in some of the earliest *actos* performed by and for farmworkers in California, as well as by the cultural production and scholarship of many Chicana/os artists and writers from varying backgrounds. As the film illustrates, the solidification of the *Movimiento* throughout the 1960s eventually inspired broader support and recognition from college students, activists, and academics across the nation. During this period, Chicana/os began to speak out and assert their subject positions from *within* the establishment, rather than from outside it. Lyndon B. Johnson, elected in 1963 with significant Latina/o support, created the first Cabinet Committee on Mexican American Affairs in order to help solve what he called "[Mexican American's] very special, unique problems" (*Chicano!*). Vicente Ximenes, the Former Chair of that committee, articulates the overarching social and political rights and treatment sought by Chicana/os throughout the 1960s: "Establishment, you've gotta do something. […] We wanted equality, we wanted first-class citizenship, we wanted to be respected, we wanted our children to have better schools, all that everybody else wants" (*Chicano!*). Ultimately, the Committee on

Mexican American Affairs alone was not enough to guarantee Chicana/os the equality and respect they sought from a political and legal standpoint, but it did represent an acknowledgement on the part of the US administration that change was needed.

Following the US occupation of Mexican territory, beginning with the War of North American Invasion[31] in 1846, Mexicans in the US experienced a process of racialization that labeled them as "other" and "not-quite-US-citizens." In response to this racialization, the most vocal participants of the *Movimiento* began to assert their status as non-white, as mestizo, as indigenous. This established a distinctive shift from the previous decades in which many people of Mexican heritage had emphasized an enduring claim to whiteness through Spanish blood. Chicana/o activists and scholars increasingly emphasized that their identity claims were not biological or race-based but rather related to the concept of Aztlán[32], the Chicana/o homeland. Those who made the conscious decision to identify as Chicana/o in the 1960s and 1970s tended to share a commitment to what has been called by many scholars and activists "la búsqueda de Aztlán". Aztlán can be described in geopolitical terms as the Mexican territory that we know today as the US Southwest and West. However, many artists and scholars assert that more than a physical domain, Aztlán represents the Chicana/o homeland in multiple senses—spiritual, cultural, psychic and political. Luís Leal, for example, writes that "[l]a búsqueda…ha terminado. Y así tiene que ser para todo chicano: quien quiera encontrar a Aztlán, que lo busque, no en la geografía, sino en lo más íntimo de su ser" (27). Although I don't specifically deal

[31] The Mexican-American War, according to US history textbooks and most anglophiles educated in the US.

[32] For a more detailed analysis of this concept, see *The Road to Aztlán: Art from a Mythic Homeland* (2001), and especially Amalia Mesa-Bains discussion of "Aztlán" in "Spiritual Geographies." In her exploration of art by Chicana/os, she traces the concept of "Aztlán" to a mythical point of origin and a unifying force during the *Movimiento* for the Chicano people.

with the representation of Aztlán in this dissertation, I do revisit the concept in my conclusion, where I discuss a recent production of a play titled *Searching for Aztlán.*

In the introduction to Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Norma Alarcón articulates the difference between national identity—Mexican, for example, or Mexican American—and cultural and socio-political identity—in this case Chicana/o:

> The name "Chicana," in the present, is the name of resistance that enables cultural and political points of departure and thinking through the multiple migrations and dislocations of women of "Mexican" descent. The name "Chicana" is not a name that women (or men) are born to or with, as is often the case with "Mexican," but rather it is consciously and critically assumed. (15)

While Chicana/os share ties to a Mexican heritage, what it has meant to be Chicana/o has evolved over time in response to external social and political conditions of both Mexico and the US. According to Anzaldúa and many other scholars and activists, being Chicana/o has been, more often than not, a conscious choice and a label of belonging that carries with it a particular set of socio-political implications. As we find in the interviews in the film *Chicano!*, the choice to identify as Chicana/o, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, tended to connote activist involvement in *La Causa* and carried with it greater personal and political risks, to which the plays I will discuss later attest.

Many prominent activists, artists, and writers within the *Movimiento* articulated a radical, separatist vision of Chicano cultural, economic, and political autonomy; yet within the *Movimiento*, women were often denied credit for their cultural and political work or relegated to secondary roles as behind-the-scenes caretakers and as maternal symbols of the Chicano nation. Many literary and artistic works, as well as the discourses of prominent leaders like Tijerina, Chávez, and Valdez, equate liberation with

a reclaiming of Chicano masculinity. This masculinity was often represented and articulated as a dominion over women who were construed in reductive binary terms, like the Aztec goddess / virgin mother dichotomy. Even before the publication of Valdez's *Pensamiento Serpentino,* a salient and enduring example of this hyper-masculinity is found in Rodolfo "Corky" González's epic poem *I am Joaquín*, which Valdez adapted into a short film in 1969. The poem features a male speaker who, not unlike the speaker in *Pensamiento*, refers almost exclusively to Chicano men and forefathers and articulates a Chicano nationalism born from and centered on the lives and contributions of "fathers," "brothers," "priests," "princes," along with a host of specifically male figures, both mythical and historical. In the final stanza, the speaker declares "La raza! / Méjicano! / Español! / Latino! / Chicano! / Or whatever I call myself"; these identity markers speak explicitly of and to the Chicano—male—subject. Toward the end of the poem, the speaker refers to himself as an "Aztec prince" and "Christian Christ," allegorical figures that epitomize masculine strength and virtue and that we find echoed, several years later, in *Pensamiento Serpentino* as well. A second salient example of hyper-masculinity is the figure of the Pachuco, which I discuss in the context of Valdez's *Zoot Suit* later in this chapter.

This male visibility manifested in multiple ways within theater ensembles, one of which was that women's organizing and labor were often devalued and negated. As I discuss in my introduction, the heteropatriarchal legacy of the *Movimiento* has been reinscribed in the large volume of books, anthologies, and articles published on ETC and focused almost exclusively on Valdez. My goal here is not to negate or call into question the historical and political significance of Valdez's work and accomplishments. Rather, I

seek to demonstrate the existence, from the beginning of the *Movimiento* in the 1960s, of other stories worth telling and other voices worth acknowledging, many of which are the stories and voices of women who have been active participants in the *Movimiento*, as actors, as dramatists, as artists, and as cultural producers in every sense of the term. This reassessment of the collective nature of the *Movimiento* can help us to conceptualize the fight for Chicana/o liberation into the 21st century as both internal and external to the Chicana/o Movement.

I am not the first to consider the contributions and representations of Chicanas, within theatrical works, productions, and organizations and in subsequent critical considerations of such phenomena. Yolanda Broyles-González and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano have been pioneers in critical investigations of gendered experiences and exclusionary practices within the Chicano Movement, various *teatros*, and especially ETC. In *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement* (1998), Broyles-González recounts the story of what she describes as the collective ensemble that was ETC from 1965 to 1980. She underscores how different that period was from the decade that followed, in which Valdez shifted his focus as a dramatist and director to more commercialized and solo productions, effectively branding his own name and solidifying his legacy within Chicano theater and the *Movimiento* as a whole (xii). In this book, Broyles-González calls into question and ultimately rejects what she calls the "great-man/text-centered/chronological-linear approach" observed in all of Valdez's theatrical works as well as in scholarly examinations of those works and period (xiii). She prioritizes oral testimony over the written text, and she affords critical and theatrical

space to long-silenced participants—almost all of them women—in the conceptualization and day-to-day operations of ETC.

In "The Female Subject in Chicano Theatre: Sexuality, 'Race,' and Class," Yarbro-Bejarano addresses the related problem of the dominance of the narrative form in Valdez's works: "Western quest narrative excludes women from the subject position and subordinates her as an object to be attained, an obstacle to be removed or a space to be conquered by the active male subject" (396). In the *actos*, the *mitos*, and the commercial plays that followed, men are typically assigned roles as subjects and women are relegated to the status of binary objects. Gender construction in those plays adheres strictly to what Yarbro-Bejarano calls the "*chingón/chingada* axis"[33] (395). It is this reality that facilitated the subsuming of women's roles in ETC under the name of Luis Valdez and what Broyles-González describes as the "neglected cultural legacy" of women's participation in the Chicano theater movement (*El Teatro* 129). I would add that the contributions of Chicanas in ETC speak to a doubly neglected cultural legacy; these women's work, like that of their male counterparts, has been disavowed in the first place because they are Chicano—in the gender-neutral use of the term—and then again because of their identities as Chicana women.

Many scholars of Chicana/o theater have not questioned, but instead have naturalized, the aforementioned issues. Many have not taken issue with the representation of gender and sexuality in these plays, nor have they focused adequate attention on Chicana playwrights, whether or not their works dramatize gender and sexual politics. Broyles-González identifies the "absolute male-centeredness" in writings

[33] In English, the one who fucks (the man) and the one who gets fucked (the woman). It connotes, for many Chicana and Latina writers and activists and certainly for me, a violatory and misogynistic treatment of women.

on ETC as a primary motivator to publish her own, full-length critical work about theater within the *Movimiento* (xiii). She even mentions the backlash she faced after choosing to publish a chapter on the women of ETC before the publication of *El Teatro Campesino*: "the publication of the book met with considerable resistance and resentment (from male colleagues) at what was perceived as iconoclastic treatment of Luiz Valdez" (xv). As she rightly asserts, the kinds of censorship attempts she faced were grounded in "certain gender based forms of ideological blindness" (xv). In the face of resistance from the publishing world, Broyles-González chose to continue forward with her methodological and critical approach to examinations of ETC and the Chicana/o theater movement.

She was shocked to discover during her research that not a single member besides Valdez himself had ever been contacted for an oral interview: "[t]he classism and sexism that informs the production of knowledge made it unnecessary to approach the ensemble members for an oral history" (xvi). The resulting research for her book originates from ten years of oral interviews with the ensemble members, a year and a half spent as a participant-observer with ETC, and complete access to the company's theater artifacts (scripts, production notes, letters, etcetera) (xvii). Broyles-González concludes her introduction by stressing that the new sources she uncovered ultimately motivated her to compose "a qualitatively different history" that consciously rejects the linearity of chronological history in favor of a more layered approach to the material social process of ETC.

In direct response to what I would call the critical blind spot of many ETC and Chicano theater scholars, Broyles-González insists upon and enacts an alternative to the historical narrative approach to understanding ETC and Valdez, as well as to the writing

of theatrical history and the writing of history in general. In her introduction, she describes the singularity of her own scholarly work:

> [E]xisting research was of little benefit in providing data for my own research. […] The parameters of what is considered information or information worth collecting are among the first limiting factors in Chicana/o studies research. Creating new sources remains the laborious task of any Chicana/o studies research that wants to chart new pathways. (xvi)

Charting new pathways seems an understatement for all that she contests and offers in her critical work on ETC. Broyles-González most directly engages in a rescripting of historical narratives in her fourth chapter, "Toward a Re-Vision of Chicana/o Theater History: The Roles of Women in El Teatro Campesino." In this chapter, she analyzes the gender politics of ETC as a way to expose and problematize what she calls the ensemble's "most enduring contradictions" (xvii). She also demonstrates the many ways in which Chicanas have "challenged and circumvented patriarchy in an effort to establish their dignity within a context of confinement" (xvii). This is a point not to be taken lightly. It is not the case that Chicana women and their allies have lacked and sought the necessary skills to fully participant in Chicano theater. The cultural production and contributions of Chicanas throughout the many evolutions of the *Movimiento* have existed for as far back as we can conceptualize and write of Chicano theater and activism. Both Yarbro-Bejarano and Broyles-González underscore that the work that needs to be done involves excavations, recoveries, and the unveiling of long-silenced and overlooked people, their art and writing, and their cultural and political contributions.

I too am interested in the contradictions we find, not only in ETC but in the Chicana/o theater movement as a whole. Throughout this book, I consider the mechanisms of exclusion toward Chicanas within plays and in broader critical reception

to those plays and dramatists. Rather than focus primarily on ETC, in Chapters II and III I turn my attention to the work of individual dramatists who have written, staged, and published plays and who have achieved varying degrees of professional visibility and commercial success. In short, I am most interested in individual dramaturgy by a variety of playwrights rather than the work of collective ensembles like ETC.

While Broyles-González and Yarbro-Bejarano focus primarily on El Teatro Campesino, their works have important implications for other Chicana and Chicano playwrights and *teatros*. As Broyles-González maintains, "[o]nly by learning to ask new questions will a new Teatro history emerge that incorporates voices and issues long overlooked or buried" (133). She deconstructs the notion that "like history in general, Teatro history has largely been reduced to a chronology of the doings of one individual, its director" (130). More specifically, she notes that "[b]y the 1990s, the already prolific scholarship of theater critic Jorge Huerta ha[d] become something of an official version" (130). Both chronological and text-centered, Huerta's scholarship relies upon what she calls the "great-man conceptual framework," through which he ultimately fails to consider the inherently collective makeup of ETC (130). As a result, Huerta and others have effectively immortalized Valdez as the creative genius who is solely responsible for all of ETC's accomplishments, performances, and plays (131). As both Broyles-González and Yarbro-Bejarano demonstrate, as consistently as women participated in ETC, so too was their work sabotaged, silenced, or appropriated.

The *Encyclopedia of Latin American Theater* (2003) reveals that assertion to be true in the 21st century. The encyclopedia features a section titled "Chicano," which is the only entry in the book not listed as the name of a country. In this section, Juan Torres

Pou provides a brief history of Chicano theater, beginning with the colonial era. In the two paragraphs devoted to the 1960s and beyond, Pou cites only the names Luis Valdez and César Chávez individually; while he describes the "diversification" carried out by Chicana/o dramatists and theaters in the 1990s, among them Chicana feminists, he fails to mention by name a single Chicana dramatist or director. The remainder of the "Chicano" section is composed of alphabetized names of Chicana/os involved in or known for their theatrical contributions. Similar to Huerta's and Kanellos' depictions of Valdez, here he is described as "the most important Chicano playwright" and is credited with "creat[ing] a whole concept of theater that was followed by many playwrights and theatrical Chicano groups" (90-91). Broyles-González contests this claim outright; she also cites Valdez as partially responsible for subsuming the work of other Chicana/o performers and activists under his name. For example, he asserted authorship rights of *actos* originally created orally and collectively before he published them in *Early Works* under his own name. Throughout her book, Broyles-González consciously subverts the tenets of theory-based research and critical scholarship by privileging women's words and experiences, always toward the explicit end of writing Chicana/o theatrical history in a new way, a way she characterizes as

> a feminist commitment to honor women's words, to validate the notion that a woman's experience is best described in her *own* words, in spite of what researchers may think to the contrary. The focus on women's experience should also serve as a corrective to the hundreds of existing works of exclusively male focus. […]
>
> Careful attention to women's experiences must provide the grounding for any theory we construct and for any categories of analysis we apply. […] [T]he inclusion of women's experience will fundamentally alter the way in which performance history or other history is written. (134-135)

Yarbro-Bejarano makes a related assertion when she observes that theater, in general, has tended to "perpetuat[e] the power relations of sexual difference" in such a way that men are subjects and women are Other and necessarily confined by the social construction of the female gender (Female 392).

Within the *Movimiento* and the early decades of Chicana/o theater, Chicana women responded in varying ways to the heteropatriarchal divisions of the roles and credit afforded to men and women: some chose not to divide the movement over gender issues; others offered critiques from within the Chicana/o culture; and still others joined the Anglo "women's lib" movement, even as that movement tended to negate the multiple forms of oppression that characterize the experiences of women of color (Female 390-391). *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, edited by Alma M. García, offers a detailed account as to why many Chicana feminists and activists asserted the need for an alternate feminist movement and practices that went beyond the goals of Anglo feminists. In "La feminista," first published in *Encuentro Femenil* in 1974 and included in García's anthology, Anna Nieto-Gómez writes of the problematic conflation of the Anglo and the Chicana women's experiences of discrimination, in large part because of their fundamentally different political positions:

> The Chicana's socio-economic class as a non-Anglo Spanish-speaking, low-income Chicana woman determines her need and therefore her political position. The low-income Anglo woman does not have to deal with racism nor is she punished because she speaks another language. The middle-class Anglo woman only shares with the Chicana the fact that they are both women. But they are women of different ethnic, cultural, and class status. All these factors determine the different socio-economic needs and therefore the different political positions of these women. (39)

In *El Teatro Campesino*, Broyles-González addresses this issue by emphasizing and prioritizing telling the story of *all* of the participants and experiences—including those of

women—without limiting her approach to what we might describe as *let's group together all of the women and look at their experiences as different from those of men.* Moreover, she offers commentary on women within and outside the Teatro, and she lets these women speak for themselves directly in many moments throughout her book. This strategy serves to ground the inequities inherent to the *modus operandi* of ETC in their broader socio-historical context, as well as to personalize and give credence to her more generalized observations of ETC's practices and policies.

In accounts of the theatrical trajectory of ETC and Luis Valdez, critics tend to agree on three genres of theater and performance that predate the more commercial plays of the 1980s and beyond: the *acto*, the *mito*, and the *corrido*. In his introduction to *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*, Jorge Huerta defines the *acto* as a "brief, comedia-like [sketch]…about the need for a farmworker's union" and a theatrical style influential in the development of "broad, farcical and presentational political theater based on improvisations of socio-political issues" (*Zoot* 7-8). The *acto* is generally most strongly associated with ETC of the mid-1960s. By 1967, Valdez had left the UFW to focus on his career as a playwright. He coined the term *mito* that same year, to describe *Dark Root of a Scream*, a play he wrote in opposition to the Vietnam War (*Zoot* 8).

In 1971, ETC became a resident theater company that performs plays solely in its playhouse in San Juan Bautista, California, where it continues to operate today. Huerta describes the decade after this relocation as a period in which Valdez began to adapt traditional forms of Mexican music and dance in plays dealing with the issues of 20th Chicano people:

> [He adapted] the traditional Mexican *corridos*, or ballads, to the stage. A singer would sing the songs and the actors would act them out, adding

> dialogue from the corridos' texts. Sometimes the singer/narrator would verbalize the text while the actors mimed the physical actions indicated by the song. These simple movements were stylized, enhancing the musical rhythms and adding to the unique combination of elements. (*Zoot* 9)

I do not contest the evolution in genre and theatrical style that informed Valdez's work in the 1960s and 1970s. However, by documenting the history of ETC and Chicano theater through this single evolutionary framework—the generic evolutions in plays performed by ETC—critics like Huerta have contributed to a vision which obscures women's theatrical roles and leadership within the ETC. Even as the genres employed by ETC and Valdez shifted over time, the roles of women remained limited to a fixed number of character types (mother, grandmother, sister, wife/girlfriend) within binary sexual categories (virgins and whores).

Broyles-González concludes that from the 1960s through the 1970s "women's roles [did] not enjoy the dramatic space necessary for the unfolding of a full character. In their confinement, women [did] not evolve beyond a single dimension" (136). If we consider the history of ETC through an alternate framework, we uncover significant gaps in the generally accepted narrative and understanding of ETC, especially in terms of its portrayal as a group focused on making consistent strides toward equality and representation for all its members and for Chicano people as a whole. As both Broyles-González and Yarbro-Bejarano have emphasized, the inclusion of women as cultural producers as well as subjects necessitates an alternate conceptualization of ETC's history.

In "The Image of the Chicana in Teatro," Yarbro-Bejarano highlights the gender politics inherent to the ETC casting process. Many plays performed by ETC relied upon on individual, heroic male characters who dominate the dialogue, space, and action on stage. Broyles-González observes that this dichotomous approach to male and female

roles extended not only to the development of characters but also to the naming of the plays themselves: "[t]he female figures are those *affected* by men; they are peripheral, the ones to whom things happen. Never is the world seen through the eyes of a woman. This is reflected in the very titles of the works, which usually carry the name of a male protagonist" (136). Today, we might frame this issue in terms of what's known as the "Bechdel/Wallace Test." This "test" was first articulated by Liz Wallace but received international attention after Alison Bechdel featured it in her comic "Dykes to Watch Out For," in a 1985 strip titled "The Rule." As the characters in the comic explain, in order for a film (or any work of fiction) to pass the "test", it must feature (1) at least two women (2) who talk to each other (3) about something other than a man. Failing to meet these criteria is considered indicative of the presence of token female characters and is often used today as a way to call attention to gender inequality in popular Hollywood cinema. Few if any ETC plays of the 1960s and 1970s would pass the Bechdel test; I offer a concrete example of these characteristics in my analysis of *Zoot Suit* in the second part of this chapter.

Broyles-González stresses the ways in which the division of labor off the stage in ETC was also largely shaped along gender lines. Male dominance and centrality were reinforced in the business matters of the organization, and the ensemble itself was predicated on familial relationships with Valdez in the father role (141-142). For example, his brother Daniel earned leading roles in many plays, while his sister Socorro speaks candidly in interviews with Broyles-González of the limited roles for which she was allowed to audition and of her frustrations at being cast as either two-dimensional,

and often sexualized, female "types" or as asexualized non-human entities or concepts like "La Muerte."

According to the numerous female members of ETC interviewed by Broyles-González, women who spoke up or fought back—and there were many!—were accused of being "divisive" or "unnecessarily provocative" and were often ostracized (140, 143). Despite the evolution of genre and content, Broyles-González contends that ETC was consistently "stagna[nt] in its treatment of women" (140). For these reasons and others, the women who initiated the challenging process of changing these practices faced an uphill struggle, perhaps in part because they were not supported or validated by their male counterparts:

> The process of changing the portrayal of women, of developing fuller roles and images of women, was perceived by the women as a challenge both in theatrical terms and in terms of human dignity. Yet men did not share that sense of urgency in the women's challenge. Perhaps it was alarming to the patriarchal structure of El Teatro Campesino. (*El Teatro* 143)

One of the limited responses these women received from men in the theater ensemble and from Valdez himself was the suggestion that they simply write their own plays (143). Broyles-González describes an environment of complacency among men in the face of women who challenged the status quo, a phenomenon she describes as "male resistance to female self-determination" (144).

ETC's internal organizational and creative practice of regarding women as secondary to men— both on and off the stage—reflects an overarching historical precedent of the era, namely the disavowal of women's issues within radical and leftist groups in the US in the 1960s and 1970s. Within the *Movimiento* and other parallel movements, "[t]he liberation of people in general was considered the chief priority"

(Broyles 140). Yarbro-Bejarano highlights this inconsistency in the supposed goals of the Chicana/o theater movement as a whole, which was from the beginning an oppositional theater of resistance and yet fundamentally heteropatriarchal. She describes the goal of the Chicana/o theater movement as

> to create an alternative to the dominant mode of production of mainstream theatre, to make theatre accessible to a working-class Chicano audience, to validate forms of working-class Chicano culture, and to create accurate theatrical representations of Chicanos' historical and social experience. (Female 389)

Despite these goals, Yarbro-Bejarano explains that ETC fostered "a static view of culture, including the uncritical affirmation of the family and gender roles" (Female 390). From male dominance within *teatros* to the exclusion of women from decision-making, from the lack of credit afforded to women for their ideas and labor to their portrayal as sexual partners to male leaders who were represented as the epitome of historical agency, Yarbro-Bejarano exposes the explicit as well as the more covert ways in which Chicana women and feminist issues have been systematically marginalized beyond the already marginalized status of Chicano men within the dominant US narratives and society. She notes that throughout the 1960s and 1970s the aforementioned factors worked to "[construct] a male subject through notions of class, 'racial,' and cultural identity that reinscribed tacit cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity within the heterosexual structure of the family" (Female 391). When we consider the broader socio-historical and political context of the era, it is not difficult to understand how such contradictions could have manifested within the Chicano theater movement and the *Movimiento* as a whole. I agree with Broyles-González's assertion that "the most enduring contradiction" of ETC, and the broader Chicana/o Movement, has been that of the roles and

representation of women within the group: "[i]t was a contradiction between what was, on the one hand, a constant process of renewal in the form of new performance visions and experimentation, and what was, on the other hand, a static clinging to well-worn stereotypes of gender roles" (Broyles 140). The success and impact of ETC performances as a whole were consistently prioritized over individual roles or issues, including those pertaining to women. As with other social movements throughout US history, gender and sexual inequities were considered secondary to broader discussions of cultural, ethnic, or "racial" inequities, in this case those of Chicano people.

Throughout the 1970s, Luis Valdez assumed greater control of ETC and began to assert his identity as an individual dramatist. During this transition from ensemble work to individual dramaturgy, Broyles-González notes that Chicana women continued to be stereotyped and typecast both on and off the stage (146). For Broyles-González, these limitations and oversights ultimately overshadow many of the advancements for Chicano people typically credited to ETC. She also identifies these limitations in Valdez's commercial and solo productions of the 1980s and beyond: "the deplorable representation of Mexican and Chicana women is a chronic weakness and signature of Luis Valdez's mainstream productions, such as *Zoot Suit*, *Corridos*, or the film *La Bamba* (1987)" (160). For Yarbro-Bejarano, the limiting and debilitating representations of female subjectivity and sexuality in Chicano theater mirror the historical development of *El Movimiento* as a whole. She characterizes the 1960s as an era of cultural nationalism that fostered narratives of exclusion within the Chicana/o theater movement. She depicts the 1970s as a decade of research predicated on material analysis that produced counter-narratives with more revolutionary subjects (including the theatrical form of the docu-

drama *Zoot Suit* that I explore later in this chapter) but which continued to reinscribe the male subject and heteronormative family as dominant (Female 407). In terms of Chicana women both within and outside of *teatros*, both scholars provide ample documentation of the ways in which the Chicana "bears the additional weight of gender oppression, in the dominant culture as well as in the Chicano culture" (Female 389).

In "Notes on Chicano Theater," written in 1970 and included as a preface to his *Early Works*, Valdez offers his own articulation of what Chicano theater is and should be:

> Chicano theater, then, is first a reaffirmation of LIFE. That is what all theater is supposed to be, of course; but the limp, superficial, gringo seco productions in the 'professional' American theater (and the college and university drama departments that serve it) are so antiseptic, they are antibiotic (anti-life). […] The nature of Chicanismo calls for a revolutionary turn in the arts as well as in society. Chicano theater must be revolutionary in technique as well as content. It must be popular, subject to no other critics except the pueblo itself; but it must also educate the pueblo toward an appreciation of *social change*, on and off the stage. (2)

In this citation, Valdez neither mentions nor explicitly negates the particular situation and issues of Chicana women within the Chicano theater movement. Although revolutionary in both formal and thematic senses, Valdez's theatrical corpus also reveals troubling limitations in terms of the representation of a range of Chicana/o people and identities within the *Movimiento* and Chicana/o theater within that movement. It might seem easy to overlook the issue of representation and involvement of Chicanas within the *Movimiento* and ETC in particular. But the scholarship of Broyles-González and Yarbro-Bejarano, as well as my own research and analysis in this dissertation together demonstrate the ways in which Chicano theater tended to be utilized and characterized as an affirmation of the lives and potential of Chicano men.

THE DAY OF THE SWALLOWS AND *ZOOT SUIT*

Although a great deal of scholarship on Chicano theater from 1960 through the 1970s centers on ETC and Valdez, other *teatros* and playwrights with distinct theatrical and social visions existed and influenced the direction of the Chicano theater and activist movement. Chicana/o theater ensembles and collectives active in the 1960s and 1970s included Teatro de la Esperanza (originally called Teatro MEChA) founded by students at UC Santa Barbara and El Teatro Libertad—which would become known as Borderlands Theater in the 1980s—founded in Tucson by farmworkers, students, and activists in 19 (Pou 89). Although not a troupe dealing primarily with Chicana/o issues, the San Francisco Mimi Troupe is an organization still active today in which Valdez and Chicano dramatist Carlos Morton participated in the early 1960s. Chicana/o dramatists who wrote, produced, and/or published plays in the 1960s and 1970s include: Fausto Avendaño, Gregg Barrios, Denise Chávez, Nephtalí De León, Sylvia Maida Domínguez, Alfonso C. Hernández, Inés Hernández, E.A. Mares, Carlos Morton, Estela Portillo-Trambley, John Rechy, Rubén Sierra, and Luis Valdez.

Estela Portillo-Trambley is a Chicana dramatist who began writing plays in the early 1970s, around the time that ETC was gaining national and international recognition. Portillo-Trambley's first play, *The Day of the Swallows*, represents the creative vision of an individual Chicana playwright who was not involved in ETC nor in the *Movimiento* in the activist sense, despite the fact that her work and life had significant impact on the work and critical positions of Chicana scholars and artists of future generations. Written in the mid-1970s, Luis Valdez's play *Zoot Suit* debuted in Los Angeles in 1978 and has since become his most well-known and critically referenced work following its

Hollywood cinematic adaptation. It too represents the creative vision of an individual playwright, rather than of a collective ensemble, and provides a counterpoint to Portillo-Trambley's theatrical approach to Chicana/o identity, family, and community at the height of the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement in the US.

Through our consideration of both *Day* and *Zoot Suit*, we can appreciate how Portillo-Trambley and Valdez's representations of Chicana/os differ both in form and in content. In this chapter, I consider who and what informs these representations of Chicana/o identity and community, and who is not represented at all. My critical approach centers on three features of each play: (1) the mode of theatrical representation and presentation, (2) the relationships of individual characters to the broader communities depicted, and to each other, and (3) the development of a Chicana/o mythos. In my reading of these plays, I find *Day* to be theatrically traditional and yet thematically more radical than *Zoot Suit*, which prioritizes formal experimentation and innovation. Besides the more obvious pairing of these plays because of the decade in which they were written and first staged is the stark contrast between the artistic, financial, and socio-political opportunities afforded to each playwright. Along with the content and form of the plays themselves, these circumstances—what I call conditions of possibility—help us to contextualize the very disparate career trajectories of Portillo-Trambley and Valdez as well as the subsequent canonization (or not) of their theatrical works.

Despite significant differences in theatrical style, thematic focus, and the relationship between spectators and actors, Portillo-Trambley and Valdez each provide unique artistic visions of the role of theater in the *Movimiento*. In this way, *Day* and *Zoot Suit* function not only as plays but also as manifestos. As Portillo-Trambley and Valdez

enact through theater the creative and cultural visions they each convey in other artistic and academic projects. Their plays provide valuable insight into the conditions of possibility that affected the cultural production of each dramatist during the era, insights that are made all the more revealing through the consideration of these plays together. Taken together, they inspire the consideration of productive and complicated questions around issues of male visibility and female invisibility within the *Movimiento*, among other notable issues. Why has *Zoot Suit* been reprinted, discussed extensively in academic publications, professionally staged, and adapted into a Hollywood feature film, while *Day* has not shared in similar academic or commercial successes? Why does Portillo-Trambley remain little-known, referenced, and studied, even within the fields of Chicana/o Studies and Chicana/o Theater? It would be unproductive to simply look for elements in Valdez's works in those of Portillo-Trambley and to evaluate her play using *Zoot Suit* as a frame of reference. Rather than consider which of these playwrights' works have more value, I am interested in what we can learn from them about Chicana cultural agency within the *Movimiento*.[34]

Born in 1936 in El Paso, Texas, Estela Portillo-Trambley grew up bilingual, speaking English with her father and Spanish with her mother and grandmother. In a 1982 interview for the journal *MELUS*, she attests to feeling "very comfortable [and] at home with the Spanish," particularly for spoken communication. She also notes that she has tended to utilize English for much of her creative work (Vowell 61-62). She married in 1953, just out of high school; she and her husband, Robert Trambley, had five

[34] By cultural agency, I am referring to a wide variety of creative endeavors that contribute to, inform, influence, and are reflected back by a given society. See Doris Sommer's *Cultural Agency in the Americas* for a collection of essays related to cultural agency written by a wide range of scholars from anthropological, performative, historical, and literary backgrounds.

daughters and then a son who died at a nine months old (Bruce 165, 167). In an interview with Juan Bruce-Novoa, published in 1980 in *Chicano Authors: Inquiry by Interview*, Portillo-Trambley describes with candor the tension she felt in her role as a mother and primary breadwinner for her family in her younger years:

> Many times I imagined life, more than lived it. I kept house, had babies, went to college, and worked…an integrated time…Es posible que tentaba sueños y negaba realidades, y por eso lo que aspiraba fue no más un desencuentro. Still, there were muchos días con espacio, sin medida…I played a woman's role with great timidity and the usual illusions; always wanting much more…life always becomes a matter of priorities. Raising my family and working took most of my time. Once in awhile [sic] I would pick up some graduate credits for a Master's degree that finally materialized in 1977. (165)

She earned a B.A. in English from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1956 and then taught high school English and served as Chair of the El Paso Technical Institute from 1957 to 1969. In the following two years, Portillo-Trambley worked as a radio talk show host and as the writer and host of the Spanish-language television program "Cumbres." In her interview with Bruce-Novoa, she describes the radio program as "very political" but the television show as culturally, rather than politically, focused (166). She wrote all of her own material, in Spanish, for the television program; she tells Bruce-Novoa that writing for television made her realize that she wanted to be a writer (167). During her writing and theatrical career, she wrote and published plays, novels, and short stories, directed the Theatre Arts Program at El Paso Community College, and edited a *Quinto Sol* special issue titled *Mujeres en Arte y Literatura* in 1972. In 1982, she taught as a guest lecturer at the University of California at Riverside and also won the "Texas Writers Recognition Award" (*Chicano Drama* 20).

By the age of 30, Portillo-Trambley decided to try something new: "I had to do something besides raise children and teach school" (Vowell 59). This realization led to her first experience with bilingual theater, which occurred in 1968 in El Paso. With no prior experience in theater or playwriting, Portillo-Trambley tells Vowell that she decided to write a play: "[s]o I set about and wrote the most atrocious play that you could ever imagine" (59). After writing her first theatrical work, she explains in the *MELUS* interview, "I was hooked, you might say" (59). From 1970 to 1975, she worked as the resident dramatist at El Paso Community College. During that same period, she began what would become a full-time writing career with the publication of *Impressions* (1971), a collection of haiku poetry. In 1972, she became the first Chicana to publish a play (*The Day of the Swallows*). In 1973, she edited the first women-centered issue of a major Chicano journal, *El Grito*[35]. During that same year, she attended a summer workshop at the Escuela de Arte Dramático at UNAM [Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México], where she studied modern Mexican playwrights and solidified her knowledge and creative passion for theater "within a Mexican context"[36] (*Chicano Drama* 20). During the course of her life, Portillo-Trambley wrote eight plays, all of which she later rewrote because, in her own words, "writing plays is about the hardest thing there is because everything is concentrated into dialogue" (Vowell 60). From 1974 to 1977, a time of intensive writing and development for Portillo-Trambley, four of her plays were produced at the Chamizal National Theatre on the border between El Paso and Juárez (*Chicano Drama* 21). In 1978, she earned a Master's degree in English at the University

[35] That special edition was titled *Chicanas en Literatura y Arte*.

[36] Among the playwrights she studied were Octavio Paz, Hector Azar and Vicente Leñero, whose creative and scholarly contributions are known internationally and considered canonical today.

of Texas at El Paso. At the time of the *MELUS* interview in 1982, she had not yet written *Sor Juana and Other Plays* (1983), a collection of plays that has since become one of her best-known and most critically acclaimed works. In 1985, her play *Blacklight* earned second place at the New York Shakespeare Festival's Hispanic American playwright competition. Portillo-Trambley was inducted into the El Paso Women's Hall of Fame in the following year. She died in 1999, at the age of seventy-two (*Books*).

Portillo-Trambley identified as Chicana and wrote works that deal with the struggles of Chicana and Latina women; yet unlike many of her contemporaries, she did not identify as a feminist (Detwiler 146). On one hand, she speaks in interviews of her inability to relate to Chicano authors of her generation, as well as to their tendency to write about women as groups or types rather than as individuals. At the same time, she notes the criticism she herself had received for "the fact that [the women in my works] are not images of the Chicana, really, you know. I've said that they are definitely images of women, and they're images of angry women" (Vowell 64). Bruce-Novoa identifies a "feminist strain" to Portillo-Trambley's work as a dramatist and describes her writing as a whole as an example of a "positive tale of female liberation" (164). In the interview, Portillo-Trambley counters this common characterization by explaining that if her works do qualify as feminist, that kind of ideological charge or implication has never been her focus as a writer (167).

In her fictional works, Portillo-Trambley tends not to write specifically of Chicana/os. Her stories and plays present more universalized characters and interpersonal and cultural conflicts than the works of her Chicana/o contemporaries. In the interview with Bruce-Novoa, she emphasizes the importance of separating politics from literature:

"I can believe in eventual social evolution," she explains, "but not revolution" (174). When asked about the relationship between Chicana/o literature and Anglo society, she maintains that Chicana/o literature should—but does not—improve communication between Anglos and Chicana/os (Bruce 176). On the subject of Portillo-Trambley's own cultural identity, Vowell writes that "Portillo-Trambley qualifies her Chicanaism by emphasizing her Americanism" (59). In the *MELUS* interview, Portillo-Trambley explains, "I think I have the feel, the earth-roots, the historical consciousness of *Mejicana*, enough to re-create the authentic experience" (59). It's important to clarify that Portillo-Trambley identified with and wrote from a place of Pan-Americanism, rather than what might be called US "Americanism." This Pan-American worldview and consciousness helps her readers to contextualize the kind of Chicana/o mythos represented in her theatrical works, and in *The Day of the Swallows* in particular. Jorge Huerta comments that, particularly in *Day* and *Blacklight*, Portillo-Trambley "attempt[s] to create a Chicano mythos by incorporating indigenous icons and concepts" (*Chicano Drama* 22). He maintains that in *The Day of the Swallows* this mythos is portrayed in the representation of "a world in which indigenous, female powers prevail" (24). Portillo-Trambley's plays are indeed centered on the lives and lived experiences of women, and in many cases Chicana and Mexican women. Yet her stance on the role of theater in the Chicano Movement speaks to some of the reasons why she chose not to write explicitly feminist or activist works.

Portillo-Trambley categorically rejected the notion of "[theater] as a weapon for social protest" (Vowell 61). She criticizes "revolutionary literature" as "the simplest to write" and ultimately isolationist and divisive rather than unifying and enlightening

(Bruce-Novoa 177). She particularly disliked the goals and the style of the *acto*, which was a popular form of Chicano mobilization among farmworkers within the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. The *acto* is also a theatrical genre that has informed and influenced the creative production of many Chicana/o dramatists into the 21st century, as I discuss earlier in this chapter. While she believed in the pedagogical influence of theater and performance, Portillo-Trambley critiqued theater that is utilized for primarily political ends: "theater should be used for unifying the people, making them aware of the injustices of America. One of the real arguments I have is that theater—one of the greatest, the most difficult, and probably the most sophisticated of all the arts—should never be used as a political tool. I think that is definitely a prostitution of art" (Vowell 61). Rather than write plays that serve as an explicit call-to-action for the audience, Portillo-Trambley advocated for theater that unifies spectators through a shared, artistic experience. She underscored her affinity for "the traditional three-act play; psychological dramas, which by their nature don't necessitate social protest at all," and she located her own plays on the opposite end of the spectrum from the *acto*, which is by nature a form of social protest (61). As a writer, she describes to Bruce-Novoa her primary identification as an "artist," rather than an activist or revolutionary. "I strongly believe that all literature limits itself when its life is prolonged in political or social-protest dialectic," she explains in the interview. "Machine-like repetitiveness makes it ineffective" (Bruce 173).

Portillo-Trambley prioritized the artistic representation of historically marginalized and oppressed groups over theater that is, in and of itself, a vehicle for socio-political engagement, protest, or activism:

> [t]he social protest in my work is not done directly, or overtly, in saying, "Look, this is the white people, the *gringo*, and we're the poor, long-suffering, exploited Mexicans." I show the wear-and-tear of poverty on human beings. And also the good side of it because poverty does have a certain element of teaching people. Wisdom in itself must have a certain amount of suffering. And I think that poverty has done this to a lot of the Chicano people, given them acceptance, an appreciation that the people who are affluent would not really have. (61)

Throughout her writing career, Portillo-Trambley remained most invested in what she describes as the personal and individual evolution of spectators who might see her plays performed on stage. In this way, she promotes a non-dogmatic social awakening, rather than an overt social protest, through the plays she wrote. Instead of prioritizing her own identity, or the identity of her characters, as Chicana/o, she instead asserts that "we should extend ourselves from just being Chicanos, into something else—into being persons, and human beings, into not making things black and white" (63). For Portillo-Trambley, theater born from and aimed at inspiring social protest unites spectators on an emotional level but often falls short of uniting them on an intellectual plane. When asked by Bruce-Novoa about the future of Chicana/o literature, she states succinctly that "[t]he Chicano's destiny is to create a new kind of American" (181).

To date, none of Portillo-Trambley's plays have been staged professionally, although many have been staged at universities and in nonprofessional venues across the US. As she herself points out, this could be due in part to the fact that she lacked playwriting experience, particularly in her early years as a playwright, and was more skilled at narrating through stage directions than through dialogue (*Chicano Drama* 24). I would argue that it has more to do with the conditions of possibility for Chicana artists of her era, as we have seen in the case of the women involved in ETC. Despite this superficial treatment of her theatrical works, Jorge Huerta does assert that Portillo-

Trambley's literary contributions offer important reflections on "who the Chicano and especially, the Chicana, really is" (20). Huerta allows that Portillo-Trambley continues to be known in the 21st century as "the woman who inspired and opened the doors for all the Chicana writers that followed her" (20). He does not, however, imply that her work as a Chicana dramatist influenced her male contemporaries in any way.

The Day of the Swallows was Portillo-Trambley's first published play, a play which she continued to revise throughout her writing career. It was picked up almost immediately by Octavio Romano's up-and-coming Chicano publishing house, Quinto Sol Publications, and has been anthologized five times and staged at many universities across the country (Vowell 60). *Day* is a traditional, realist play that takes place in a single setting in the course of twenty-four hours. The plot centers on the external life and inner turmoil of protagonist Doña Josefa, as well as a host of other characters whose lives intersect with hers— Alysea, her confidant, co-conspirator, and lover; Clemencia, who delivers the milk; Tomás, her alcoholic uncle; Eduardo, Alysea's boyfriend; Don Esquinas, the owner of the hacienda; Clara, his alcoholic wife; and Father Prado, a Catholic priest and the person to whom Josefa will eventually confess the sins that plague her conscience. The characters are not described, other than by name, in the opening notes to the play; rather, they are introduced as they first appear on stage and through dialogue between other characters.

The initial stage directions are detailed and poetically rendered. Portillo-Trambley blends figurative language and philosophical ponderings with an introduction to the ritual of bathing virgins and descriptions of the mythical rural town of *Lago de San Lorenzo*, where the play is set. The play's setting and initial description call to mind, in

abstract terms, the legacy of Spanish colonization in the Americas and the hacienda culture and life of first-generation Mestiza/o people. The opening pages of the play read more like a novel than a scenic guide intended for a director, cast, and crew. The play seems to be set in a 19th century, Spanish-speaking village, and yet Spanish is incorporated infrequently and primarily in the form of interjections and common expressions likely to be recognized by a minimally bilingual audience. In addition to the extensive set descriptions, Portillo-Trambley employs unusual punctuation markers in all of the characters' dialogue throughout the play; rather than commas, semi-colons, or periods between sentences and thoughts, she consistently utilizes ellipses to mark pauses in speech and to separate phrases. On the whole, there is little in *Day* that evokes *explicitly* Chicana/o, as differentiated from more universally Latina/o, identities and socio-cultural contexts.

A lengthy narrative precedes the opening scene of Act I. The first paragraph epitomizes the literary style and tone of the entire play: "*The tierra of Lago de San Lorenzo is within memory of Mountain sweet pine. Then the maguey thickens with the ferocity of chaotic existence; here the desert yawns. Here it drinks the sun in madness*" (5). As in the play's dialogue, Portillo-Trambley prioritizes the development of imagery and atmosphere over concrete physical or spatial descriptions. The literary substance of the play is found in this narrative, which makes the reading of it satisfying in ways that would not necessarily transfer to its theatrical staging. Even without having seen this play staged, we can imagine the opening narrative printed on the playbill given to each audience member upon arrival at the theater. Another possible approach to incorporating this narrative could be through an off-stage narration directed at the audience. Short of

those techniques, it is somewhat difficult to envision what direct role the opening narrative could play in the physical construction of a set design, or in the audience's own framing of the play's setting and context. Still, for those reading *Day* rather than seeing it performed on stage, the opening narrative sets an impressive tone and ambience even as it does not necessarily set the stage, so to speak, for the performance of the play.

After poeticizing the *tierra* on which the play is set, the following four paragraphs describe the village, its residents, and the fiesta day. These descriptions have a philosophical dimension to them, a quality we also find in some of the characters' dialogue and monologues throughout the play. I read this philosophical dimension as Portillo-Trambley's particular way of contextualizing *Day*'s plot. She does not frame her play in a concrete socio-historical context or period; instead, she encourages the audience to reflect upon more universalized Chicana/o tropes as well as the characters that we come to know as individuals rather than as representatives of a particular social or political group within an historically-grounded moment.

In the sixth paragraph, Portillo-Trambley communicates more about the where and when of the play's setting and plot, which centers on a yearly ritual that unifies each of the play's three acts. Set in the hottest of summer months, *Day*'s action transpires on an *hacienda* in Lago de San Lorenzo, a town named for the yearly ritual of the saint's-day on which all the town's virgins bathe in the lake in the hope of acquiring husbands:

> *On the day of San Lorenzo, in the heat of July, everybody goes to the lake; this day the lake is invaded by village life. When the church bells toll eleven in the sun, the late morning is the sole witness to the bathing of the virgins. The lake becomes a sacred temple. The high priestesses talk of hopes, lovers, and promises. In earnest belief, they wash their hair in spring water to insure [sic] future marriages in heaven. It is true, no one has seen a marriage made in heaven, but each girl hugs the private truth that hers will be the one*. (5)

We find here the first subtle critique of patriarchy and the role of Catholic Church in the lives of women. Portillo-Trambley's narrative suggests both the impossibility of such perfect marriages and the impact the annual ritual has upon young women; tradition and ritual pull them to want that kind of marriage, even as none have seen it manifested in the real world.

The town itself functions as an absent scenic referent that is personified throughout the opening set description: "*The village of Lago de San Lorenzo is a stepchild; it is a stepchild to the Esquinas hacienda, for the hacienda has been a frugal mother and a demanding father*" (5). These lines call to mind a kind of feudalism, as Portillo-Trambley once more evokes images of colonial servitude and serfdom. This background also foreshadows the character development of protagonist Doña Josefa, who perhaps represents the landed oligarchy in North America prior to Anglo invasion of Mexican territory. As we soon discover, Doña Josefa, characterized as "*a tall regal woman about thirty-five*" of both "*Indian*" and "*Aryan*" descent, has been chosen to lead this year's procession and is the focal character of the entire play (8).

Portillo-Trambley poses two philosophical questions in the third paragraph, which add to the poeticized tone of the opening description. "*What is this footfall beyond ritual, beyond livelihood? What is this faint unknown ache in the heart? It's more than just the rasp of hope*" (5). True to theatrical realism, Portillo-Trambley's play calls our attention to the problems of daily life and represents conflicted characters that fall victim to forces greater than themselves. Yet she hybridizes *Day* through her tone, not only in these descriptions but in the play's dialogue as well. The questions above serve to contextualize the yearly ritual at the lake and also to convey the general attitude of the

youth in anticipation of the event. "*The young know this*," the unidentified narrative voice continues, "*and they go to the spring with lyrical intimacy. […] The lake is too much for them*" (5). Like the lake, the town, and the summer season, the young people are filled with the fertile desire of adolescence and yet overwhelmed and uncertain in the face of such potential and such possibility, both for love and for disappointment. In passages like this one, Portillo-Trambley's affinity for writing narrative prose, even within the context of a theatrical work, stands out. She is also a Chicana dramatist in dialogue with classical European tropes and formal characteristics of representational dramas, which in *Day* include a love triangle, an allegorical setting and characters, and the secrecy and mystery that veil the articulations and representations of gender and sexuality she develops throughout the play.

Act I offers further introduction to the representational style of theater portrayed in *Day*. Most of the play's action is set in Doña Josefa's home, "*the only house close to the edge of the lake*," in an enclosed and domestic setting. The first scene begins with a lengthy description of Doña Josefa's picturesque, serene, and lace-adorned sitting room (6). It is homey and safe, with a large French window that opens onto the yard and a view of a large tree that houses an orb-shaped treehouse for birds. Josefa's room is also characterized in Scene 2 as a "haven…away from the world of men" (14). Portillo-Trambley introduces three leitmotivs in Scene I—light, lace, and beauty—that will be employed and problematized throughout the play: "*The light, the lace, the open window all add to the beauty of the room, a storybook beauty of serenity*" (6). On the surface and to an outsider, Josefa and her room embody all that is tranquil, beautiful, and good in the world.

The idyllic setting of Josefa's sitting room creates a striking juxtaposition with the actions of the first character to appear on stage, Alysea, whom we meet frantically scrubbing the carpet when the curtain opens. Alysea has plans to marry Eduardo, described as "*a young man of mixed heritage*," but as the drama unfolds it becomes increasingly apparent that Alysea harbors deeper feelings for Josefa than she does for Eduardo (14). In obvious distress and shock, Alysea is interrupted from her thoughts in Scene 1 by the sound of a milk bell; she confirms Clemencia's arrival with the milk delivery by opening the French window and looking outside. After uttering something aloud to herself, Alysea hastily proceeds to clean "*a long kitchen knife with traces of blood on it*," which she finds on a side table next to the couch (7). She gives the room a final once-over just before Clemencia noisily enters the kitchen with a milk can and demands to know why her pay has not been left on the table. And thus the scene is set; it appears that a crime has been committed in Josefa's sitting room.

Even before Clemencia's first line, the stage directions work to develop a dramatic tension and intrigue that draw the spectator, or the reader, into the interwoven lives and circumstances of the protagonists. This development depends upon the juxtaposition of Josefa's beautiful and tranquil sitting room, with its French window and view of the yard, with Alysea's frantic scrubbing, her obvious panic, and the blood-stained knife. From the opening moments of the play, it is clear that there is more to be revealed, and more at stake, than meets the eye. When the first dialogue finally transpires between Alysea and Clemencia, we already know something that many of the other characters do not know yet. This inside information works to build suspense and intrigue for the audience in the scenes that follow as we are drawn to know more about the events

leading up the violent incident. Moreover, the inciting incident involving the knife occurred before the play begins—in media res—further adding to the intrigue and tension we experience as spectators through the opening scene. Throughout Act I, we are driven not only to access the background information not yet revealed in Scene 1, but also to seek a resolution to this emerging conflict.

Here we encounter Portillo-Trambley's engagement with Aristotelian, or representational, theater, a dramatic style characterized by an eventual catharsis for both characters and audience. In "The Process of Aristotelian Catharsis: A Reidentification," Noreen W. Kruse describes the tragic drama as dependent upon a catharsis, "the end which a successful tragedy must achieve" (163). According to Kruse, the function of such a tragedy is ultimately "the production of fear and pity and the performance of some kind of catharsis"; the success or failure of a tragedy is dependent upon the combination of fear, pity, and an eventual catharsis (163). Even in analyses of more contemporary tragic dramas, Kruse maintains that Aristotle's principles are still productive and relevant in the establishment of common criteria: "Aristotle's principles…assist in both the identification and the production of tragic drama, the formulation of analytical instruments which will help us understand individual tragedies, and the foundation of theoretical propositions which relate to the corpus of serious dramas" (162). Among the central characteristics of an Aristotelian catharsis are that: (1) it is a function of plot; (2) it is "the final cause" of a play; (3) it inspires the audience to feel fear and pity for the characters; (4) it inspires the audience to experience fear and pity for themselves; (5) it depends upon plotted incidents; and (6) it culminates in a restoration of "normal" order at the end of the drama (Kruse 169-170). After discussing the three main interpretations of

catharsis—as clarification, as purgation, and as cleansing—Kruse synthesizes a new definition that incorporates aspects of all three: "[catharsis connotes] an integration of clarification, cleansing, and—rather than purgation—the restoration of emotional equilibrium. Catharsis, then, is a combination of scripted proofs which clarify situations and enlighten the audience so that the plotted actions first evoke and then modify the spectators' emotional responses" (169). Audience enlightenment is central to Kruse's understanding of Aristotelian catharsis. Rather than functioning as a means through which spectators' emotions are purged and pity and fear are eliminated, spectators instead become cognizant of their own existences in relation to society as a whole (170). In this way, Kruse suggests a more complex intellectual experience on the part of the audience—not unlike that articulated by Portillo-Trambley in the interviews discussed above— even as some kind of social and theatrical order are generally restored by the end of a play.

Day fits this description of a tragic drama that builds to an eventual catharsis in several ways. The drama unfolds chronologically and with little technical experimentation. Throughout the play, the actors adhere to the constraints of the fourth wall. That is to say, the characters interact with one another within the confines of the set, but never break character or acknowledge the presence of a viewing public. As audience members, we are not defamiliarized by being made acutely aware of commonplace or automatically perceived phenomena in order to prevent emotional or psychological connection or identification with characters and their lives. Likewise, there is no engagement with metatheatrical techniques and commentaries, as we will encounter in abundance in Valdez's *Zoot Suit*. The audience is never directly addressed

nor is it incorporated into the play; we are not forced to reflect on the fact that what we are watching is, in fact, a play. Once the play begins, the fiction of the performance is maintained through the final, tragic scene.

At the end of Scene 1, we witness Alysea and Josefa alone together for the first time. Their dialogue reveals subtle clues as to the nature of the crime committed last night, as well as to the nature of their relationship:

> *Josefa:* About last night, Alysea…we must have a story.
> *Alysea*: *(She seems to shiver)* Story?
> *Josefa:* When I took David to the hospital…the doctors…everyone was sympathetic…I told them someone had broken in…
> *Alysea:* And David?
> *Josefa:* He will be alright.
> *Alysea:* I can never believe that….
> *Josefa:* I will take care of him always….
> *Alysea:* You killed him!
> *Josefa:* Don't! He'll be back with us in a few weeks...I will make a fine life for him always….
> *Alysea*: He'll never…he'll never….
>
> *She is overcome by emotion; she walks out of the room into the kitchen. Josefa looks after her. She remains standing for a moment; then she picks up a book of poetry from the lamb table.*
>
> *Josefa:* Santa Teresita…"El hombre toma…toma y hiere,
> La flor desnuda…temblorose…"
> In her world of God…she saw what I see…she knew the light….beauty...truth…yes…in a cloister. […] The web…the beautiful web we weave! Anything…anything is worth this! (14)

Through this dialogue, we learn that Josefa and Alysea have injured David—a character who never appears on stage—to such a degree that he will be hospitalized for several weeks. Alysea is visibly distraught by the circumstances, while Josefa is more concerned with taking care of Alysea and ensuring their continued relationship. Earlier in the same scene, Josefa calls Alysea "honey" and strokes her hair to comfort her. By the end of Scene 1, it is clear that Josefa and Alysea are involved in a romantic relationship, one

which has something to do with the crime they committed the previous night. As we find in many of Portillo-Trambley's literary works, the introduction to issues of gender and sexuality in this scene is subtle and understated and fundamental to the play's overarching allegory. Unlike the plays of Cherríe Moraga and Josefina López, which I will discuss in Chapter IV, the characters in *Day* do not discuss through dialogue or monologue their gender and sexual identities, even as both are central to the inner conflicts that plague both Alysea and Josefa.

Act II begins with another dialogue between Alysea and Josefa later that afternoon, this time in Josefa's bedroom. Alysea is more agitated and distraught than she was that morning, while Josefa remains outwardly composed and almost disassociated from the circumstances and from her own emotions. To the rising agitation and disbelief of Alysea, Josefa articulates matter-of-factly her own tendencies to separate herself from anything lacking beauty, including the still unnamed crime they committed together:

> *Alysea: (looking at her with horror)* Josefa…no! Forgot? How could you?
> *Josefa: (becoming slightly agitated)* Habit…to keep strong…since I was little…to keep strong…I put ugliness away.
> *Alysea:* Where? Where?
> *Josefa:* What do you mean?
> *Alysea:* If you have a conscience…where could you put it away?
> *Josefa:* There will be atonement….
> *Alysea:* No….that's impossible…you think…it will…disappear? The blood…the knife…*(she runs to the table where she had placed the knife.)* Look…I'll show you…you make it disappear! *(She opens the drawer and stares unbelievingly)*
> *Alysea:* The knife…it's gone!
>
> *She begins to look frantically everywhere.*
>
> *Alysea:* Did you hear me?
>
> *Josefa seems almost unaware of Alysea's frenzy.* (30)

Josefa's reverie suggests a psychological trauma and conflict never fully developed through her dialogue but insinuated by her distinctive speech and frequent moments of disconnection from her immediate, tangible reality. Eventually awakened from this dissociative state, Josefa realizes that her uncle Tomás has stolen her money box to buy alcohol, and that he has also taken the bloody knife. In a heated dialogue that transpires between Josefa and Tomás, we learn that Tomás has intuited the nature of Josefa and Alysea's relationship; he threatens to reveal the truth if Josefa does not guarantee him more money. The family secret, the dysfunctional and malevolent secondary character, and the blackmail trope are all familiar within the tenets of Aristotelian theater, even if the particulars of the conflict—a romantic relationship between women—would likely prove unexpected for theatergoers of Portillo-Trambley's era.

As is common in traditional three-act plays, *Day*'s structure is circular and its literary style allegorical. In a way, the entire play can be synthesized by the first and final scenes; in these scenes, Josefa is described by the set design and other characters' dialogue, she introduces herself, she reveals her inner conflicts to herself and to the audience, she comes to peace with what she must do, and she leaves her sitting room empty—and beautiful—once more. Moreover, the play opens and closes in the sitting room, in both cases without Josefa present. As I mention above, even before her first entrance in Act I, Josefa herself is represented on set by her sitting room, which Portillo-Trambley describes as "*an unusually beautiful room, thoroughly feminine and in good taste*" (6). Like Josefa, the room is beautiful and composed and yet already tainted with the blood of the crime she committed. The same room is the setting for the "Final Scene," which begins the following day at dawn. In it, Josefa reflects on her confession

to Father Prado—that she cut out David's tongue after he witnessed her and Alysea in an intimate moment—before drowning herself in the lake. As the morning progresses, the townspeople begin to search for Josefa, who has gone missing. From the sitting room window, Clemencia eventually spots a woman in white floating in the lake and makes her final exit from the stage, without expressing horror or sadness or any emotion at all.

The representational theatrical features discussed thus far also play a role in the development of characters' relationships to one another and to the broader community of Lago de San Lorenzo. Although *Day* revolves around the emotional states and relationships of Doña Josefa, she is absent in both the opening and final moments of the play. There is a symmetry to the plot realized in large part through the framing of the play through Josefa's sitting room and the window that overlooks the lake. Portillo-Trambley describes the window and tree in great detail, as well as abundant light that fills the sitting room and illuminates the lace with which it is adorned. By the time Josefa appears on stage at the end of Scene 1, we already feel like we know a great deal about her. That scene concludes as Josefa reflects aloud to herself: "The web…the beautiful web we weave! Anything…anything is worth this!" (13). Josefa's manner and tone at the end of Scene 1 help to construct her image as confident and in control of her life and the people in it, qualities which we will soon discover do not characterize her at all. At this early moment in Act I, we still have hope for a peaceful and non-tragic ending to the play.

The "Final Scene" is more of an epilogue than a scene; it takes place after the curtain drops at the end of Act III. The sound of birds enters the room from the orb in the tree outside the French window as Josefa appears on set: "*Josefa comes from the*

bedroom with a white gown over her arm. It is the gown to be worn at the procession. She goes to the window and looks at the tree with great happiness" (44). The sound of church bells suddenly remind Josefa of the "*barrio world*" outside her window, and she looks in the mirror and lets down her hair, laughing in "*joyous delirium*" (45). Before making her final exit, she touches the finished lace damask once more and says aloud: "My magicians will let me come back as light…yes, yes!" (45). After looking at her room a final time, she whispers "Wait for me…" and then departs to the sound of church bells that signal the commencement of the procession to the lake (45). The audience hears voices searching for Josefa from outside her window. Two boys enter, retrieve the ceremonial gowns she has left for them, and then exit the room to join the procession outside: "*[t]he room is empty again; this time the voices of the choir beginning the procession hymns are heard…They are as ethereal as the room. Combined, the room and the voices have a cathedral-like awesomeness. Clemencia breaks the atmosphere. She is in her Sunday best"* (46).

It is Clemencia who first suspects that something is amiss when she does not find Josefa in her sitting room or bedroom. The birds outside the window finally draw her eyes to the lake, where she spots what looks like "*a girl floating in the lake…a girl dressed in white*" (46). Rather than accept what she has seen, Clemencia seems unable to grasp the severity of the implications for Josefa and the church procession in progress: "The sun is too bright…it is my imagination! I better hurry…what a day this will be" (47). The play concludes with a final descriptive paragraph that synthesizes, once more, the overarching motifs of *Day*: *"[Clemencia] leaves the room. The voices of the choir, the church bell, the birds on the tree in full life, and the almost unearthly light streaming*

through the windows gives the essence of a presence in the room…of something beautiful" (47). It seems that even after death, Josefa's spirit lives on in the beauty of the room and the light that continues to illuminate its empty spaces.

When considered solely through character development in the first and final scenes, Josefa is not a markedly Chicana character. Even when considered as an individual in the play's entirety, she is never identified explicitly as Chicana: she is a woman, a community leader, relatively privileged, in love with a younger woman, a sinner in her own eyes, and wholly misunderstood by the people who know her. The most obvious example of her role as a community leader is the fact that she has been chosen to lead the procession and to serve as the honoree of this year's ritual. She also looks after Clara, the wife of the hacienda owner, providing her both alcohol, emotional support, and acceptance. She is idolized by Alysea, as well as other townspeople, she stands up to Tomás, and she challenges Don Esquinas, the lone patriarch in *Day*. Even Father Prado, a Catholic priest, is so blinded by her "beauty," "calm," "giving," and "talent" that he seems to accept Josefa's love for Alysea, as well as the violent act she committed against David, declaring "There is so much God in you!" (43-44). Beyond the development of these secondary characters themselves, their dialogue and interactions play a fundamental role in defining Josefa's identity, both for herself and for the audience who witnesses her evolution throughout the play.

In the first dialogue that transpires between Alysea and Clemencia, we are introduced to the public, social side of Josefa. They characterize her as "too kind," "the most considerate of persons", "an angel", and "a great lady" (7-8). In the same scene,

Clemencia describes Josefa's relationship with other people, and with Alysea in particular, in idealized and naïve terms:

> Doña Josefa is an angel. All her life, she goes around…with that walking stick of hers…always she goes…like an avenging angel…helping…what a sight she must be…pounding with her stick on those evil people…One, two…that's for wickedness! (*she makes motions of one pounding away*.) She takes care of the devil alright…eh? Yes…she saved you [Alysea] from sickness. (8)

Clemencia remains unwavering in her view of Josefa even after she spots her floating in the lake. Her myopic insistence on Josefa's goodness gives us insight into the social and community pressures and expectations that fuel Josefa's inner conflict around her feelings for Alysea, and around her own sexual and social identity.

In Scene 2 of Act I, Alysea and Eduardo discuss their relationship and the possibility of marriage. Ironically, this private moment takes place in Josefa's sitting room, and her name, feelings, and good deeds surface repeatedly throughout their conversation; as in many scenes, Josefa is absent during this dialogue only in terms of her physical presence on stage. Eduardo comments on the gentleness and beauty of Josefa's sitting room and calls it a room "for women" (14). Here again we notice the suppression of an explicit conversation around desire, a feature we will find in abundance in the plays of Cherríe Moraga that I discuss in Chapter IV. Alysea then wonders aloud if Josefa has discovered her relationship with Eduardo. Finally, Alysea confides in Eduardo that it was Josefa who saved her life and rescued her from a life void of beauty and light:

> *Alysea*: No…let me finish…I've never told you…[…] Then, I decided to run…I simply got up…and ran…down the stairs…into an open hall…where men…men with hard dead looks stared…no one expected me to try and escape through the front door…but I did…I got as far as the street…then he caught up with me; his hands were at my throat….
> *Eduardo*: That's enough….

> *Alysea*: All of a sudden…Josefa appeared…with her walking stick. She raised it over her head and beat the man…he cried out in pain…she never faltered…then, she brought me to this world of light…
> *Eduardo*: We shall marry tomorrow night…that's it! (16)

Eduardo proves himself unable to hear of Alysea's near-assault, and of the role Josefa played in Alysea's psychological recovery after that terrifying night. Here, and throughout *Day*, Alysea expresses the most nuanced understanding of Josefa, while Eduardo remains the character most resistant to and skeptical of Josefa's power and authority, especially over Alysea.

This (anti)amorous triangle is made complete when Josefa reenters the room to join them for breakfast. All three discuss the upcoming ritual and, when Alysea leaves the room, Josefa and Eduardo begin a strangely intimate discussion of desire and love. Josefa asserts that Alysea has found love, safety, and happiness with her, and she expresses concern over Eduardo's intentions toward Alysea. She accuses Eduardo of being unfaithful and then brings up the topic of violence toward women by men:

> *Josefa:* She belongs here…with me…You men explain away all your indiscretions, so easily…after all, you make the rules and enjoy the abuses!
> *Eduardo:* That's not fair…
> *Josefa:* That's funny… When has a man been fair to…women?
> *Eduardo:* You are distorting…
> *Josefa:* What I offer her is not a violence…Man's love is always a violence.
> *Eduardo:* I'm sorry.
> *Josefa:* For what…the evil in the world?
> *Eduardo:* I love Alysea.
> *Josefa:* Oh, yes…you love, he loves, they love…how convenient the word "love"! (18-19)

This dialogue reveals more about Josefa and Eduardo than it does about Alysea; what Josefa and Eduardo most share is a desire to assert control over Alysea. Their conversation reaches new levels of intimacy when Josefa confides that she refused to

bathe on San Lorenzo's day when she was young. She also reflects on the fact that she "never saw the dream…never felt the hope" to marry (20). While she is quick to criticize men throughout *Day,* this line is as close as Josefa ever comes to labeling or directly referencing her own sexuality and sexual desire. In the moment before Alysea reenters the room, Josefa and Eduardo engage in verbal foreplay initiated by Josefa, further complicating the love triangle suggested earlier in this scene:

> *Josefa:* […] Do you think me beautiful?
> *Eduardo*: Yes…very…mixed in with a dangerous excitement…
> *Josefa*: You are making love to me…
> *Eduardo:* I make love to all things beautiful…don't you?
> *Josefa:* (*in a whisper*) Yes…oh, yes… (20)

Alysea returns a moment later, and Josefa continues to entrance both Alysea and Eduardo with reflections on her life and her secret, inner wonder and light, a phenomenon that she calls her "magicians" (21). Once more, Josefa does not describe her sexual and gender identity with particular labels or terms. We know that she loves Alysea, that she never felt compelled to marry or have children, and that the lake and her "magicians" have fulfilled her and filled her with desire and joy in a way that men and daily life have not. Through her description of her "magicians," we also become aware of darker and more complicated attributes that characterize her inner world and that the rest of the townspeople are not willing or able to comprehend.

In the final scene of Act I, yet another dialogue takes place in Josefa's sitting room. Clara arrives, already drunk, while Alysea and Josefa are outside in the garden. She is preoccupied with her age and the state of her life; when Josefa arrives, she adds a fourth dimension to the love triangle by confessing that she fears her age is the reason

why Eduardo has not chosen her to love. Once again, Josefa asserts her nonconformist views on men, emphasizing that there are other ways and things to love:

> *Clara: (She closes her eyes)* I wish…I wish I were young for one day…just one day…so he would love me the way I love him.
> *Josefa:* Men don't love…they take…haven't you learned that by now?
> *Clara:* Oh, Josefa…you are wrong…you are wrong…a woman was made to love a man…to love is enough for a woman…if only they would let us love them without negating, without negating…
> *Josefa*: Why, Clara? Why must you give…so easily? Not to them…Clara…not to men!
> *Clara*: (*shrugs)* My downfall? *(in a whisper)* My life?
> *Josefa:* Here…enough of that…there are beautiful things to love. (27-28)

As in the opening scene, in this scene the sitting room represents all that is beautiful and good in the world and provides a means of breaking the tension during intimate dialogue. It also serves as a platform from which to engage issues of gender norms and societal roles; throughout *Day*, Josefa is consistent in her criticism of men and often advises other women that they would be better off without men.

The intensity and dramatic tone of the subject matter of this scene is juxtaposed once more with the lake that can be seen outside the window. For many of the characters who figure in *Day*, the sitting room is the most beautiful and inspiring space. Josefa, however, prefers the lake, as she finds love there through the "magicians" only she can sense. In terms of the allegorical nature of *Day*, the repeated contrast between Josefa's sitting room—a haven for women and away from men, well-lit, and lace-adorned—and the lake—a darker unknown, outdoors and in a non-confined and non-domestic setting—helps to set Josefa apart from the other women of *Lago de San Lorenzo* as well as from societal expectations regarding the roles of women and men. The lake represents, for Josefa, an example of another "beautiful thing to love," as well as the conflict between her love for Alysea and the inner turmoil it causes her.

Josefa's frequent references to her magicians are one of the only indications of a particular Chicana/o cosmovision or mythos portrayed by Portillo-Trambley in *Day*. Many of her contemporaries, as well as other Chicana dramatists who wrote and staged plays in the following decades, invoke Mesoamerican and indigenous iconography and spirituality in their works dealing with Chicano people. Portillo-Trambley's play does not dialogue directly with these tropes, which makes *Day*, as one of the earliest published plays by a Chicana/o dramatist, all the more interesting to discuss. The most explicit historical references and contexts appear in the opening narrative before Act I. Near the end of that description, Portillo-Trambley alludes to the two-hundred-year-old history of the people of Lago de San Lorenzo, "*Indians [who] were pushed out further into the desert. This was the way of the bearded gachupín, with his hot grasp and his hot looks. Their greedy vitality was a wonder to the Indian. It was also death*" (6). These three sentences seem a strange departure from the content, if not the tone, of the previous paragraphs; they are more rooted in history than interpersonal intimacy and inner conflicts. They also reveal an anti-imperialist and anti-Anglo ideology not found until this point in the text. This introductory allusion to history aside, I find that the Chicana/o mythos portrayed in *Day* has more to do with the characters, and the lifestyles they represent, than with a particular social or political statement or affirmation.

The initial narrative description notwithstanding, *Day*'s formal elements likely would not challenge a non-Chicano audience's expectation of what theater is; the three-act structure, dialogue-driven character development, suspense, language use, and even the love triangle—lesbian intimacy aside—all meet the expectations a theater-going audience would have of traditional, European-derived theater. Within this traditional

form, however, Portillo-Trambley experiments with the characters themselves. Although the play's structure would feel familiar to Anglo audiences in particular, the characters challenge the popular stereotypes of the era—both within and outside the Chicano Movement—regarding Chicana/o people, and Chicana women in particular. Josefa is not a noble matriarch but a single, financially independent, child-less woman actively involved in town politics and business. Alysea is not a disempowered young woman torn between her true love for a poor man and her family's need for her to marry up; she is in love with Josefa and lies to the man who loves her. The only truly patriarchal character to appear in the play, hacienda owner Don Esquinas, plays a minor role on stage and in the lives of the other characters.

When Jorge Huerta published *Chicano Theater* in 1982, Portillo-Trambley was still the only Chicana playwright in print. At that time, the Chicana/o theater movement was still very much portrayed by scholars, including Huerta, as a movement dominated by men. In Huerta's own words, "although women were active participants in decision-making processes, both politically, organizationally and artistically, most teatros were headed by men" (*Chicano Drama* 11). As I address in my introduction, in *Chicano Drama* (2000) Huerta justifies his lack of attention in *Chicano Theater* (1982) to issues related to Chicana women by stating that within the Chicano Movement "women's issues [in the 1980s] were not as prominent as they are today"(11). I contend that the existence of *Day*, first published in 1971, and the issues with which Portillo-Trambley engages directly contradict Huerta's characterization of Chicana/o theater of the era. *Day* centers on the desires, the words, and the actions of flesh-and-blood women and, considering the era in which it was written, features non-normative (i.e.: closeted lesbian) expressions of

intimacy, sex, love, and interpersonal and cultural conflicts. Unlike the ETC plays discussed earlier in this chapter, the women in *Day* play lead rather than supportive roles and are complex and diverse rather than two-dimensional and stereotypical.

In his introduction to the interview with Portillo-Trambley, Bruce-Novoa interprets *Day* as an ultimately optimistic play and Josefa's suicide as a transcendent victory for her as lesbian (an identity label never used in the play itself) (164). In my own analysis of the play, however, I read Josefa's suicide as a much darker and disheartening act. By the final scene, it is difficult to envision an optimistic future for any of the characters still alive at the end of the play; an optimistic interpretation of Josefa's suicidal escape from her life seems even less plausible. As a result of her desire and identity, Josefa feels forced to choose between living—disingenuously, discontentedly, and dangerously—and dying. I find it impossible to frame her suicide as anything but overtly tragic; she makes the choice to die, despite her love for Alysea, despite her passion for helping others, and despite her dreams of a better future yet to come. By choosing death, Josefa herself may have found some form of peace. For her audience, however, one message remains clear—the expression of one's desire, particularly as a woman who loves women, implies a risk worse than death. If this interpretation sounds fatalistic or reductive, it is worth noting that we can find engagement with similar tropes, often with similar outcomes, in works by more contemporary Chicana writers, among them Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga.

Following the publication of *The Day of the Swallows*, Portillo-Trambley continued her work as a dramatist. Not all of her plays have been published, but most were first staged at the Chamizal National Theatre and many continue to be staged today.

Her theatrical corpus includes: *El hombre cósmico* (staged 1975), *Isabel and the Danzing Bear* (staged 1977), *Sor Juana and Other Plays* (published 1983), a collection which includes the plays *Sor Juana*, *Puente Negro*, *Autumn Gold* and *Black Light* (staged 1975), as well as the three-act musicals, *Morality Play* (staged 1974) and *Sun Images* (staged 1976). Of these plays, several are psychological dramas and two are musicals; some treat issues of Chicana/o identity and reality explicitly while others portray more universalized Latina/o communities; one is a comedy unrelated to any particular Mexican American or Chicana/o issue at all. As scholars who have studied Portillo-Trambley's works tend to agree, *The Day of the Swallows* has remained her best-known play to date. As the entry on Portillo-Trambley in *Encyclopedia of Latin American Theater* points out, "the most interesting aspect of the play is the psychological complexity of the characters" (Cortés 88). The same entry describes her dramatic style as an apoliticized means of inspiring her audience to reflect upon the world around them: "In her plays, Portillo avoids ideological flags, attempting instead to inject in her characters and subjects a strong dramatic intensity, which induces her audience and readers to reflect on social problems, such as repression, intolerance, and injustice" (88).

Considering the interviews mentioned earlier in this chapter, it seems likely that Portillo-Trambley would be satisfied with this characterization of the kind of plays she writes. In response to Bruce-Novoa's questions about the political nature of her work, she expresses her strong belief that political literature tends to stereotype, reduce, and limit its representations of Chicana/o and non-Chicana/o subjects in such a way that the nuances and subtle particularities of what it means to exist as a human are often lost (174). She speaks candidly of her goal to find a US audience for her works, not because

of her minority status but rather because "people can find themselves in what I write…all people. To be that kind of a writer," she continues, "to go beyond the local and the contemporary, to find a common denominator in unifying people, these would be the kind of imprints I would like to make in contributing to the *Movimiento*" (Bruce-Novoa 172). Although certainly at odds with some of the socio-political goals of other Chicana/o writers of her era, it would be a challenge to identify even one way in which *The Day of the Swallows* diverges from Portillo-Trambley's own descriptions of her goals as a dramatist.

Although written only a few years apart, *Zoot Suit*'s post-modern and technically experimental elements present a stark contrast to *Day*. For Valdez, *Zoot Suit* marked the beginning of an individual identity as a Chicano dramatist and activist. First staged in 1978, the musical drama ran for 11 months to sold-out crowds in Los Angeles; in 1979, it ran for four weeks in New York as the first and to date only Chicano play to be performed on Broadway (*Zoot* 11). In 1981, Valdez directed a filmed version of the play in conjunction with a Hollywood production company, and the film quickly gained fame both within and beyond Chicana/o communities in the US. Jorge Huerta notes that Valdez has been called the "the Pachuco of Broadway" and the "social bandit of the media" in direct relation to his crafting and production of *Zoot Suit* (*Zoot* 20).

Rooted in a specific, 20th century historical moment, *Zoot Suit* is a theatrical work by a self-identified Chicano dramatist that "dramatizes a Chicano family in crisis" (Huerta Introduction 15). Unlike in *Day*, Valdez explicitly draws from and incorporates characteristics of the *acto* and socio-political theater in general in order to frame the play in a specific historical context. In "Cutting Through the News: *Zoot Suit*," Huerta

introduces the play as a synthesis of Valdez's earlier theatrical accomplishments though a kind of generic syncretism:

> *Zoot Suit* is the logical culmination of all that Valdez had written before, combining elements of *acto*, *mito*, and *corrido* in a spectacular documentary play with music. Unlike any of his previous plays or *actos*, however, *Zoot Suit* is based on historical fact, not a current crisis. (Introduction 13)

Whereas Portillo-Trambley argues against the merits of socio-activist theater in favor of a more representational and intellectually-grounded approach, Valdez employs a docu-drama theatrical form and presentational techniques in a style of theater directly informed by the *acto*. The set design of *Zoot Suit* evokes the Living Newspaper Style of the 1930s, which Valdez describes as "a documentary theater that exposed current events […] through dramatizations of those events" (Introduction 15). Of the play's historical basis and context, Huerta notes that "[t]he politically aware will know that the police brutality and injustices rendered in this play are still happening; others may lose the point" (Introduction 13). *Zoot Suit* portrays markedly Chicana/o identities and realities in several ways, including the use of Chicano and Pachuco lexicon and slang, the dress and lifestyle of the younger generation of characters, and references to historical dates and events centered on Chicana/os living in the US. The historical events represented on stage work to remind the audience that *Zoot Suit* is, first and foremost, a play about Chicano civil rights issues. In addition to the influence of the *acto*, several characteristics and techniques employed by Valdez in *Zoot Suit* incorporate aspects of the *corrido* and the *mito*. The musical underscoring, for example, includes both original and traditional songs and serves to situate the events of the play within their broader historical context. The mambo, in particular, works to identify Chicana/o characters as "American" and to

remind the audience that it is, as Huerta puts it, "an American play" (Introduction 14). Here, "American" refers not to the inter-continental Americanism previously discussed in the context of Portillo-Trambley's dramaturgy, but rather to specifically US citizenship, identity, and culture.

Set in Los Angeles, the play is based on the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial and the events leading up to the 1944 East L.A. "Zoot Suit" race riots. In the prologue to *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.*, Eduardo Obregón details the circumstances leading up to the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial: On Saturday, August 1st, 1942, 22 year-old José Díaz attended the birthday party of a family friend, 20 year-old Eleanor Delgadillo Coronado, at her parents' home on Williams Ranch in rural Los Angeles County. Scheduled to enlist in the US Army the following Monday, José spent a final night celebrating with family and friends, before he was brutally attacked on his walk home. He died early the following morning in Los Angeles General Hospital. On Monday, August 3rd, the front page of *L.A. Times* featured what Obregón describes as "an unassuming report about weekend violence. […] [B]oth the positioning and the tenor of the report reflected the attitudes that many Angelenos held toward Mexicans in the United States"—namely, concern over growing violence in L.A. County but not over the death of another Mexican-American youth (2).

Had it not been for a memo sent from the Governor's Office to the Los Angeles Police Department urging law enforcement "to crack down on street violence and youth gangs," Obregón posits that the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial would never have come to pass (3). Instead, that communication inspired a county-wide project of "mass dragnets," especially targeting Mexican American and African American neighborhoods in L.A.:

> The Los Angeles Police Department launched a much publicized war on juvenile delinquency and turned the investigation into a major media event. In the months that followed, Californians would again revive the discourse on "the Mexican problem" and debate whether Mexican citizens and their American-born children were culturally, politically, intellectually, and biologically capable of living within a white, civilized, democratic society. (3)

The L.A. press "hailed the police as heroes," and the L.A.P.D. eventually found the 38th Street Gang responsible for José's death. They were all charged with murder, and most were convicted (3).

Just as we find represented on stage in *Zoot Suit*, the real murder charges against seventeen Chicano youth culminated in biased and illegal judicial proceedings, media misrepresentation of the trial and the seventeen Chicano defendants, and the subsequent incarceration of nine of the defendants in San Quentin Prison under charges of second-degree murder. The remaining eight were charged with lesser crimes and served time in the Los Angeles County Jail. *Zoot Suit* utilizes a historical referent of thirty years in the past to re-present an actual incident in Chicano-Anglo relations in Los Angeles. As Huerta points out, the fact that the work is based on historical events rather than a current crisis means that only a very aware and perceptive audience will be conscious of the fact that the police brutality and injustices portrayed on stage "in the past" are still happening in the present (13). Overall, *Zoot Suit* highlights the negative impact on Chicana/os living in Los Angeles during WWII, a reality largely ignored in history textbooks today.

The docu-drama form of the play is influenced by Valdez's earlier *actos* and yet relies upon a more Brechtian approach to performance, a notable contrast to the representational theatrical approach employed in *Day*. In "A Model for Epic Theatre," first published in 1949, Bertolt Brecht outlines this model as a performative approach

linked to class conflict at its climax and a way to present social processes and causal connections in the 1920s and 1930s in Germany (425). "Theater is no longer concealing the fact that it is a theater," Brecht asserts as his recipe for a non-conventional form of theater that no longer relies upon "the creation of illusion" (426-427). In particular, he highlights the complex technique of placing actors at a distance from the roles they play. Translator Eric Bentley comments that epic theatrical performances "showed dramatic situations at such an angle of vision that they were bound to become the object of the spectators' criticism" (425). Whereas conventional theater "shields actions from criticism," Brecht characterizes Epic Theater is one in which the actor or demonstrator "takes a stand and creates a mood, or frame of mind, suited to his interpretation of the case" (Brecht 430, 428). Brecht contends that presentational theater offers a socially practical meaning and converts the spectator into an "active critic of society," rather than a passive observer whose experience is limited to entertainment (432). As Bentley points out, Epic Theater made possible the implementation of experimental technical features for description and reference, such as choruses that provide social commentary, written projections, and direct actor-to-audience communication (425). Brecht further explains that "the demonstrator, as often as seems possible, interrupts his imitation with explanations" (433). This is a theatrical technique we encounter in abundance in *Zoot Suit*; the kinds of theatrical innovations that Brecht describes ultimately facilitate a transition from presentation to commentary, in plays that can be both entertaining and didactic.

Valdez's reliance upon presentational theater techniques in *Zoot Suit* is especially apparent in his use of an omniscient narrator, who manifests as an alter-ego or personality

double to protagonist Henry Reyna. This narrator, called El Pachuco, directly addresses the audience in various moments throughout the play, providing a running commentary that links distinct scenes; he even has the ability to stop and start the play's action, a technique Huerta calls the "instant replay" phenomenon (Introduction 14). Not only omniscient but also omnipresent, El Pachuco plays a variety of "roles" throughout the play; he underscores or challenges protagonist Henry Reyna's thoughts and actions, interprets the action that takes place on stage, engages with the audience, and counters the presence, ideology, and practices of The Press.

The Press, one of several collective and allegorical characters that figure in *Zoot Suit*, serves as a counterpoint to the individuality and socio-historical referent of El Pachuco. The Press includes characters listed as Press, Cub Reporter, and Newsboy, and is introduced through a series of headlines recited aloud during Scene 2. Throughout the play, The Press is represented on stage in various forms: as newspaper headlines and excerpts, as a reporter, as a collective chorus of reporters, and as radio broadcasters. In all of those manifestations, The Press reinscribes popular Anglo consciousness around the events in question, by presenting blatantly biased and racist accounts of events surrounding the murder trial.

Act I begins with a prologue, during which El Pachuco presents himself to the audience, first through actions and then through a kind of monologic prologue. Props, music, and dress all inform our initial perception of his character, particularly in this first scene:

> *A switchblade plunges through the newspaper. It slowly cuts a rip to the bottom of the drop. To the sounds of "Perdido" by Duke Ellington,* EL PACHUCO *emerges from the slit.* HE *adjusts his clothing, meticulously fussing with his collar, suspenders, cuffs.* HE *tends to his hair, combing*

> *back every strand into a long luxurious ducktail, with infinite loving pains. Then* HE *reaches into the slit and pulls out his coat and hat.* HE *dons them. His fantastic costume is complete. It is a zoot suit.* HE *is transformed into the very image of the pachuco myth, from his pork-pie hat to the tip of his four-foot watch chain. Now* HE *turns to the audience. His three-soled shoes with metal taps click-clack as* HE *proudly, slovenly, defiantly makes his way downstage.* HE *stops and assumes a pachuco stance.* (25)

An explicitly Chicano masculinity and cultural identity materialize before our eyes in this gestural monologue, even before El Pachuco speaks. The audience witnesses the coming together, so to speak, of the parts that make up the whole, namely the historical and cultural context evoked by the newspaper, the music, the costume, and El Pachucho's body language. In short, we are made explicitly aware of the simultaneously constructed and authentic nature of his identity.

The use of language, in particular of Pachuco slang, provides the final piece of the narrator's Chicano identity as well as a poetic and satirical articulation of the Pachuco tradition within the broader socio-historical context of the 1930s and 1940s. El Pachuco addresses the audience in the first of his many monologues through a hybridized language:

> ¿Que le watcha a mis trapos, ese?
> ¿Sabe qué, carnal?
> Estas garras me las planté porque
> Vamos a dejarnos caer un play, ¿sabe?
> (HE *crosses to center stage, models his clothes.*)
> Watcha mi tacuche, ese. Aliviánese con mis calcos, tando,
> lisa, tramos, y carlango, ese.
> (*Pause.*)
> Nel, sabe qué, usted está muy verdolaga. Como se me hace
> que es puro square.
> (EL PACHUCO *breaks character and addresses the audience in perfect English.*)
> Ladies and gentlemen
> the play you are about to see is a construct of fact and fantasy.
> The Pachuco Style was an act in Life

and his language a new creation.
His will to be was an awesome force
eluding all documentation…
A mythical, quizzical, frightening being
precursor of revolution
Or a piteous, hideous heroic joke
deserving an absolution?
I speak as an actor on the stage.
The Pachuco was existential
for he was an Actor in the streets
both profane and reverential.
It was the secret fantasy of every bato
in or out of the Chicanada
to put on a Zoot Suit and play the Myth
más chucote que la chingada.
(*Puts hat back on and turns.*)
¡Pos órale! (25-26)

His speech blends Spanish, English and Pachuco caló[37] with seamless fluidity. He does however, speak in "perfect English" when the stage notes indicate to address the audience directly, a linguistic choice on the part of Valdez which represents a decolonial cultural strategy employed as a challenge to Anglo perceptions of Mexican non-assimilation or linguistic and cultural intelligence. El Pachuco's opening monologue also serves to introduce the audience to the metatheatrical devices that characterize the entire play; what they are about to see is a play, in multiple senses of the word. Finally, the opening scene validates the existence of Pachucos and a Chicano community, particularly for audience members not familiar with their historical legacy and cultural presence within the US.[38]

[37] In "Que le watcha los cabrones: Marking the 30th Anniversary of Luis Valdez's 'Zoot Suit'," Shakina Nayfack defines *caló*, in the context of the Pachuco culture, as follows: "*Caló* is Pachuco/Chicano slang, before Spanglish, a hip and resistant mix of Spanish and English" (163). Alice, a central character in *Zoot Suit*, also references *caló* at the end of the play (*Zoot* 94).

[38] See Elizabeth Jacob's "The Theatrical Politics of Chicana/Chicano Identity: From Valdez to Moraga" for a useful analysis of El Teatro Campesino as resistance theater and the new creative direction Luiz Valdez took beginning with *Zoot Suit* in the 1970s. She also considers Cherríe Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* and the ways in which Moraga forged a different path in terms of performativity and strategies of representation. She ultimately concludes that unlike Valdez, Moraga redefines "culturally determined

Beyond the introduction of El Pachuco, several theatrical devices and presentational techniques inform Valdez's portrayal of a specific historical moment in *Zoot Suit*. The set design immediately calls the audience's attention to the role of the Press, here through the daily headlines that inform the public's perception of the Pachuco movement and Chicano communities in general.[39] The opening stage description articulates one central role played by actual newspapers in the play: "*[t]he giant facsimile of a newspaper front page serves as a drop curtain. / The huge masthead reads: LOS ANGELES HERALD EXPRESS Thursday, June 3, 1943. / A headline cries out: ZOOT-SUITER MARINE HORDES INVADE LOS ANGELES. US NAVY AND MARINES ARE CALLED IN*" (24). The headline that remains present on stage through the duration of the play is dated June 3rd, 1943, one year after the initial action of the play takes place. In this way, the scenes that transpire throughout the play are already informed by a future not yet come to pass, at least for audience members familiar with the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial and Zoot Suit Riot of the following year. Newspapers appear in other contexts as well; El Pachuco makes his first on-stage appearance by cutting his way through the newspaper drop curtain and, in Act I, Scene 4, Henry's mother hangs newspapers instead of clothes on the clothesline. Although a knife is present on stage in the opening scenes of both *Day* and *Zoot Suit*, the similarities in the use of the prop end there. In *Zoot Suit*, the presence of the knife foreshadows the literal and socio-cultural

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characterizations of identity" and identity politics in general through her critique of communal/popular culture discourses.

[39] See Rosa Linda Fregoso's "The Representation of Cultural Identity in 'Zoot Suit'" for an insightful discussion of US public discourse depicting Chicana/os as "social problems". She dates the negative representation of Mexican people back to the 19th century, arguing that "the positioning of Chicanas and Chicanos in dominant imagery as 'gang members' is neither a recent phenomenon nor one that has disappeared altogether" (659). She describes *Zoot Suit* as the first play "to represent the 'gang' problem from a historical perspective of Chicano subjects" and a significant contribution to the development of Chicano nationalism through cultural production.

violence—played out through fight-dances between members of opposing gangs, as well as on the part of Anglo cops toward the Chicano youth—represented throughout the play. Act II also features several oral announcements from The Press that present anti-Chicana/o and uninformed information about the murder charges, the trial, and the appeals process. The set design is one of several means through which Valdez establishes complex and experimental temporal manipulations that shape the audience's perception of the historical events in question. Yarbro-Bejarano calls our attention to non-linearity as a common feature of plays produced in the context of the *Movimiento*. She notes that these plays work collectively to undermine traditional Aristotelian theater and the hierarchies inherent in the Western theater tradition (23). *Zoot Suit* is not an exception to this unifying tendency within Chicana/o Theater of the 1970s and in later decades.

After El Pachuco's dramatic gestural entrance and prologue directed at the audience, the action flashes forward to depict the police interrogation of several members of protagonist Henry Reyna's gang, the 38th Street Gang, in reference to what will come to be known as the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial. After a night of dancing and socializing, a young man is found dead outside a house party and Henry and the 38th Street Gang are called in for questioning and arrested shortly thereafter. As Henry waits in the interrogation room, El Pachuco appears beside him and the two discuss the seemingly unavoidable consequences to follow. In this scene, Henry asserts his innocence for the audience when he states: "They're going to do it again, ese! They're going to charge me with some phony rap and keep me until they make something stick" (29). We also learn that Henry had planned to leave for Navy training the following morning, a detail that

helps to represent Chicano men as just as capable and deserving of defending their country—just as "American"—as their white counterparts. As Huerta explains, Valdez makes conscious efforts to identify Chicanos as "Americans" too by asserting in varied ways that "Americans populate The Americas, not just the US" (14). Henry's clean-cut and well-spoken nature suggest that wearing a Zoot Suit is in no way synonymous with anti-patriotism.

In the following scene, titled "The Interrogation," El Pachuco disrupts temporality more drastically, this time by an incantation that gradually flashes Henry and his surroundings back in time and invokes the physical appearance on stage of Henry's family. His poetic incantation concludes with the following lines: "It's a lifetime ago, last Saturday night…before Sleepy Lagoon and the big bad fight. […] Tu mamá, carnal. (HE *recedes into the background*)" (33).[40] The lights change, the music shifts, and the audience meets Henry's nuclear family in the setting of their own home, before the shock of the murder charges that will change the course of the next year of Henry's life.

This temporal transition brings us to a discussion of the relationships of individual characters to the broader communities depicted, and to each other. Henry Reyna is the protagonist of *Zoot Suit* and is doubled by El Pachuco, the narrator as well as Henry's alter-ego, and a character visible to and heard by only Henry and the audience. In my reading of *Zoot Suit*, the relationship between Henry and El Pachuco potentially inspires different kinds of questions for different kinds of audiences. Non-Chicano audiences might interpret the central question as related to assimilation; if the only possible path of redemption for Chicanos is assimilation, which is portrayed as a socio-political, racial,

[40] The use of slang here is an instance of prioritizing an insider discourse community. Non-Spanish-speaking spectators likely will not perceive the aggression and hyper-masculinity of the phrase "[t]u mamá, carnal."

and legal impossibility, where does that leave Henry? Chicano audiences, on the other hand, might identify the central issue as whether or not Henry will sell out and abandon his Pachuco identity and community.

Huerta describes Henry's *familia* as a link to his broader Chicano community and El Pachuco as Henry's inner attitude of defiance, "the defiance against the system that identifies and determines the pachuco character" (Introduction 15). This dramatization of a Mexican American family and community depends upon the host of other characters that permeate the set, the actions, and the dialogue throughout the play. In some ways, the collective framework of El Teatro Campesino is mirrored within the play itself, as Henry is not alone but rather surrounded by an entire Chicano community composed of both family and peers. In the list of "Characters" that precedes Act I, Valdez enumerates 40 distinct characters. All except El Pachuco and Henry Reyna are grouped into the following collective categories: "His Family," "His Friends," "His Gang," "The Downey Gang," "Detectives," "The Press," "The Court," "The Prison," "The Military," and "Others" (23-24). Valdez's own rising career as an individual dramatist is best reflected in the singularity and centrality of Henry and El Pachuco, the obvious stars of the show and the embodiment of Chicano individuality, agency, and masculinity.

In addition to stylistic and temporal manipulations within an historically grounded scenography, Valdez's incorporation of Pachuco lexicon works to identify and affirm a particular Chicano identity and culture. Although this linguistic feature is present throughout the play, it is especially noteworthy in Scene 4, as Henry and his family members argue about the legitimacy and significance of Pachuco/Chicano identity markers through language and dress. Henry refuses to budge when his mother and father

confront him about his choice of clothes for the dance he'll attend that night. He's dressed in classic Pachuco attire, complete with an oversized tacuche [jacket], slicked-back hair, and a pork-pie Zoot Suit hat. Henry's mother, Dolores, confuses the Pachuco terminology itself, effectively locating herself within a different cultural generation than that of her Pachuca/o-identified children. Her reference to the police also foreshadows the events that transpire later that evening after the dance:

> DOLORES: Tacuche? Pero tu padre…
> HENRY: (*Revealing a stubborn streak.*) I know what mi 'apá said, 'amá. I'm going to wear it anyway.
> DOLORES: (*Sighs, resigns herself*.) Mira, hijo. I know you work hard for your clothes. And I know how much they mean to you. Pero por diosito santo, I just don't know what you see en esa cochinada de "soot zoot."
> HENRY: (*Smiling.*) Drapes, amá, we call them drapes.
> DOLORES: (*Scolding playfully*.). Ay sí, drapes, muy funny, ¿verdad? And what do the police call them, eh? They've put you in jail so many times. ¿Sabes qué? I'm going to send them all your clothes! (33-34)

Although neither Henry nor Dolores speaks only Spanish or English, they communicate through noticeably different lexical systems, each charged with a particular cultural meaning and implications for their self-images and community identifications. Dolores' confusion over Pachucho terminology serves to underscore the distinctive cultural identity of the younger generation of Mexican Americans who identify as Chicana/o, as well as to reveal intra-familial conflict and strife that further complicates the Chicano youth's already precarious and marginalized social reality within dominant US culture.

The cultural tension that manifests between father and son is even greater than that between mother and son. Later in the same scene, Henry's father, Enrique, responds with incredulity and anger to his children's use of Pachuco language: "¿Cómo que pedo? Nel, ¿Simón? Since when did we stop speaking Spanish in this house? Have you no respect?" (36). A few moments later, Henry's sister Lupe, who is also leaving to attend

the dance with her brothers, says goodbye to her mother by saying "Ahí te watcho, 'amá," to which Enrique responds with frustration "¿Que qué?" (36-37). Linguistic and cultural miscommunications such as these abound throughout the play. While humorous to witness, these interactions also foster a mood of uneasiness and tension that only builds as Act I progresses.

Beyond the precarious generational hierarchy at play, there also exists a gender hierarchy that is clearly maintained, rather than questioned or rejected, within the Pachuco/Chicano community represented in *Zoot Suit*. Although Dolores and Enrique question Henry and his brother Rudy's Pachuco outfits, it is their youngest daughter Lupe who receives the harshest criticism for her choice of clothes. In the frenzy of activity before the children leave for the night, Lupe is found hiding behind the clothesline—not coincidentally, perhaps, the same clothesline upon which Dolores hangs newspapers at the beginning of the scene—in fear of her parents' reaction to her outfit. Her fears prove true, when even her mother insults her clothing choice upon catching a glimpse of her daughter's clothes:

> DOLORES: (*To* LUPE.) ¿Oye y tú? What's wrong with you? What are you doing back there?
> LUPE: Nothing, 'amá.
> DOLORES: Well, come out then.
> LUPE: We're late, 'amá.
> DOLORES: Come out, te digo. (LUPE *comes out exposing her extremely short skirt.* DOLORES *gasps.*) ¡Válgame Dios! Guadalupe, are you crazy? Why bother to wear anything?
> LUPE: Ay, 'amá, it's the style. Short skirt and fingertip coat. Huh, Hank?
> HENRY: Uh, yea, 'amá.
> DOLORES: ¿Oh sí? And how come Della [Henry's girlfriend] doesn't get to wear the same style? […] Ándale. Go change before your father sees you.
> ENRIQUE: I'm home. (*Coming into the scene.*) Buenas noches, everybody. (*All respond.* ENRIQUE sees LUPE.) ¡Ay, jijo! Where's the skirt?!

> LUPE: It's here.
> […]
> ENRIQUE: ¡Te digo que no! I will not have my daughter looking like a …
> DOLORES: Like a puta…I mean, a Pachuca.
> […]
> LUPE: But you let Henry wear his drapes.
> ENRIQUE: That's different. He's a man. Es hombre. […] And look how he came out. ¡Bien macho! Like his father. ¿Verdad, m'ijo? (34-35)

There is much about this interaction that merits comment, the most obvious being the clear familial and cultural hierarchy in which the men dominate the women, certainly in terms of verbal articulation as well as in other, more troubling ways. Dolores' main concern is not her own opinion about what Lupe is wearing but rather her husband's foreseeable reaction when he arrives home. While Henry doesn't concur with his father's ideas explicitly, he does little more than agree with both sides to keep the peace during this exchange. What is most suggestive, however, is the fact that Dolores, and not Enrique, finally utters the first sexist response. She quickly modifies "puta" [whore] to "Pachuca," but in light of the previous conversation, it is not clear that one term can be viewed as less degrading and sexist than the other, particularly within Dolores' cultural framework. In this scene and others, Enrique effectively silences all of his family members, here through an assertion that Henry is different from and better than Lupe simply because he is a man. At the end of this scene, Lupe does leave with her brothers wearing her Pachuca outfit, which perhaps suggests a possibility for changing cultural patterns and norms through actions rather than through words; yet the issue of gender politics within the Chicano and Mexican American communities represented in *Zoot Suit* is never revisited in future scenes. The entire scene regarding Lupe's outfit seems to serve the more technical function of comic relief than as a commentary on gender politics and inequities within the *Movimiento*.

In Act I, Henry and his friends are all convicted of murder in the first and second degree and sentenced to life imprisonment in the State Penitentiary at San Quentin. Act II is set primarily in the prison cells where they await an appeal. As in Act I, El Pachuco makes numerous appearances on stage as a narrator, as Henry's conscience/alter-ego, and to slow-down or pause the temporal flow of the scene. A new theatrical device that Valdez incorporates into Act II is epistolary communication, between "the boys'" and Alice, a white reporter-turned-appeals advocate for Henry and his gang. Henry and Alice grow close through letters and conversation, to such a degree that Henry begins to believe her optimistic assertions that she'll succeed in acquitting him. Their relationship causes tension between Henry and El Pachuco, as he continues to advocate against false hopes in the external world and the US judicial system:

> PACHUCO: (*A spot illuminates* HENRY'*s family standing upstage;* EL PACHUCO *snaps it off*.)
>
> Forget them!
> Forget them all.
> Forget your family and the barrio
> beyond the wall.
>
> HENRY: There's still a chance I'll get out.
> PACHUCO: Fat chance.
> HENRY: I'm talking about the appeal!
> PACHUCO: And I'm talking about what's real! ¿Qué traes, Hank? Haven't you
> learned yet?
> HENRY: Learned what?
> PACHUCO:
>
> Not to expect justice when it isn't there.
> No court in the land's going to set you free.
> Learn to protect your loves by binding them
> in hate, ese! Stop hanging on to false hopes.
> The moment those hopes come crashing down,
> you'll find yourself on the ground foaming at
> the mouth. ¡Como loco!
>
> HENRY: (*Turning on him furiously.*) ¿Sabes qué? Don't tell me any more. I don't need you to tell me what to do. Fuck off! FUCK OFF! (HENRY *turns away from* EL PACHUCO. *Long pause. An anxious,*

intense moment. EL PACHUCO *shifts gears and breaks the tension with a satirical twist.* HE *throws his arms out and laughs.*)
PACHUCO:
¡Órale pues!
Don't take the pinche play so seriously, Jesús!
Es puro vacilón!
Watcha. (77-78)

Despite El Pachuco's critique of the courts and the legal processes of the US, especially in terms of their discriminatory treatment of Chicana/os, Alice's continual plea for Henry and his gang to put their faith in her and the future prove true in the end, at least temporarily, when Henry is finally released and returns home to his family. In a final postmodern and metatheatrical twist, *Zoot Suit* concludes with a series of three divergent life narratives for protagonist Henry Reyna, articulated by characters with whom he has engaged throughout the play and necessitating audience involvement in contemplating his possible futures. El Pachuco is ultimately afforded the last word, as he concludes the play by saying "Henry Reyna…El Pachuco…The man…the myth…still lives" (94).

As I mention in my introduction, the man and the myth of the Pachuco became a central part of Chicano nationalist iconography as the *Movimiento* gained strength in the decades following the era in which *Zoot Suit* is set. In the documentary film *The Art of Resistance*, Chicano film and television director Jesús Salvador Treviño describes the central role played by the Pachuco figure in Chicana/o activism of the 1960s:

> There was also an exploration of who we were as symbols, as people. You have, for example, the emergence of the Pachuco as a prototype of Chicano identity. […] We in the '60s began to think, you know, that the Pachuco is going through the same experience of bilingualism and biculturalism and identity conflict that we have gone through, and in many ways he was a precursor to the Chicano of the '60s.

Above all, the climactic moment between Henry and El Pachuco cited above reminds the audience of the potential for the Chicano—male—subject to assert and enact his own

agency. By grounding the play in historical facts that hold implications not just for the past and the present but for the future as well, Valdez articulates through theater several fundamental goals of the *Movimiento*, among them (1) the search for and validation of a wholly Chicano identity, (2) the fight for equality for Chicanos in the US, and (3) the acknowledgement on the part of non-Chicanos of the blatant, debilitating, and in many cases illegal disempowerment and disenfranchisement of Chicano communities across the US.

My use of the male-gendered term "Chicano" in much of my analysis of *Zoot Suit* is intentional. What is noticeably missing from Valdez's portrayal of Chicano people and issues of social and political justice is an awareness of the ways in which Chicana women, as well as other internally marginalized groups, have been silenced, made invisible, and even criminalized within the *Movimiento* as well as in characterizations of the era by Anglo scholars. We have already seen evidence of this in the secondary and comic role played by Lupe within the context of the Reyna family and the play as a whole. Another example is the representation of Della, Henry's girlfriend and the person he is with on the night the murder takes place. Della is sentenced to one year in a juvenile detention center after her refusal to testify against Henry and his gang in court. The fact that Valdez never develops this potential legal fight encourages the audience to view its significance as secondary to the plight of Henry and his male peers. In my reading of the play, the savior figure of *Zoot Suit* is not only El Pachuco but also Alice, an English-speaking, well-educated liberal reporter, who is the only character able to move between social classes. Unlike Alice, the Chicana women in *Zoot Suit* are relegated to supporting roles and to representational "types"; they are not endowed with the same agency and

depth of character development as are the male characters. In short, the only female character in the play who demonstrates real political agency and authority is not Chicana but white, educated, and English-speaking.

The Pachuco identity, voice, and lifestyle represented in *Zoot Suit* are fundamental to Valdez's far-reaching commentary on Chicano—and Chicana—people in the US. And yet El Pachuco's masculinity, and that of the other male characters, is not without problem. Overall, *Zoot Suit* is technically and thematically complex and potentially offers multiple avenues for liberation and exploration of self for Chicano men. And yet in terms of the characters themselves, in many cases Valdez reinscribes troubling Anglo perceptions and stereotypes about Chicano people still very much in circulation in the 1970s in the US. The Chicano youth portrayed in *Zoot Suit* belong to gangs, smoke cigarettes and marijuana, and are forever getting into trouble. The Chicana youth also smoke, dance and dress provocatively, and disobey their parents. The Chicano men tend to be represented as reactionary, assertive, and angry, while the Chicana women—when represented at all—are portrayed as submissive, hesitant, or silent.

In "Brechtian and Aztec Violence in Valdez's Zoot Suit," which discusses the film adaptation of *Zoot Suit*, Mark Pizzato synthesizes some of the most significant scholarly criticism of Valdez's work:

> Valdez's complex Brechtian and Artaudian presentation of the perversely moral Pachuco, as resurrected Aztec god, desiring yet transcending sacrificial violence, has received mixed reviews from academics. Various scholars—white, Chicano, and Chicana—while applauding *Zoot Suit*'s postmodern ending, have criticized Valdez as modernist, patriarchal, and essentialist in his macho idealization of El Pachuco. Although the film version enhances the roles of Della (Henry's Chicana girlfriend) and Alice (Henry's Anglo love interest who helps raise money for his appeal), the roles of his mother, his sister, and the *pachucas* remain slight. *Zoot Suit* on screen continues to be a male-centered, father-son-brother story. (59)

Pizzato's nod to the problematic portrayal of Chicana women—and Chicano men—is an exception to the tendency of scholars to gloss over, if they acknowledge at all, the hypermasculinity and sexism inherent to Valdez's work. Even as Pizzato acknowledges Valdez as "patriarchal," "essentialist," and *Zoot Suit* as absolutely "male-centered," he concludes the article by praising Valdez's skill at bringing together history, myth, and culture and for "challenging audiences in multiple directions" (59).

Overall, *Zoot Suit* presents, rather than questions, heteropatriarchal notions and social realities within and outside of the *Movimiento*, even as it potentially disrupts our expectations of what theater during the 1960s and 1970s should look and sound like. The play is revolutionary and yet perpetuates the image of the inherent danger of Pachuco and Chicano society and culture to dominate Anglo culture. The performative violence enacted in *Zoot Suit* reifies stereotypes of male violence and validates the dominant culture's policing of Chicano and Mexican American communities and, in particular, youth. Although Valdez's experimental techniques work to defamiliarize—and perhaps even to shock—the audience, the content ultimately explored falls short of engaging a more comprehensive spectrum of issues related to Chicana/o identity, history, and culture in the US.

Throughout their careers, Portillo-Trambley and Valdez were consistent in the visions they articulated for the Chicano people and for the role of theater within the *Movimiento*. In both cases, this was a significant accomplishment given the particular barriers and prejudices each dramatist faced. Portillo-Trambley's first effort as a playwright was perhaps not her most successful literary creation, a fact to which she herself attests in interviews. She does succeed, however, in dramatizing a conflict of

identity through a Chicana character caught between conflicting worlds and desires—the desire to fit into her community and the desire to know and be herself. When considered against the backdrop of the *Movimiento*, we find in *The Day of the Swallows* complex and allegorical fragments of the central problems that have since informed and inspired the works of Chicana/o writers into our present moment.

Although her critique of Chicano patriarchy is often more veiled than that of more contemporary Chicana writers, in an interview for the *Austin American-Statesman* in 1981, Portillo-Trambley speaks frankly of the compounded exploitation—that of both racism and sexism—experienced by Chicana women:

> The greatest exploitation the Chicana gets is from the Mexican and Mexican-American man. This is because machismo is still running rampant. The Mexican and Mexican-American man still considers the woman less than equal. He has to have certain sexual privileges. If the wife so much as wants equality, immediately, he labels her something bad. […] [He] has got to change, or the Chicanas have got to extricate themselves from their men. (A24)

Although Portillo-Trambley does not write or speak literally of a return to Aztlán, the Chicana/o homeland alluded to by many Chicana/o writers and activists, her protagonist Josefa's death can perhaps be read as a commentary on the challenge faced by Chicana/os who desire to find home, first and foremost, within themselves. "'I guess,'" Portillo-Trambley concludes in her interview for the *Statesman*, "'it is hard for a Chicana who has become somewhat Anglicized to go home again'" (A24).

The disparate conditions of possibility afforded to Portillo-Trambley and Valdez as dramatists in some ways explain why they stand in such contrast in terms of writing, staging, reception, and the acceptance (or not) of their works into the literary canon. I hope that my analysis of *The Day of the Swallows* and *Zoot Suit* contradicts this assertion

in significant ways. As I discuss earlier in this chapter, Portillo-Trambley and Valdez each raise—in very distinct ways—profound and complex questions surrounding Chicana/o identities, families, and communities in the US These questions bring to light—explicitly, in the case of *Day*, and, perhaps unintentionally, in the case of *Zoot Suit*—significant issues of women's cultural agency within the *Movimiento*.

To this day, Portillo-Trambley's published plays have not received in-depth and holistic critical consideration. Although even Huerta and Kanellos agree that her creative contributions and voice have influenced other Chicana writers and dramatists, there remains a relative critical and cultural silence around her theatrical vision and practice, both of which diverged greatly from those of Valdez. This silence is two-fold; not only Portillo-Trambley's voice but also the voices and experiences of her characters have been overshadowed by the male writers of her generation, and by the voices of their characters. The playwright and characters of *Zoot Suit*, in particular, are often the sole theatrical reference point for non-Chicana/os with any knowledge of the lives, political agenda, and struggles of Chicana/o people in the 20th century. One of my goals in giving critical consideration to the works and life of Estela Portillo-Trambley in this chapter to offer a comprehensive look at her life and theatrical accomplishments and struggles. My analysis of her work, in conjunction with the work and career of Valdez, also serves as context for the focus of my third and final chapter: the explosion of Chicana activism and cultural production in the 1980s and 1990s, and especially the creation of new models of Chicana scholarship and dramaturgy that offer alternative ways of representing and conceptualizing the protagonists of the fight for Chicana/o liberation into the 21st century.

CHAPTER IV

SHARING THE STAGE: BEYOND THE HETEROPATRIARCHAL PARADIGM OF CHICANO THEATER AND CULTURAL PRODUCTION

"THE BORDER SPLIT MY FAMILY"

Gloria Anzaldúa grew up twenty-five miles north of the US-Mexico border, on a *ranchería* in the Río Grande Valley of South Texas. She was a seventh generation American whose ancestors—Indigenous, Spanish, Mexican—had inhabited the territory we know today as the Southwestern United States for more than twenty thousand years. In an interview with Karin Ikas, included in the first edition of *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Anzaldúa reflects on her childhood experience as a migrant worker and ranch-hand:

> Until I was eleven years old we lived in a ranching environment, and all of us had to participate in farm work like, for example, working in the fields, raising animals. […] Until I turned ten we were continually changing places as we were working on different ranches and in different places as migrant workers. So I had learned the hardships of working in the fields and of being a migrant laborer myself, and that experience formed me. (267)

When Anzaldúa was ten, her father moved the family to the small South Texas town of Hargill so that she could attend school more regularly. After graduating from the eighth grade, she was bussed to a high school in nearby Edinburg, where she later attended Pan American University and graduated with a B.A. in English, Art, and Secondary Education.

After working as a teacher to migrant students in South Texas, in 1972 Anzaldúa earned an M.A. in English from the University of Texas at Austin and began the doctoral

program in English at the same university. In the interview with Ikas, Anzaldúa attests to the disavowal of Mexican and Chicana/o studies as legitimate academic fields during her career as a PhD student:

> [My] advisor told me that Chicana literature was not a legitimate discipline, that it didn't exist, and that Women's Studies was not something I should do. You know, this was back then in 1976-77. If you were a Chicana at a university, all you were taught were these red, white and blue American philosophies, systems, disciplines, and ways of knowledge. They didn't consider ethnic cultural studies as having the impact or weight needed to enter the academy. And so in a lot of these classes I felt silenced, like I had no voice. (*Borderlands* 269)

Perhaps owing to the racism and sexism she experienced as a graduate student, Anzaldúa eventually left the doctoral program and moved to California to teach migrant workers and begin her writing career.

Anzaldúa soon became an active participant in what she calls *El Movimiento Macha*, an offshoot of the Chicano Movement led by women she describes as *marimachas*, "very assertive…different…queer, not normal" (269). As a result of their involvement in *El Movimiento Macha*, Anzaldúa and her contemporaries became models for the next generation of Chicana writers and activists:

> [I]n the sixties and the early seventies the Chicanos were at the controls. They were the ones who were visible, the Chicano leaders. Then in the eighties and nineties, the women have become visible. I see a lot of Chicanas when I travel. They come up to me, and while we are talking I ask them about their role models. They mention names like Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa and other Chicana authors. It is, and will continue to be, women that they are reading, that they respect. Not the guys. So it—the Chicano Movement—has shifted into the *Movimiento Macha.* (269)

Anzaldúa's experiences with queer and feminist activism within the *Movimiento* were ultimately more empowering than the work she speaks of undertaking with Anglo feminists. She speaks critically of her isolating experiences as the only person of color in

the Feminist Writers' Guild she joined after moving to California. Those group discussions revolved around what Anzaldúa calls "white problems" and "white experiences"; she felt silenced and unrepresented in discussions of the plights of Anglo feminists and queer activists:

> When it was my turn to talk, it was almost like they were putting words into my mouth. They interrupted me while I was still talking or, after I had finished, they interpreted what I just said according to their thoughts and ideas. They thought that all women were oppressed in the same way, and they tried to force me to accept their image of me and my experiences. […] I mean, somehow these women were great. They were white and a lot of them were dykes and very supportive. But they were also blacked out and blinded out about our multiple oppressions. They didn't understand what we were going through. They wanted to speak for us because they had an idea of what feminism was, and they wanted to apply their notion of feminism across all cultures. (270)

As a result of experiences like these, Anzaldúa asserts that one of the central messages of her own writing is that "gender is not the only oppression" (270). She cites her experiences at the University of Texas as one of several factors that motivated her to co-edit—with Chicana writer and dramatist Cherríe Moraga—*This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. First published in 1981, *This Bridge* has since become a guidebook-cum-manifesto for feminist activists and writers of color, and especially for feminist women of color. As in all of Anzaldúa's works, *This Bridge* demands critical awareness of the intersections of racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism within heteropatriarchal culture. Anzaldúa locates her particular struggle and existence from both within and outside of Chicana/o and Anglo culture, politics, and cultural production. "The Anzaldúas lived right at the border," she explains to Ikas. "The border split my family, so to speak" (274).

By the 1980s, many of the focal points and goals of the *Movimiento* had shifted and expanded. Writing produced during this decade demonstrates a heightened sense of urgency to end the decades of silence around issues of gender and sexuality as they relate to, affect, and are affected by issues of race, class, and ethnicity. Anzaldúa's remarks speak to the increasing unrest around inequities within the Chicano Movement, many of which were increasingly engaged by Chicana/o writers and scholars. These preoccupations meant the beginning of a shift in cultural production by Chicana/o activists and artists alike. In many ways, the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* marked a new era for Chicana—and non-Chicana—women, both politically and in terms of literary and scholarly production. As we find in *This Bridge*, language itself became a central feature in critical and theoretical works by Chicana and lesbian-identified scholars. In 1988, *This Bridge* was translated and adapted into Spanish and published as *Esta* [sic] *puente, mi espalda: voces de mujeres tercermundistas en los Estados Unidos*. In the introduction to *Esta puente*, the term "*mujeres de color*" is defined as a "término de identificación política para distinguirnos de la cultura dominante" (1). The title of the book refers to women of color who, as Anzaldúa and Moraga explain: "[son] la puente entre las columnas de la ideología política y la distancia geográfica; ya que en nuestros cuerpos co-existen las identidades de opresiones múltiples a las que hasta ahora ningún movimiento político, no obstante su origen geográfico, ha podido dirigirse simultáneamente" (1). In this way, they form the bridge that facilitates dialogue and action around the multiple and unique forms of oppression experienced by Chicanas.

In spite of the increasing self-empowerment by Chicanas within and beyond the *Movimiento*, the disenfranchisement of Mexican Americans continued to characterize the

socio-political landscape of the US and especially in the Southwest. In the introduction to the fourth edition of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Norma E. Cantú and Aída Hurtado describe the socio-political climate for people of Mexican heritage living in South Texas in the 1970s and 1980s:

> El Valle…is a unique blend of US and Mexican culture, history, language, and ethos. It is also an area that is profoundly racist and isolated from the rest of the Mexico. […] At the time that Anzaldúa was attending schools in South Texas it was not uncommon for children to be physically punished for speaking Spanish in and outside of the classroom. Mexican culture was explicitly considered inferior to US culture and the ethos was one of compulsory, complete and absolute assimilation to US culture, language, and norms. The terrible irony was that in some areas of the Valley at least 85% of the residents were of Mexican descent whose families had, like Anzaldúa's, resided in the areas before Texas was part of the United States. (4-5)

This disavowal of Mexican heritage, culture, and language also permeated institutions of higher education in Texas, a reality to which Anzaldúa attests in *Borderlands*. Like those involved in the *Movimiento* in the 1960s, Chicana/o activists and artists in the 1980s asserted that they had not crossed the border but that the border had crossed them. What differentiated the socio-political and cultural project of Chicanas from this era was that their claims to belonging referred not only to their geo-political subjectivity as US citizens but also to their representation as subjects and agents within the *Movimiento* and in Chicana/o cultural production itself.

In this chapter, I shift my temporal focus to the 1980s and beyond, as I examine more recent contributions to Chicana/o theater and Chicana/o Studies. As in earlier decades, dramatists who begin writing and staging plays in the 1980s and 1990s share a preoccupation with the representation—on their own terms—of Chicana/o history and identity. Unlike many male-centered performances and plays of earlier decades, this new

wave of theatrical writing and production tends to self-reflexively question issues of representation within the *Movimiento* itself. Cherríe Moraga and Josefina López are central figures of Chicana dramaturgy from this era; their works explore distinct and sometimes overlapping means of engaging with contemporary issues of Chicana/o identity, history, and representation in the US. The use of theatrical monologues is one feature common to many plays by Chicana dramatists, including Moraga and López, who work to decenter and problematize dominant theater practices of the *Movimiento* and in dominant US society. Critical consideration of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, a non-theatrical work, in this chapter can help us to understand the importance of acts of self-expression for Chicana and lesbian/gay/queer/bisexual Chicana/os of the 1980s and 1990s, not only through writing but also through the more corporeal and visible communicative acts performed on stage.

While Moraga and López have experienced relative literary and financial success as Chicana writers, their works themselves differ greatly. López's plays tend to be short, comedic, technically straight-forward, Latina/o (rather than Chicana/o)-focused[41], less explicitly grounded in particular political or historical contexts, centered on character "types," and generally more culturally and linguistically accessible to English-speaking audiences. Moraga's plays tend to be longer, spiritually and psychologically-inclined, technically experimental, politically motivated and historically grounded, and specifically Chicana/o-focused; they also generally represent more fully-developed characters and language that could prove intellectually, if not linguistically, challenging for Chicana/o and non-Chicana/o audiences. Despite these stylistic and thematic differences, each

[41] By Latina/o, I refer here to people with roots in countries from Latin America as a whole, rather than from Mexico in particular.

playwright dialogues with and responds to her predecessors and contemporaries, offering unique commentary on what it means—what it feels like, what it looks like, what it sounds like—to grow up Chicana/o in the United States.

Moraga and López deserve critical consideration for their work as writers and directors not because of their gender or sexual identities but because of the continued relevance of that work to the Chicana/o Movement and the narrative that surrounds it. As I discuss in my first three chapters, the history of theater within the *Movimiento* has tended to focus on the contributions of Luis Valdez, first in his work with El Teatro Campesino and later as a solo dramatist and director, a career which continues in the present day. And yet his is not the only trajectory of the development of Chicana/o theater, nor is it the only lens through which to consider theatrical representations of Chicana/o identity and history in the US. In my analysis of *Giving Up the Ghost* by Cherríe Moraga and *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* by Josefina López in this chapter, I demonstrate the existence of multiple and sometimes divergent representations of Chicana/o identity and history through theater. In particular, I consider the incorporation of monologue as a primary communicative act and the role played by the audience, both of which work to represent on stage diverse manifestations of Chicana and Latina characters. Beyond my analysis of these plays for their theatrical characteristics, with this dissertation I seek to afford critical space to dramatists who have not been given adequate consideration and whose works reveal and engage issues of representation within the *Movimiento*, as well as in broader Anglo society. Moreover, I argue in my analysis of these plays that Moraga and López effectively decenter the heteropatriarchal

paradigm and challenge the heteropatriarchal subjects of Chicano dramaturgy of the 1960s and 1970s.

Let's first consider the shift in theatrical form and content that distinguishes Chicana/o theater of the 1980s from that of the previous two decades. In "Aproximaciones al nuevo teatro chicano del autor único," published in 1986, Armando Miguélez separates contemporary Chicano theater into two historical phases: he considers the first to begin in 1965 with the creation of El Teatro Campesino and TENAZ (Teatro Nacional de Aztlán)[42], both influenced by indigenous and popular Mexican theater and performance; the second phase, as the article's title indicates, represents a departure from the collective theater of the 1960s to more formally experimental and varied plays written by individual authors:

> [The 1970s] abre paso a los dramaturgos que, durante los últimos años de los 70, ya hacían un teatro chicano más en consonancia con las preocupaciones individuales (psicológicas, místicas, mágicas, experimentales) o históricas, y con gran influencia de la dramaturgia mundial en cuanto a la complejidad de las tramas de los personajes. (9)

Throughout the article, he characterizes the plays from this transitional moment as more explanatory and historically grounded than what he describes as politically aggressive. Miguélez focuses his literary analysis on three plays written after 1978 that each demonstrate what he calls a "cambio de propósito y de técnica" that differentiates them

[42] According to Jorge Huerta in "Concerning Teatro Chicano," TENAZ's name was suggested in 1971 at the first Teatro Directors' conference in Fresno California by Mariano Leyva (14). TENAZ included representatives from nine *teatros*, including El Teatro Campesino [ETC]; the first TENAZ workshop was held in the summer of 1971 in San Juan Bautista, California, the future home of the ETC playhouse. Huerta lists TENAZ's founding goals as to "1) establish communication between Teatros; 2) provide a means for sharing materials, i.e., actos, songs, etc.; and 3) establish a summer workshop for representatives from as many teatros as possible" (14).

from the politically charged theater of the previous decade (9).[43] For example, he characterizes these plays as theatrically, rather than politically, militant, and he finds in these works an intellectual approach to issues of justice. He maintains that the background and social class of Chicana/o dramatists of the 1970s reveal a shift as well; he describes the newer wave of Chicana/o playwrights as largely middle-class and less concerned with effecting social change to ensure the literal survival of Chicana/os (10).

In terms of the connection between playwright and audience, Miguélez identifies what he sees as a common approach among dramatists from this era to encourage intellectual reflection about reality: "[a finales de los 70] se procura capturar la vida multifacética del pueblo para que ese mismo pueblo se reconozca en sus distintas variantes al presenciar la representación en las tablas" (11). At the same time, he describes these plays as more guided by their authors than those of the previous decade, a trait he equates to "la individualidad burguesa y del orgullo del individuo que ve la obra, al salir de sus manos, como completo y perfecto" (12). Miguélez's characterization of Chicana/o theatrical production of the 1970s and into the 1980s is supported by the plays I consider, insofar as he characterizes this new paradigm as contradicting or moving away from particular aspects of 1960s dramaturgy. He mentions a move toward individual authorship, formal experimentation, and an increasing preoccupation with the psychological development of characters as characteristic of this new era in Chicana/o theater, traits which are featured to varying degrees in the works of Portillo-Trambley, Valdez, Moraga, and López. Yet I disagree with his portrayal of Chicana/o theater of the 1970s and 1980s as less politically-motivated, more entertainment-oriented, and

[43] These plays include *The False Advent of Mary's Child* (Alfonso Hernández), *El corrido de California* (Fausto Avendaño), and *Sun Images* (Estela Portillo-Trambley).

generally more concerned with aesthetics and form than with socio-political commentary. If, as Miguélez describes, Chicana/o theater of the 1960s "sirve, sobre todo, como vehículo de la nueva conciencia" (8), Chicana/o theater of the late 1970s and 1980s, in my estimation, could be described as a vehicle of a *newer* and less homogenizing Chicana/o consciousness.

W.B. Worthen's "Staging América: The Subject of History in Chicano/a Theatre," published in 1997, also explores the evolution of Chicana/o theater from the collectively inspired *actos* of the 1960s to individually written plays of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Worthen characterizes Chicana/o theater throughout these decades not in terms of an increasing depoliticization of content but rather in terms of a consistent preoccupation with both documenting and staging history: "an important strain of Chicano/a theatre has been concerned with recovering the history of Aztlán…and relating that history to contemporary political and social action" (101). He finds in many Chicana/o plays from the 1960s into the 1990s an emphasis on the documentation of "Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicano/a histories occluded by a dominant 'American' narrative" (101). Citing Cherríe Moraga's *Heroes and Saints & Other Plays* (1992) as evidence, Worthen describes the dual function of what he calls "Chicano/a history plays," plays which work to "legitimiz[e] aspects of Chicano/a culture (themselves often deeply hybridized)…at the same time [as] reframing the representation of Chicanos/as produced in dominant culture" (102). As we find in *Heroes and Saints*, where Moraga redefines Valdez's representation of Chicana/o history, Worthen argues that many Chicana/o plays "seem to question the relationship between history and representation, and the uses of history in the fashioning of a Chicana/o subject, Chicano/a agency" (Worthen 109-110). This is

realized through the recovery and staging of the occluded history of Chicana/o oppression, a characteristic which he identifies as common throughout many thematically and formally diverse Chicana/o plays (119). On the subject of audiences, Worthen notes that Chicana/o plays written and staged from the 1960s into the end of the 20th century "make different demands on different kinds of audiences" but are not necessarily unwatchable or unstageable, in terms of their linguistic features and cultural reference points, for non-Chicana/o audiences (120). Whether written with Chicana/o or non-Chicana/o audiences in mind, Worthen identifies a shared demand made by many Chicana/o dramatists and their works: "They demand an effort to learn the languages of the border, of the frontiers of identities as well as of nations—spoken languages, cultural and gestural languages, the language of history, and the politics of position that inform them" (120). Worthen describes representations of borderlands—"potentially productive cultural experimentation"—and borders—"potential [sites of] appropriation and exploitation of subaltern identities and cultures"—as central to plays by Chicana/o dramatists from the mid-to-late 20th century (103).

His characterization of borderlands and borders recalls Berg and Varea's editorial remarks in *Borders: Hybrid Imaginaries / Fractured Geographies* regarding performed borders:

> Engaging borders, in plural, from a performance perspective is particularly useful in that it allows us to look at them as produced by different performative events and expressions, as well as being represented and enacted by a multiplicity of actors. […] Rather than witnessing the disappearance of borders, we are in fact experiencing their multiplication. (1)

In *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa also engages and problematizes the production, representation, and multiplication of borders in the context of US and Mexican history.

In the preface to the first edition, Anzaldúa identifies the physical border under examination as "the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border" (19). In broader terms, however, she reminds the reader of the presence of multiple borderlands that transcend the geopolitical reality and which manifest in every human interaction: "[i]n fact, the Borderlands are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy" (19).

As we saw in Chapter I, Valdez's multi-lingual and activist poem *Pensamiento Serpentino* is emblematic of the idea that the protagonist—and hero—of the fight for Chicana/o liberation is male. From beginning to end, the speaker of the poem calls on the Chicano male subject to "MEXICANIZE / himself / para no caer en cultural trampas" to and engage with the history of his people toward the end of recognizing his own agency and power of self-determination (172). Yet nowhere in *Pensamiento* does Valdez take a critical look at heteropatriarchal culture in order to consider the double burden of discrimination faced by Chicana women and lesbian/gay/queer/bisexual Chicana/os. Furthermore, he reinscribes those cultural norms into the canon of Chicana/o literature. Like Valdez, Anzaldúa employs a serpentine allegory and rhetoric in order to first problematize, then reject, and finally rescript Anglo conceptualizations of time, history, and the relationship between past and present. In linguistic, rhetorical, and political contestation of *Pensamiento*, however, Anzaldúa articulates her theoretical and poetic work through the voice of a Chicana and Mestiza-identified subject: "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. 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" (81). Whereas *Pensamiento*, much like the characters of Valdez's theatrical works, is outwardly and externally focused on US and Chicana/o society and culture, *Borderlands* turns this gaze inward in a more internally and psychologically-focused exploration of the inner self of the New Mestiza. This feature mirrors a central distinction between plays from the 1970s, like *Zoot Suit*, and plays from the 1980s and 1990s, like *Giving Up the Ghost*. Consideration of *Borderlands* is productive to this chapter in two ways. First, it contextualizes the shift in cultural production by Chicanas that characterizes the decade of the 1980s, both in terms of its hybrid form and the themes explored. Even more importantly, Anzaldúa demonstrates in *Borderlands* through hybridized narrative a central feature we find in Chicana dramaturgy of the 1980s and into the 21st century: the creation of multi-faceted and heterogeneous Chicana protagonists whose acts of self-expression work to counteract the hypermasculine imagery and protagonists of the dominant *Movimiento* narrative of the 1960s and 1970s.

First published in 1987, reprinted in 1999, and then printed posthumously in 2007 and 2012, *Borderlands* breaks from the standards of the Western approach to literary theory through its multi-lingual, multi-gendered, multi-voiced narrative style that reads like an elaborate prose poem.[44] The second half of the book is composed entirely of poetry, a genre which allows Anzaldúa the freedom to conclude in precisely the same

[44] By a Western approach to literary theory, I am referring to (1) the formal structure of traditional criticism (prose narrative, academic/impersonal register, and monolingual language use) and (2) the conceptual and intellectual model of Western theory (intertextuality and dialogue with other canonical texts and theorists, inherently Occidental representations of History and the world, and an implied educated, if not erudite, audience). Anzaldúa certainly demonstrates in her writing a profound knowledge and understanding of Western culture, academia, and literary theory. My point is that she does so in order to call this model into question, rather than to simply accept it as the only valid theoretical model.

impassioned, intimate, and liminal space of the Borderlands, of the *frontera*, that she evokes with her title. Refusing to conform to the *reglas fijas* of any one literary or disciplinary field, Anzaldúa challenges and liberates Western Literary Theory from its heterosexist, male-dominated, and Euro-centric position in the Western, academic world. She replaces that model with her own activist theory grounded in "*la conciencia de la mestiza*," or the way of the New Mestiza. Even her "Acknowledgement" at the beginning of the work suggests her conscious use of bold, unapologetic, and atypical language that will continue throughout the work: "*gracias a toditos ustedes*. / THIS BOOK / is dedicated *a todos mexicanos* / on both sides of the border." In the dedication, she clearly identifies the potential readers she envisions for her book:

> To you who walked with me upon my path and who held out a hand when I stumbled;
> to you who brushed past me at crossroads never to touch me again;
> to you whom I never chanced to meet but who inhabit borderlands similar to mine;
> to you for whom the borderlands is unknown territory.

What stands out in these lines is the fact that Anzaldúa does not limit the intended readership of her book to the Mestiza subject or to Chicana/os. Instead, she invites friends and strangers, those ignorant to the lives and struggles of Chicana/os, and all those who might be able to relate in their own way to a life in the borderlands. This invitation to diverse audiences is also a feature we find in plays by Moraga and López.

Many 21st century scholars—from fields as widely ranging as Chicana/o Studies and Cultural Production, Ethnic Studies, Women, Gender, & Queer Studies, Latin American Studies, US and Latin American History, English Literature, and Latina/o Studies—consider *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* to be Gloria Anzaldúa's most enduring and influential work. *Borderlands* earned Anzaldúa a spot on the *Library*

Journal's "Best Books of 1987," the only book from a small press to make the list (Anzaldúa xx). Editor Joan Pinkvoss notes that Anzaldúa's book continues to be studied in courses on feminist theory, contemporary American writers, autobiography, Chicana/o and Latina/o literature, cultural studies, and major American authors (Anzaldúa 1). Her book has also inspired significant criticism from a small but vocal minority within academia, public school systems, and the general US public. In 2012, for example, Arizona's Tucson Unified School System banned the book through a law prohibiting the teaching of Ethnic Studies in public schools under the supposition that Ethnic Studies, and Mexican American Studies in particular, promote an overthrow of the US government.

In the introduction to the second edition of *Borderlands*, Sonia Saldívar-Hull describes Anzaldúa's writing and writing process in performative terms:

> Anzaldúa stages her writing within the larger context of the continent and its layered histories. When Anzaldúa deploys multiple languages as part of her New Mestiza methodology, she enunciates her writing as an act of self-creation within that context, a strategy she claims as a Nahuatl concept. (9)

As the fourth chapter of *Borderlands* demonstrates, Anzaldúa's writing is situated in the broader context of the physical border between Mexico and the United States. Saldívar-Hull notes that Anzaldúa was not the first to articulate a Chicana, feminist epistemology[45]; yet she is the first to theorize a queer, Chicana feminism through what Saldívar-Hull describes as a New Mestiza hermeneutics. Through "the lens of a woman-identified woman," Anzaldúa forges a path through a series of previously uncharted

[45] In the introduction to the third edition, Latina novelist Julia Álvarez mentions Cherríe Moraga and Sandra Cisneros, in particular, as Latina writers who were publishing in the early 1980s and who were dedicated to fostering important literary dialogues about the intersectionality of Latina identity, civil rights and feminism (xi).

landscapes, both physical-geographical-topographical and psychological-sexual-spiritual (Anzaldúa 1). In initiating this process of self-exploration, she calls into question history as recounted from the perspective of the white, heterosexist, Anglo male and instead offers an alternate genre, "*la autohistoria*," through which she "presents history as a serpentine cycle rather than a linear narrative" (2).

Anzaldúa's central concern is both intimately personal and a collective historical reality. She draws on memories, dreams, visions, and her own experiences growing up Chicana in the borderlands in order to consider and criticize historic and widespread rejection and negation of Chicana/os on racial, ethnic, linguistic, and national grounds. By presenting the situation of the New Mestiza as an identity question in a work that adeptly blends literary genres and writing styles, Anzaldúa proposes a reconceptualization not only of Mestiza identity but also of literary theory itself. "*Borderlands*, a socio-politically specific elaboration of late twentieth-century *feminist* Chicana epistemology, signals movement toward coalitions with other *mujeres* across the US-Mexico geopolitical border," Saldívar-Hull writes. She underscores the ways in which *Borderlands* has helped to foster a *transfronteriza,* "that is, a transnational feminist, *a transfrontera feminist*," consciousness (Anzaldúa 1). . In the introduction to the third edition, Julia Álvarez remarks that "Anzaldúa [gave voice] to what it meant to be a hybrid, a mixture, a mestiza. […] Gloria Anzaldúa was one of the first to crystallize and celebrate the potential of a borderland state of mind" (Anzaldúa iii-iv). Anzaldúa constructs and adopts a language of the borderlands, a language born from the *nueva mestiza* that is capable of engaging questions of Self, consciousness, spirituality, sexuality, gender identity, and human communication in the broadest sense. The result is

a trans-disciplinary work that unabashedly shatters academic boundaries, particularly those separating history, theory, literature, cultural studies, writing, language, and autobiography.

The first half of *Borderlands*, titled "Atravesando fronteras / Crossing Borders," is composed of seven chapters written primarily in prose, although each of these chapters also includes segments of poetry. Anzaldúa balances consistency and evolution in the structure of her work; each passage both recapitulates the previous section's central concerns as she advances the argument further into the unfamiliar and uncomfortable—particularly for an Anglo readership—territory of the Borderlands, a space which Anzaldúa clears for herself with every stroke of the pen. She opens every chapter with a quote, either her own or taken from a relevant musician or writer. [46] She juxtaposes each citation with an intimate personal experience or memory, usually recalled from her childhood. The effect in the more "formal" arguments that follow is a multi-layered line of reasoning, expressed through hybridized language and writing, that achieves both a constant evolution and a seamless overlapping of personal memories with the collective historical past of present-day Chicana/os.

Chapter 1, "The Homeland, Aztlán / *El otro México,*" lays the historical foundation for the discussions of history, spirituality, and the female Self that Anzaldúa explores in subsequent chapters. She establishes a topography of Chicana/o displacement dating back to 35000 B.C. and reaching its climax in the early 16th century when Spanish *conquistadores* invaded Mexico "and conquered it," leaving only 1.5 million pure-blooded Indians by the 1650s (27). At this crucial historical moment, Anzaldúa

[46] With the exception of the fourth chapter, which opens with an original poem, not entirely unlike the citations in other chapters but not offset in italics or cited.

establishes that a "*una nueva raza, el mestizo"* is born (27). By proposing an official Chicana/o genealogy through what Saldívar-Hull calls a "*testimonio*-like pedagogy," Anzaldúa deconstructs the dominant Anglo discourse of mutually beneficial territorial expansion and national gain (2). Central to this deconstruction is her recollection and recovery of memories long since erased from the "official" narrative of US and Western history. As Saldívar-Hull underscores,

> [Anzaldúa] offers knowledge that Anglo-centric schools tend to erase, interjecting a counter-narrative that tells of the appropriation of land by Anglo-Americans who did more than take territory: the process of absorption into the US included the imposition of White Supremacy aided by the overt terrorist tactics of the Texas Rangers. (Anzaldúa 2)

This knowledge works to position the reader—Chicana/o and non-Chicana/o—in a vantage point from which s/he can more readily follow the construction of the New Mestiza subject throughout the poetic unfolding of *Borderlands*.

Anzaldúa also introduces the mythology and symbology of the eagle and the serpent in this chapter, figures central to the hyper-masculine iconography that characterized the *Movimiento* in the 1960s and 1970s: "[t]he eagle symbolizes the spirit (as the sun, the father); the serpent symbolizes the soul (as the earth, the mother)" (27). For Anzaldúa, these spiritual symbols represent the struggle between "spiritual/celestial/male" and "underworld/earth/female." The eventual sacrifice of the serpent to the eagle, an event foreseen by the Aztecs, represents the patriarchal vanquishing of the feminine and the matriarchal lineage in pre-Columbian America (27). This is a significant claim: rather than blaming the identity crisis of the contemporary Chicana/o solely on recent political/historical developments, Anzaldúa identifies the "*herida abierta*" of the US-Mexican border as symptomatic of a wound so ancient and

profoundly deep that its roots reach back to the pre-Colombian era while its trunk remains grounded firmly in *La Conquista* that began in 1521 (25). This is a rhetorical strategy we see repeated in many moments in *Borderlands*; Anzaldúa puts the responsibility for self-determination and liberation on the Chicana/o subject while also deconstructing dominant narratives and tropes that have fostered guilt, shame, and blame within Chicana/o communities. In a section titled "*El destierro* / The Lost Land," Anzaldúa describes the appropriation of Mexican territory by the Gringo and the repeated displacement of the *mexicanos*, in particular in the aftermath of the 1848 signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (29). The signing of this treaty established what she calls the "border-fence," which effectively split the Mexican people in two and has had devastating consequences into our present moment.

Anzaldúa then turns to what she does best: poeticizing, with unapologetic and multi-lingual anger and eloquence, her particular situation as a Chicana in what she calls *la crisis* of the 20th century. The *maquiladoras*, the devaluation of the *peso*, and the lack of jobs for Mexicans: Anzaldúa links all of these to *la travesía* that has followed Chicana/os into the present.[47] She makes explicit the connection between their repeated historical displacements and their eventual reterritorialization through *el retorno* to the promised land. She identifies the Mexican woman as most at risk in the border-crossing experience: "*La mojada, la mujer indocumentada*, is doubly threatened in this country. Not only does she have to contend with sexual violence, but like all women, she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness" (34-35). Anzaldúa draws on her own experience as a Mestiza who has learned to straddle borders in her daily life. She concludes Chapter 1 by

[47] *Travesía* in the sense of a travesty, and also as a kind of crossing or migration.

asserting that the Borderlands are, for better or worse, the Chicana's homeland: "This is her home/ this thin edge of/ barbwire" (35).

In Chapter 2, "*Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan*," Anzaldúa leaves behind the historical rewriting in favor of more intimate and controversial subject matter: (female) rebellion, cultural tyranny, gender identity, homophobia, terrorism and the ascension of the *india*-Mestiza to her rightful position as a subject capable of self-determination. In this chapter the reader meets Anzaldúa face-to-face as she unequivocally assigns responsibility to those at fault and calls on the multiplicities of her own Self to take the first steps toward (r)evolution. Code-switching and subject-switching, from *I* to *she* back to *I* again, she exposes and rejects the cultural tyranny "made by those in power—men" (38), a tyranny which threatens the many subjects that Anzaldúa identifies as most at risk: women, lesbians, Chicanas, half-and-halves, the brown-skinned race, and the *india*-Mestiza. At the end of this chapter, Anzaldúa leaves the reader with an image of the goddess *Coatlalopeuh*, who waits patiently for the *india*-Mestiza to heal her wounds, get back on her feet, and liberate herself from the violation, the invisibility, and the silence that have been carved into her consciousness and written onto her body: "[f]or 300 years she has been a slave, a force of cheap labor, colonized by the Spaniard, the Anglo, by her own people" (44-45). In confronting the tradition of heteropatriarchal dominance in her community and within Anglo culture, Anzaldúa avows the commencement of the Mestiza's fight for independence.

Chapters 3 and 4 are centered on questions of female and feminist spirituality and iconography, as well as the construction of spiritual Borderlands in the Americas. In "Entering into the Serpent," Anzaldúa arms herself with the feminist tools she constructs

in the previous chapters to explore the legacy of her indigenous forbearers. Snakes, *víboras*, and *serpientes* have been a significant part of her life and spirituality, through remembrance of her ancestors, childhood dreams, and trance-induced visions. Anzaldúa contends that *la Víbora*, a wholly female presence whose earliest incarnation was manifested in the goddess *Coatlicue* ("Serpent Snake"), is "older than Freud, older than gender" (48). To enter into the serpent is a New Mestiza mantra that connotes entering the Earth "to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul" (48). After tracing the evolution of *Coatlicue* in its multiple aspects and forms, Anzaldúa identifies the Azteca-Mexica culture as the first to split the female deities, assigning them negative and dark attributes while replacing their positive and light characteristics with male deities. As a consequence, not only female deities but also the female Self was split in two, into "upper (light)" and "underworld (dark)" aspects (49). Anzaldúa asserts that male dominance and heteropatriarchal society are a direct result of the female *madre/puta* dichotomy still in existence today. According to Anzaldúa, this damaging dichotomy can and must be counteracted by the New Mestiza through what she calls the *Coatlicue* State.

In "*La herencia de Coatlicue/*The *Coatlicue* State," Anzaldúa begins with a fragmented, free-verse poem which continues intermittently throughout the chapter. The interwoven poetry and prose emphasize the multiplicities and insecurities of Self and psyche that the New Mestiza subject has experienced as a result of the *Coatlicue* State in which she lives. The poem begins in darkness as the speaker encounters a ghost-like woman with four heads:

protean being

> dark dumb windowless no moon glides
> across the stone the nightsky alone alone
> no lights just mirrorwalls obsidian smoky in the
> mirror she sees a woman with four heads […]
> tunneling through the air in the photograph a double
> image a ghost arm alongside the flesh one. (63)

For Anzaldúa, the *Coatlicue* state is the embodiment and projection of the "seemingly contradictory aspects" of her existence—seen and being seen, being both subject and object, and recognizing herself as I and she. The subject-switching from *I* to *she* is particularly noticeable in this chapter, as it will be in the poems that make up the second half of *Borderlands*; it creates the sensation of standing before a mirror and simultaneously *being* and *seeing* yourself looking back. Rather than rejecting the duality of the Borderlands, of the *Coatlicue* State, and the shame she felt "for being abnormal," Anzaldúa describes for the reader the corporeal sensations she experiences that preface the "*oposición e insurrección*" that builds both within and around her (65). "I am not afraid," she reminds the reader, in both an act of agency and a call-to-action for her readers (73). "The *Coatlicue* State Is A Prelude To Crossing," a subheading in this chapter reads, a supposition that Anzaldúa enacts through the act of writing:

> Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape "knowing," I won't be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. "Knowing" is painful because after "it" happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before. (70)

This passage can be read as a testimony to Anzaldúa's personal and individual evolution into a New Mestiza subject who is aware and accepting of her whole self. When considered in the context of the larger project she undertakes in *Borderlands*, it also

becomes an invitation to the reader to do the same: to become conscious and to embrace necessary knowledge, even in the face of personal discomfort.

The fifth and sixth chapters deal with the themes of written expression and the use of language. As Saldívar-Hull notes, in these chapters Anzaldúa "enacts the multilingual methodology of *mestiza* language" (*Borderlands* 258); she both describes it as and demonstrates it to be a physically embodied and intimate act. She explores the tools of language in order to emphasize the importance of forms of writing, like her own, that are situated within the broader context of a particular region and its superimposed histories. Before discussing the writing process as an act of Mestiza agency, Anzaldúa introduces the reader to the reality of the systematic silencing of Chicana/os within a socio-historical as well as a deeply personal context through linguistic prohibition: "So if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language," Anzaldúa asserts (81). She emphasizes the intrinsic connection between her ethnic identity and linguistic identity. In order to overcome the tradition of silence, the New Mestiza must declare the right to her own voice and to her own language (81). Fundamental to this process is the legitimization of the multiple Chicana/o languages and, in particular, the language of the New Mestiza.

In "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa contextualizes and validates her own use of multiple languages, which blends Spanish and English in a variety of ways. She defines Chicano Spanish as a border tongue and a living language, rather than a broken or bastardized language. It is in this chapter that Anzaldúa brings to life the inherent relationship between language and culture, along with more subtle connections between language and identity. In Chapter 6, "*Tlilli, Tlapalli /* The Path of the Red and Black Ink," Anzaldúa elaborates on the validity and the legitimacy of Chicana/o

languages by proposing and enacting a multilingual methodology of Mestiza/o language. The New Mestiza subject's writing is an act of self-creation through which she communicates the personal sacrifice required in writing her own history. The act of writing, for Anzaldúa, is a sacrifice in part she must always write "against a resistance. Something in me does not want to do this writing," she confesses. "Yet once I'm immersed in it, I can go fifteen to seventeen hours in one sitting and I don't want to leave it" (89). She describes the writing blocks she must endure as *Coatlicue* states she inherited through her Mestiza identity and history (96). She characterizes her writing process as surrendering to what she calls "[t]he stress of living with cultural ambiguity [that] both compels me to write and blocks me" (96). She describes her invocation of art and images, her entrance into the Shamanic trance state, and the inherent sensuality of the writing act.

In the final paragraph, she describes herself seated in front of her computer, *Amiguita*. A make-shift altar rests upon the monitor and a serpent shaft sits to the right. Anzaldúa grants the reader access to her inner thoughts as she reflects upon "the sacrifice that the act of creation requires, a blood sacrifice" (97). In the conclusion to this chapter, she equates her scholarly and creative work to Aztecan sacrifices or offerings:

> For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth's body—stone, sky, liquid, soil. This work, these images, piercing tongue or ear lobes with cactus needle, are my offerings, are my Aztecan blood sacrifices. (97)

Anzaldúa is not the first to utilize the metaphor of a woman's own body that produces the ink used for writing. In "The Laugh of the Medusa," French feminist theorist and writer Hélène Cixous demonstrated and expanded upon the theory of *écriture féminine*, or

"women's writing," in order to bring to light the ways in which women (writers) have been repressed and negated. She consciously describes not the metaphysical but rather the physical sensations of the woman who expresses her Self for the first time in front of a reading public. "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display…Write your self. Your body must be heard," Cixous demands of her implied female readership (880). She appeals to the body itself as something integrally connected to the act of writing for women of the 1970s. Moreover, she demands a repositioning of this body from the space of silenced object to that of a new subject, capable of expressing itself in its own terms.

Cixous make repeated references to the female body as a readable text and, moreover, to a woman's desire to write and her act of writing as necessarily corporal and sensual:

> Woman be unafraid of any other place, of any same, or any other. My eyes, my tongue, my ears, my nose, my skin, my mouth, my body-for-(the)-other…Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive—all these drives are our strengths, and among them is the gestation drive—just like the desire to write: a desire to live self from within, a desire for the swollen belly, for *language*, for *blood*. (890, emphasis mine)

Cixous characterizes her *écriture feminine* through graphic references to explicitly female bodies, bodies that have been repressed by patriarchal discourse and that finally express themselves through the female writer: "There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink" (881). Although grounded in markedly distinct socio-political and cultural contexts, the similarities between Cixous' and Anzaldúa's perspectives on the female body and the act of writing are undeniable. Both assert that the female body can be affirmed, at least in part, by the act of writing itself.

They portray this act as the means to liberate the woman (and her body) from invisibility; yet they refuse to convert this modern, articulate body into a new, essentialist model for a universal human being. Anzaldúa's depiction of the writing act as inherently corporal reaches new significance in this chapter in that she departs from the tendency of Western theorists and critics to depersonalize and de-subjectify their works, under the guise that the result is more objective and less open to critique.

Chapter 7, "*La conciencia de la mestiza* / Towards a New Consciousness," is the most frequently referenced chapter from Anzaldúa's work; it is the product of a writing act still underway during the conception of *Borderlands*. In this chapter, Anzaldúa constructs a new, spiritually activist, feminist subject who reinscribes Chicana history into the "official" record. She develops a working definition of Mestiza consciousness and outlines the requisite actions for the New Mestiza, finally able to hold the positions of subject and object within her own writing/speech act. Building on José Vasconcelos' *La Raza Cósmica*[48] through a feminist lens, she describes Mestiza consciousness as an "'alien' consciousness [that] is presently in the making…*una conciencia de mujer*" (99). This *conciencia* is the essence of the Borderlands to which Anzaldúa has alluded throughout the entire work. Above all, the *mestiza* way demands a tolerance for ambiguity, a willingness to embrace *la encrucijada* (the crossroads straddled by those who inhabit the Borderlands), and an acknowledgement that while "[t]he struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one" it is a struggle that must include the "new man." She

[48] In "Mestizos Critique the New World: Vasconcelos, Anzaldúa, and Anaya" Robert Con Davis-Undiano traces "the foregrounding of indigenous culture" and "the rise of mestizo culture" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (118). He points out that long before the publication of *Borderlands*, Mexican writer José Vasconcelos had stressed that "the subjectivity of indigenous peoples themselves is at stake in their telling of their own story" and had defined *Mexicanidad* as a series of tensions between the Mexican "autochthonous cultures" and the post-Conquest European cultures (120).

concludes the first half of the book with the mantra she first introduces in Chapter 1: "This land was Mexican once/ was Indian always/ and is./ And will be again" (113). In this way, Anzaldúa brings her narrative full circle, back to the territorial borderlands she used as a point of departure in Chapter 1.

In the second half of *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa employs poetry as a stylistic, historiographic, and theoretical counterpoint to the poetic prose of the first half. Her poetry provides yet another creative outlet for tracing the roots of the New Mestiza from her historical past and up to her present in the late 20th century, above all focusing on the relationship between the Mestiza and her own body. The organization of the second half of the book, divided thematically into groupings of several poems under illuminating headings, suggests the evolution of the New Mestiza's spirit. [49] The theoretical and socio-historical foundation developed in the first seven chapters has contextualized the metaphorical stage upon which her poems will take place. Although it would be certainly be a worthwhile endeavor to examine her entire poetic corpus in detail, for the scope of this project I have chosen to consider a selection of poems from each thematic section that demonstrate the relationship of the Mestiza woman to her body, recounted through Anzaldúa's own writing act.

"Cervicide," from "Más antes en los ranchos," takes places on a ranch just north of the Mexico-US border. The poem begins as the US law enforcement and their hunting dogs arrive in search of domesticated "venaditas," which were illegal to own at that time. It is the young daughter, Prieta, who acts quickly to defend her family; she kills their fawn, using all of the physical and emotional strength she can muster:

[49] The titles of the poetic sections are: "Más antes en los ranchos", "La pérdida", "*Crossers* y otros atravesados", "Cihuatlyotl, *Woman Alone*", "Animas" and "El Retorno."

> Prieta dug a hole in the shed, a makeshift hole. She could hear the warden talking to her mother. Her mother's English had suddenly gotten bad—she was trying to stall *la guardia*. Prieta rolled the fawn into the hole, threw in the empty bottle. With her fingers raked in the dirt. Dust caked on her arms and face where tears had fallen. She patted the ground flat with her hands and swept it with a dead branch. (127)

Taken most literally, this killing is a violent act forced upon Prieta by an Anglo, male authority figure. Yet there is also another, more symbolic level of interpretation of the killing of the fawn; the young animal could also represent Prieta herself and, by extension, any Mestiza woman who has found herself in a similar situation—with self-repression as the only possible act of self-defense. Anzaldúa highlights in this poem not only the repression and the violation of the female body and autonomy but also how such acts have frequently been displaced into the hands of the victims themselves, thereby permitting their continuation on a broad scale.

Another poem from this section also references the historic and systematic violation of the female body, not of the new, third generation but rather of the first generation. "Immaculate, Inviolate: *Como Ella*" is woven together from memories marked by nostalgia. In the opening verses, the speaker introduces the reader to the memory of her *Mamagrande* who "always came to visit," a woman with "so much dignity…and pride" (130, 132). Through the metaphor of fire as a mirror through which one gains vision into the past, the speaker pieces together the tragic and painful story of the bodily violations her grandmother endured. The narration is told through the eyes of a girl, who describes her grandmother's "yellowed talons," "knotted fingers," "tongue," "thumbnail," "chapped lips," "white hair" and "pink skull," thus giving physical form to someone who exists in the present only as a memory. The violation perpetrated against her grandmother began when "[a] long time ago she [her grandmother] burned herself"

and, as a result, "[t]hey made her give up the ranchhouse" and move in with her relatives. Since then, her grandmother has been plagued by a fire that left her in a state of deterioration and numbness:

> And as she talked I saw her breathing in the fire,
> coughing up sooty spittle
> skin blistering, becoming pus
> nerve endings exposed,
> sweating, skin pallid, clammy
> the nausea, the dizziness,
> swelling to twice her size.
>
> I watched the charred scars
> on her throat and breasts
> turn into parchment splotches
> they catch the sheen of the coals
> glow pink and lavender over the blue skin.
> She'd felt numb, she told me,
> her voice hoarse from the fire
> or the constant cigarette in her mouth,
> as though frostbitten. (131-132)

The intimacy of the memory handed down from grandmother to granddaughter brings them to the issue of marriage, a legal arrangement portrayed as a state of obligatory, sexual violation, as a never-ending rape culture:

> Finally she looked into my brown eyes,
> told me how Papagrande would flip the skirt
> of her nightgown over her head
> and in the dark take out his *palo*, his stick,
> and do *lo que hacen todos los hombres*
> while she laid back and prayed
> he would finish quickly. (132)

By recounting these memories, the grandmother's violations are transferred to and written upon the mind of the speaker, a New Mestiza subject who has the strength and the courage to carry and transcend the physical and psychic scars of her foremothers. Above all, this poem demonstrates the cyclical nature of violations against the Mestiza, as well

as the fact that these violations have historically been supported and inflicted by a heteropatriarchal society.

In the next section, "La pérdida," Anzaldúa turns to what has been lost, in a physical and sexual sense, by the women who suddenly found themselves on the other side of the newly formed border between the new nation states of Mexico and the US. "We Call Them Greasers" exhibits an unexpected change in perspective, as this poem features an Anglo, male speaker who recounts his rape of a Mestiza woman:

> She lay under me whimpering.
> I plowed into her hard
> kept thrusting and thrusting
> felt him watching from the mesquite tree
> heard him keening like a wild animal
> in that instant I felt such contempt for her
> round face and beady black eyes like an Indian's.
> Afterwards I sat on her face until
> her arms stopped flailing,
> didn't want to waste a bullet on her.
> The boys wouldn't look me in the eyes.
> I walked up to where I had tied her man to the tree
> and spat in his face. Lynch him, I told the boys. (156-157)

Here the act of writing is used in an explicitly sexual and physical way, in order to describe a rape so brutal that it results in the death of the woman and her male partner. The concept of the Mestiza's blood sacrifice through writing reaches new significance here, as the reader is forced to imagine through graphic language the violent and violatory acts that the speaker recounts.

In the third poetic section, Anzaldúa transitions to a more personally intimate tone in a selection of first-person poems, all of which relate to her experiences as a Mestiza and a poet. The title of this section, "Crossers," underscores the liminal state of being she evokes throughout these poems, a state she likens to being "suspended in fluid sky"

(162). The speakers of these poems present themselves as deterritorialized, without a homeland; little by little they begin to rediscover their own bodies and the sense of home they carry within themselves. In "Poets have strange eating habits," the theme of rape is explored in terms of the limits of the Mestiza's body; she has survived centuries of violation, negation, and hardship, and she is now getting ready to "[take] that plunge / off the high cliff" (162). Here we sense a significant shift in power, into the hands of the speaker herself, who chooses to reinvent herself through an act of bodily self-exploration:

> She takes that plunge
> off the high cliff
> hooves tumbling in the vagrant air
> head tucked between her legs
> a cold wind tugging at her back
> cutting tears from my eyes
> the obsidian knife, air
> the nightsky alone alone
>
> …Wounding is a deeper healing.
>
> Suspended in fluid sky
> I, eagle fetus, live serpent
> feathers growing out of my skin. (162)

Although more in control of her body, there is still a degree of uncertainty behind the speaker's actions; she knows that she must first "hit the bottom of the chasm" in order to then reinvent herself (163). Even so, the speaker asserts that "[t]aking the plunge" is "an act as / routine as cleaning my teeth," thereby presenting the reader with another invocation of the physical body (163). She embraces a dualist state of being, through her use of "She" and "I" and in her references to the serpent and the eagle as complementary parts of her own body and spirit. The way in which she asserts her own body's presence

and sensations suggests that she has recuperated at least some of the characteristics traditionally denied to Chicanas within dominant, heteropatriarchal culture.

"The Cannibal's *Canción*" also employs explicitly corporal language. Anzaldúa breaks again from the expectations for a book of critical theory, not only by including poetry in the first place but also through graphic and visceral references to the body in a poem that equates love to cannibalism:

> It is our custom
> to consume
> the person we love.
> Taboo flesh: swollen
> genitalia nipples
> the scrotum the vulva
> the soles of the feet
> the palms of the hand
> heart and liver taste best.
> Cannibalism is blessed. (165)

Together, the poems in this section underscore the fact that the historical silencing of the Mestiza subject explored in the first half of *Borderlands* does not extend only to questions of voice; it extends also to questions of the body. In order to overcome widespread and systematic silencing, even the body must be re-written and reinscribed, in this case upon the physical page.

Several other poems in the third section also deal with the reinscription of the female body in sexual and physical terms. "*Compañera, cuando amábamos*" tells the story of a romantic but failed relationship between two women. The third stanza, in particular, describes the physical bodies of the two protagonists in a sensual and intimate way. "Interface," although more abstract, chronicles an unusual relationship between a "She" (Leyla) and an "I" (the speaker of the poem), mirror images of one another who

come to know each other more intimately as the poem progresses. Leyla first manifests as a kind of ghost or alien figure:

> Once I accidentally ran my arm
> through her body
> felt heat on one side of my face.
> She wasn't solid. (170)

The speaker is a flesh-and-blood woman who is trapped within a body but still able to be touched, just as Leyla feels symbolically trapped by her differences. Through their connection, they begin to transform one another; they enter into an intimate-sexual relationship that they weren't able to realize when Leyla didn't inhabit a fully physical form. Through Leyla's physical transformation, however, their intimate connection loses a vital and ineffable quality: "But no matter how passionately we made love / it was never like before / she'd taken on skin and bone" (173-174). This is an important poem in the poetic development that Anzaldúa establishes in the second half of the book; it emphasizes the loss inherent in any kind of transformation, or border crossing, including the transformations experienced by the New Mestiza as she begins to rise up and assert her Self, her spirit, and her identity. In order to recover their bodies and their identities, both linguistic-physical and cultural-spiritual, Anzaldúa and the New Mestizas must necessarily give up something else. It is significant that Leyla is first represented as a kind of alien figure; she never feels completely comfortable in her body, neither as a ghost nor in a fully human form. She never feels at home; she resides in the borderlands, the liminal space between two worlds and a space only too familiar to the New Mestiza subject.

In her choice of a title for the sixth and final poetic section, Anzaldúa makes explicit the return she has undertaken in *Borderlands*. "El retorno" marks both a return to

the theme of life in the borderlands and a return to the theoretical framework initiated in the prose narrative of the first half of the book. In "To live in the Borderlands means you," she reasserts—with candor and nuance—what it means to be a Mestiza woman who inhabits the liminal space of the Borderlands:

> "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…
> half and half—both woman and man, neither—
> a new gender.
>
> To live in the Borderlands means knowing
> that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years,
> is no longer speaking to you,
> that *mexicanas* call you *rajetas*,
> that denying the Anglo inside you
> is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black. (216)

The reality of feeling split (in both senses of the word *rajetas*) is once more elucidated; it is akin to the relationship described between the protagonists in "Interface," among other poems that treat the issue of dueling selves and identities. It is a painful and devastating reality to endure and yet not, according to the speaker, without potential or hope. By the sixth stanza, intensity and persistence have given way to a new kind of acceptance and resolve, feelings born not from resignation but rather from inhabiting the unique vantage point of the eye of the storm:

> In the Borderlands
> you are the battleground
> where enemies are kin to each other;
> you are at home, a stranger,
> the border disputes have been settled
> the volley of shots have shattered the truce
> you are wounded, lost in action
> dead, fighting back;
> […]

To survive the Borderlands
you must live *sin fronteras*
be a crossroads. (216-217)

The storm is not over and yet, through the speaker of this poem, Anzaldúa offers the New Mestiza the tools she will need to live the kind of life she envisions for herself. Above all, she demonstrates the strength and potential of the linguistic tools and skills particular to the Mestiza subject. As "*Canción de la diosa de la noche* (for Randy Conner)" concludes, "[t]he moon eclipses the sun. / *La diosa* lifts us. / We don the feathered mantle / and charge our fate" (221). She enacts through her own writing the power of the Mestiza tongue, *la lengua de la serpiente*. In so doing, she offers the "you" to whom this poem is addressed the opportunity to make peace with the struggles she has yet to face and to embrace the knowledge she carries within her.

The reader can now fully visualize the New Mestiza; we have experienced her birth, her violations, her dreams, her exile, her memories, her body, her psyche, and her writing acts. The corporality that characterizes the act of writing for Anzaldúa not only rewrites the parameters of literary theory but also offers a model of a writer—and a self-identified female writer—who was successful in writing herself into a text, as well as into the "official" history of the territory that is known today as the United States. The reading process encourages the transfer of the Mestiza's own corporal sensations and experiences onto the reader. In this way, both the reading act and the writing act become inherently corporal processes.

One of Anzaldúa's most vivid and intriguing metaphors, the metaphor of the Shadow-Beast as the rebel within her, surfaces in the fourth chapter as a way of expressing her understanding of her own psychological make-up:

> It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to takes orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts. (38)

Anzaldúa returns again and again to the Shadow-Beast throughout the work. She refuses to advocate for the continued repression of this darker, inner, and sexual presence, as traditional psycho-analytic theory might direct. Rather, she not only demands the integration of the Shadow-Beast into the whole of the psyche but also provides a working example for the reader of how such an integration might feel and sound.

Theories of sub-alternity are also fundamental to Anzaldúa's re-conceptualization of the feminine, the feminist, and the new Mestiza. The majority of her arguments are triggered by personal memories or dreams, expanded to accommodate the collective history of the Chicana/o, and then re-focused on the subject of Woman, always with the most to lose in the world of male dominance and female subordination portrayed in her writing. But the reader quickly realizes that the Woman to whom she refers is in fact not just any woman. She is, in the most intimate segments of the text, Anzaldúa's higher Self, marginalized and made to feel shame for being a woman, a feminist, a Chicana, and a lesbian. Thus the territory of the Borderlands is a subaltern space for the "subalternly gendered, sexed subjects" that Paola Bacchetta discusses in her reflection on Anzaldúa in the introduction to the third edition (xv). What distinguishes Anzaldúa from more traditional post-colonialists, however, is that the de-colonization project she enacts throughout her work, rather than simply suggesting a re-positioning of center or a migratory revolution of post-colonial subjects, inspires the New Mestiza subject to begin a process of *self*-interpellation and to embrace the Borderlands she already inhabits,

physically and in mind and spirit. Reduced to a single phrase, *Borderlands* would read simply "I exist/We exist," the first step toward the external socio-political changes she envisions. For Anzaldúa, the sub-altern *india*-Mestiza *can* speak[50], and, in particular, she can write.

One of Anzaldúa's most significant contributions to the discipline of literary theory is the *way* in which she writes. "*Escribo con la tinta de mi sangre*," she confesses, a metaphor for the battles against silencing and oppression realized by her writing acts and the physical strength and intensity of such acts (93). She emphasizes the connection between writing and speaking, in that she cannot separate either one "from any part of [her] life. It is all one" (95). Her blood-ink is a way for her to express her multiple identities as a "linguistic-cultural straddler" through multi-cultural image-symbols and multi-lingual writing (xxiv). "Chicano Spanish sprang out of Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people," Anzaldúa writes, and she cites seven examples of "*el lenguaje de la frontera*" spoken by many Chicana/os today (77). What is remarkable about her use of language is not simply her application of multiple Border tongues; it is that she employs these "sub-altern" languages consciously in her writing.

Anzaldúa is but one example of the many active participants in the literary and cultural subsects of the Chicana Movement. As made evident by the ten introductory essays written by Anzaldúa's contemporaries after her death, her insistence upon acts of self-interpellation in a critical and theoretical work both set her apart and inspired a new wave of creative and critical production by Chicana, Mestiza, and Latina women who

[50] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, in which she examines and critiques the structures of postcolonial reason. In exposing the historical silencing of the subaltern (woman), she suggests that the subaltern has not yet spoken and, quite possibly, can never truly speak.

wrote themselves, consciously, into their works and into the world and history beyond those works. As Norma Alarcón asserts in her introduction to *Borderlands*,

> the name 'Chicana,' in the present, is the name of resistance that enables cultural and political points of departure and thinking through the multiple migrations and dislocations of women of 'Mexican' descent. The name 'Chicana' is not a name that women (or men) are born to or with, as is often the case with 'Mexican,' but rather it is consciously and critically assumed. (15)

Edén E. Torres also wrote about the conscious decision, by various writers who identify as Chicana, to recognize and describe the concrete harm caused to the individual psyche by actions wholly outside of that individual's control: "It seems clear…that much of the creative work of Chicana writers exposes the rounds, confronts those who inflict pain, and tries to exorcise the shame that some individuals feel" (13). In her analysis of the anger expressed by Chicanas and the repression of this anger on the part of patriarchy and Western academic discourse, Torres concludes that Chicanas have suffered an historic trauma, one which is particular to them but which also situates them within a broader, public discourse (13-15).

From a theoretical perspective, Anzaldúa's project in *Borderlands* reveals her intimate familiarity with the central concerns and practices of Western literary theory. Her impassioned criticism of white, Anglo culture, not through a memoir or a novel but in a book of socio-political, activist theory, is not coincidental. Her incorporation, de-construction, and revision of so-called high "Theory" in a text that remains readable and poetic is a testament to her skill in confronting the complex problem she addresses in *Borderlands*. In the introduction to the third edition, published three years after Anzaldúa's unexpected death, editor Joan Pinkvoss asks ten of her contemporaries "to reflect on the significance of Gloria's work out in the world" (xi).

What each of these writers has in common is their classification of Anzaldúa as an artist, an activist, and a socio-political theorist whose personal life more than embodied the words that have since outlived her with the most recent printing of *Borderlands*.

Giving Up the Ghost and *Confessions of Women from East L.A.*

In *The Idea of Latin America*, Walter Mignolo discusses borders in the context of the growth of neoliberalism in the Western hemisphere. He points out the contradiction in the Western world's claims to support an "elimination of barriers" while is increasingly adopts immigration policies and practices that call for the "enforcement of frontiers" (99). In recent decades, the harsh reality of the US-Mexico border, both in physical-material and ideological-political senses of the term, has inspired many Latin American, Latina/o, and Chicana/o dramatists to write plays that deal with migration, identity, and border existence, *la existencia fronteriza*.

Born and raised in San Gabriel, in Southern California, Cherríe Moraga is one such playwright, poet, essayist, editor, and director. The 1981 publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* gave a name to radical feminism, a movement of radical women of color. In a series of video interviews for *Makers*, Moraga explains the motivation for *This Bridge* in terms of the failure of white, middle-class feminists to acknowledge and address issues of race and class within the broader feminist movement:

> [W]omen's issues were very much being defined by white, middle-class women. So Gloria and I, actually, Gloria had approached me about this idea—why don't we write a book containing articles about racism in the women's movement, because we were encountering it everywhere. So, what happened is that the question of racism in the women's movement

> became one chapter in a much more interesting book, I think, which had to really do with the issues that affect women of color in our diversity.

Moraga recalls that they were turned down by some writers who did not want to associate with lesbianism, although not all the pieces included in the anthology deal with being queer or are written by queer-identified writers. She also reflects on the large number of submissions they received from academics, all of which she and Anzaldúa rejected. They prioritized what Moraga calls "theory in the flesh" over the "rarified, theoretical feminism" so common within academia and which Moraga asserts "does not have a trickle-down effect to women of color and impoverished women" (*Makers*):

> Yes, we have a critical framework to understanding the feminism of women of color, and feminism in general. But it's always somehow in correspondence with practice, and in correspondence with experience. And I feel like the book [*This Bridge*] encourages people to do that, you know, to practice what they preach. (*Makers*)

In the interviews, Moraga also reflects upon her experiences leading up to her first playwriting endeavors. She describes coming out as a lesbian—first to herself, then to her mother—as a transformative moment on both personal and professional fronts: "It wasn't until I acknowledged and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with an empathy for my mother's oppression—due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana—was realized."[51] Soon thereafter, she was accepted into María Elena Fornes' renowned playwriting workshop. A six-month commitment, Moraga used the opportunity to work on *Giving Up the Ghost*, a play she describes as "a series of monologues" (*Makers*). Under the guidance of Fornes, Moraga was able to merge many aspects of her Self, as Chicana, as a lesbian, as a playwright, into her identity as poet: "[s]he allowed me to be a poet on stage. […] You had to find your play, you had to

[51] This is also a direct quote from Moraga's "La güera," included in *This Bridge Called My Back*.

discover it with a poet's heart. […] Your unconscious is so much smarter than your intellect" (*Makers*). One of Moraga's creative contributions to *This Bridge Called My Back* is a poem that likens the speaker's strength and skill as a poet to that of a welder:

> I am the welder.
> I understand the capacity of heat
> to change the shape of things.
> I am suited to work
> within the realm of sparks
> out of control. I am the welder.
> I am taking the power
> into my own hands. (120)

Beyond articulating Moraga's goals as a writer and artist, this poem also serves as a lens through which to consider the theatrical explorations of self, desire, and Chicana/o identity represented in Moraga's plays.

In *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherríe Moraga*, Yarbro-Bejarano explains that the late 1970s and early 1980s provided an influential socio-historical context for Moraga's first play, *Giving Up the Ghost*, which she first published in 1986; "[that period was] a time of considerable discussion concerning the exclusionary politics of the white women's movement, in the wake of [the publication of] *This Bridge Called My Back*" (31). As I discuss above, issues of racial and class-based bias within the white feminist movement had become a focal point among Chicana feminists by the 1980s. Yarbro-Bejarano notes that while some collaboration was undertaken between women of color feminists and white feminists, efforts to address their relative differences in experiences as women still tended to perpetuate the invisibility of lesbian women of color (31). As a result, some women of color began working to address the intersecting issues of sexism, racism, and homophobia within the white feminist movement and the heteropatriarchy of broader US society:

> The work of women of color who were engaged in the critiques and elaboration of feminism operated on a variety of fronts. From a position of solidarity, they opened up dialogue within their communities on sexism and, especially in the case of lesbians, homophobia. While recognizing shared oppression with all women based on gender, they developed a feminist analysis stressing the differences among women and the dangers of theorizing from a privileged position, whether that privilege was based on race, class, or sexuality. (*Wounded* 31-32)

Cherríe Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost: A Stage Play in Three Portraits* is an early example of precisely that kind of dialogue staged through theater. In Yarbro-Bejarano's words, Moraga's first play "disrupts both dominant and Chicano theatrical canons" (32). It is also the first play I consider in this dissertation that consciously represents on stage the intersections of the multiple forms of oppression faced by a Chicana subject.

Yarbro-Bejarano also describes *Giving Up the Ghost* as a play that "dramatizes the sexual self in process, rather than a unified identity" (35). It is a theatrical work in dialogue with the work of with other technically experimental Latina/o and Latin American dramatists who deal with issues of exile and belonging, of leaving and returning home.[52] In *Giving*, Moraga represents an intimate relationship between three characters, two of whom are the same character at two distinct ages in her life. Throughout the play, Moraga includes the public within an intimate and testimonial space filled by the monologues that seem to pour from the three characters' psyches straight into the audience. Technically speaking, Moraga revolutionizes what is considered dialogue at the same time as she plays with how to realize a communicative exchange. On a thematic level, she explores and problematizes connections, both subtle and explicit,

[52] I am thinking here of several concrete examples, including *Coser y cantar* (1991) by Cuban-American playwright Dolores Prida and *El deseo* (2005) by Mexican playwright Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda. Prida's play is driven by a dialogic monologue that takes place between two facets of the same person, She and Ella, after her migration from Cuba to the US many years ago. Rascón Banda's drama deals with the relationship between Latin American and the US, represented on stage by the relationship between a Colombian migrant and an Anglo woman from the US.

between identity formation at an individual level and the formation of national identity, borders, and belief systems.

Walter Mignolo describes his scholarly project in *The Idea of Latin America* as an "excavation of the imperial/colonial foundation of the 'idea' of Latin America that will help us unravel the geo-politics of knowledge from the perspective of coloniality, the untold and unrecognized historical counterpart of modernity" (x-xi). Central to this excavation process is Mignolo's emphasis on the importance of dialogue, rather than monologue, in order to challenge or counteract dominant Western narratives and histories: "I am just saying that 'dialogue' can only take place when the 'monologue' of one civilization (Western) is no longer enforced" (xix). In "La güera," Moraga also utilizes a theatrical metaphor to describe the limitations of the current (in 1981) discussion of racism and classism within Anglo feminist groups: "[t]he dialogue has simply not gone deep enough" (33). Mignolo and Moraga's use of theatrical terminology takes on more literal significance when considered in the context of plays which rely upon dialogue and monologue. Of all of the Chicana/o plays written and staged during the 1980s and 1990s, Cherríe Moraga's works, and especially *Giving Up the Ghost*, most clearly demonstrate the representation of alterative monologues that disrupt not only the audience's visual and thematic expectations but also dominant Anglo and European-influenced narratives and theatrical forms.

Giving Up the Ghost was first published by West End Press in 1986; the same press published a revised version in 1994 and another in 2000. After a series of local stagings, the play made its world debut in 1989 at The Studio, Theatre Rhinoceros, in San Francisco, California, in a performance that incorporated aspects of several previous

stagings of the play. As the title indicates, Moraga breaks from European-derived theater conventions with the structure of the play itself; *Giving* is composed of three portraits, or *retratos*, rather than acts, titled "La Pachuca," "La Loca," y "La Salvadora." This structural trinity is maintained through temporal manipulations, as the play takes place in the characters' relative pasts, presents, and futures. The characters themselves comprise another trinity, as the plot centers on the lives of three women: Marisa, "*Chicana in her late 20s*," Corky, "MARISA *as a teenager*," and Amalia, "*Mexican-born, a generation older than* MARISA" (5). Moraga also includes "The People" in the list of characters, described as "*those viewing the performance or reading the play*" (5). The play takes place on both sides of the border between Mexico and the US during many distinct temporalities, some concrete and others unspecified. In contrast with the scenographic complexity of *Zoot Suit,* this set design is minimal and requires "as few props as possible" (5). In the initial stage directions, Moraga adds that the windows and furniture should appear in the public's imagination when necessary.

My theatrical analysis of *Giving* centers on two features that characterize many of the Chicana/o plays from the 1980s and 1990s: the role played by monologues and the incorporation of the audience into the play. Through the incorporation of monologues in a non-linear manner, Moraga deconstructs for her audience traditional gender roles as represented through theater. By the end of the play, she has reconstructed a new lesbian, female subject through monologues that frequently incorporate the audience into this process, and indeed into the play itself. The communicative acts represented in *Giving* include dialogue, anachronistic pseudo-dialogue between characters from distinct temporal realities who communicate through an undefined "present," interconnected

monologues directed toward the public but "felt" by the other characters present on stage, gestural monologues, and monologues set to music.

The first *retrato*, "La Pachuca," begins with a gestural prologue as we meet Corky for the first time. After contextualizing the setting of a Chicano barrio in the urban Southwest of Los Angeles, Moraga describes the first encounter between Corky and Marisa:

> *MARISA sits on a wooden crate, centerstage. Her black hair is pulled back, revealing a face of dark intensity and definite Indian features. […] CORKY enters upstage. Their eyes meet. As MARISA's younger self, Corky tries to act tough but displays a wide open-heartedness in her face which betrays her toughness. She dresses "Cholo style"—khaki pants with razor-sharp creases, pressed white undershirt. Her hair is cut short and slicked back. She approaches the upstage wall, spray can in hand, feigning the false bravado of her teenage male counterparts.* (6)

This gestural prologue by a single character defined first through dress and attitude calls to mind El Pachuco's first entrance in the prologue to Valdez's *Zoot Suit*. While El Pachuco's double, Henry Reyna, does not appear on stage until later in the first scene, *Giving* opens with Marisa and Corky both present on stage. From the play's opening scene, Moraga emphasizes the doubling of self that the audience will witness throughout the play as well as the psychic connection between these characters, even during monologues that are not meant to be heard by the other characters on stage. Not only is the hyper-masculinity of El Pachuco countered by a female subject here, Moraga also deviates from the phenomenon of the singular male protagonist meant to embody the fight for Chicano liberation by insisting upon a multiplicity of female subjects who need, challenge, and support one another. As Moraga explains in the set description,

> throughout the long monologues (unless otherwise indicated) when the non-speaking actors remain on stage, the lighting and direction should give the impression that the characters both disappear and remain within

> hearing range of the speaker. In short, direction should reflect that each character knows, on an intuitive level, the minds of the other characters. (5)

Unlike El Pachuco's first appearance and monologue in *Zoot Suit*, Corky and Marisa's first monologues are not an anomalous technical experimentation but rather set the style for the majority of the communicative acts that take place throughout the play.

As Corky spray-paints the upstage wall, we can see Marisa writing in her sketchbook. Corky's gestural prologue is followed by a "Dedicación" which she speaks aloud and seems addressed to herself and to the audience:

> Don't know where this woman
> and I will find each other again,
> but I am grateful to her to something
> that feels like a blessing.
>
> that I am, in fact, not trapped
>
> which brings me to the question of prisons
> politics
> sex. (6)

In *Zoot Suit*, Valdez utilizes El Pachuco's opening monologue to contextualize the external conditions of Chicano oppression and activism in a specific socio-historical moment. Here, Moraga turns our gaze inward to the internal psychology of her youngest protagonist through a poetic and ahistoricized monologue that prioritizes Corky's individual identity and experience over a collective and external socio-political context. Corky reveals to us in this brief monologue her inner, wiser self, already conscious of—and perhaps in conflict with—Marisa, her future self.

When their first verbal communicative exchange begins, Marisa expresses discomfort with Corky's visit, especially because of the disquieting memories that

surface upon seeing Corky for the first time. She also suggests a possible interpretation of the play's title:

> MARISA: […] Why'd I hafta get into a situation where all my ghosts come to visit? I always see that man…thick-skinned, dark, muscular. He's a boulder between us. I can't lift him and her, too…carrying him.
>
> He's a ghost, always haunting her…
> lingering. (6-7)

This monologue also reveals Marisa to be subject who most represents the present-tense on stage, as Corky is described as a ghost from her past. Corky and Marisa's first encounter and the monologues that follow ultimately inspire Amalia's first appearance on stage and, later, a series of *retratos* that interweave multiple pasts and presents and futures, some real and others imagined. Considered together, these dialogic monologues take on the quality of a prolonged and internally-guided psychotherapy session in which all three characters work, together, to give up, in varied senses of the word, their individual and collective ghosts.

Yarbro-Bejarano describes this dimension of the play as an "alternative system of representation" through which Moraga "constructs a female subject, not merely replacing the male subject of traditional mimesis with a female one, but introducing new structures for its representation" through the creation of a shared subject position on stage (*Wounded* 35). She notes that the play begins and ends with Marisa's memories of Amalia, rather than Amalia herself, present on stage, a decision which locates Marisa at the center of the play's drama but also never fully alone (35). Corky's physical presence and voice, in the opening scene of the play, and absence, in the final scene, also play a central role in Moraga's dramatization of the identity formation of the Chicana subject enacted through Marisa. While Amalia is fundamental to how the audience comes to

understand Marisa's past (and present), Corky is perhaps most necessary for Marisa herself. Corky's eventual disappearance seems to signify a newly integrated self for Marisa, who has finally learned to live with, and so live without, her ghosts.

Expressions of gender, sexuality, and desire are fundamental to the monologic explorations of identity that connect the play's three portraits. During "La Pachuca," in a poetic monologue expressed with Pachuco lexicon, Corky introduces herself as a precocious young woman who is already able to reflect upon her life up to her present:

> CORKY: the smarter I get the older I get the meaner I get
> tough a tough cookie my mom calls me
> sometimes I even pack a blade
> no one knows I never use it or nut'ing
> but can feel it there in my pants pocket
> run the pad of my thumb over it to remind me I carry somet'ing
> am sharp secretly […].
> when I was a real little kid I useta love the moves
> […]
> then later my friend Arturo 'n' me
> we'd make up our own movies
> one was where we'd be out in the desert
> 'n' we'd capture these chicks 'n' hold 'em up for ransom
> we'd string 'em up 'n' make 'em take their clothes off
> "strip" we'd say to the wall all cool-like. (7)

As a young girl, Corky already struggles to understand and express her identity, above all in terms of her gender and sexuality, both of which inform how she comes to question her own desires. After recounting this troubling memory, she describes her implicit gender identity as "funny," meaning weird, different, or queer: "now when I think about how little I was at the time / and a girl but in my mind I was big 'n' tough 'n' a dude / in my *mind* I had all their freedom / the freedom to see a girl kina / the way you see / an animal you know?" (8). At the end of this monologue, Corky admits that she always

knew she was a woman, "deep down inside / no matter how I tried to pull the other off" (8).

Marisa enters the discourse on gender identity at precisely this moment, with a frankness born from lived experience and perspective but still tainted by the consequences of adolescence: "I never wanted to be a man, only wanted a woman to want me that bad. And they have, you know, plenty of them, but there's always that one you can't pin down, who's undecided. (*Beat.*) My mother was a heterosexual, I couldn't save her. My failures follow thereafter" (8). Already in the first *retrato* we note Moraga's preoccupation with desire and nostalgia explored through the gender and sexual identities and experiences of the protagonists. When Amalia appears on stage, she first seems to be Marisa's mother, rather than her lover, in part because she continues Marisa's monologue by declaring "I am a failure" (8). In the following scenes, we come to understand that she is in fact Marisa's lover, and that the actor who plays Amalia also represents Marisa's mother in various flashback scenes. Amalia is the character who traces connections—both subtle and explicit—between identity and issues of belonging from individual to geopolitical levels. While Corky and Marisa communicate within an extemporal present, the play includes multiple, more temporally grounded scenes in which Amalia and Marisa dialogue with each other, often through monologues that provide a sense of disconnected dialogue. In Scene 5 of *Retrato* I, both women express their particular sentiments around the notions of memory, nostalgia, and socio-political identity:

> MARISA (*to* THE PEOPLE): I have a very long memory. I try to warn people that when I get hurt, I don't forget it. I use it against them. I blame women for everything. My mistakes. Missed opportunities. My grief. I usually leave just when I wanna lay a woman flat. When I feel that vengeance rise up in my, I split. I desert.

> AMALIA: Desert. Desierto. For some reason, I could always picture mi cholita en the desert, amid the mesquite y nopal. Always when I closed my eyes to search for her, it was in the Mexican desert that I found her. I *had* intended to take her…to México. She would never have gone alone, sin gente allá.
> MARISA: This *is* México! What are you talking about? It was those gringos that put up those fences between us! (17)

Amalia remains steadfastly in favor of a nostalgic characterization of Mexico, which forever recalls her youth and marks a distinction from everything that has never felt like home to her in the US. Marisa rejects this sentimentality by affirming a less idealized nostalgia that reveals her refusal to look back when the present reality is unmistakable and all around her.

Although *Giving* could be described as an intimate play, it is not confined to an enclosed and domestic setting. Instead, Moraga expands the physical limits of each character's reality by manifesting on stage—through memories, images, and words—a multiplicity of outside threats. Whether occurring in the present or recollections of the past, these threats are portrayed in *Giving* as commonplace for Chicana women living within a heteropatriarchy society ruled by men who only appear on stage in the form of traumatic memories, anti-desires, and absent family members. In this way, Moraga expands the geopolitical and psychological frame of reference for her characters and encourages a deeper level of reflection for both characters and audience. In *Retrato* II, "La Loca," Amalia continues to bring Mexico into her monologues as the embodiment of the nostalgia and solitude that have plagued her throughout her life. In a monologue directed to "The People," she recounts the story of her migration to the US. She identifies the connection between her move and her identity as a woman; her menstrual cycle, "la regla," began during the first day of her trip north. Reflections about what it

means to be a Mexican woman, especially one who lives in a modernized and industrialized US, continue into the play's third and final *retrato*, largely through monologues expressed by Marisa.

Scene 10 of the third *retrato* can be viewed as the culminating moment of the entire play. Facing the public as she speaks, Marisa recounts to us the story of her rape by a janitor at her school, ultimately revealing how she came to understand her existence as a woman:

> MARISA: Got raped once. When I was a kid. Taken me a long time to say that was exactly what happened, but that was exactly what happened. Makes you more aware than ever that you are one hunerd percent female, just in case you had any doubts. One hunerd percent female whether you act it…or like it…or not. […] But the truth is…
> CORKY (*entering*): I was took. (25)

From this moment in the memory, Corky continues Marisa's monologue in a way that suggests that Marisa can only access her traumatic childhood with the temporal and psychological distance created by the passing of time:

> CORKY: […] Y ya 'stoy lista for what long ago waited for me
> there is no surprise
> 'n' I open my legs wide wide open
> for the angry animal that springs outta the opening in his pants
> 'n' all I wanna do is have it over so I can go back to being
> myself
> 'n' a kid again
> then he hit me with it
> into what was supposed to be a hole…
> […]
> but with this one there was no hole he had to make it
> 'n' I saw myself down there like a face with no opening
> a face with no features
> no eyes no nose no mouth
> only little lines where they shoulda been
> so I dint cry
> I never cried as he shoved the thing
> into what was supposed to be a mouth
> with no teeth

with no hate
with no voice
only a hole
a hole!

He made me a hole! (28-29)

Finally able to speak again after Corky's acknowledgment of the violation, Marisa asserts that she doesn't regret what happened to her because "[h]e only convinced me of my own name. From an early age you learn to live with it, being a woman. I just got a head start over some" (29). The scene ends as Marisa wraps a Mexican shawl around Corky's shoulders and then holds her in her arms.

For Marisa, being a woman also comes to signify being *left* by a woman, as her final interaction with Amalia reveals. Although she wanted to, she could not save Amalia; the title of the third retrato, "La salvadora," implies hope, perhaps, only for Marisa's own future. In Scene 12, Marisa is left alone on stage, freed from her past and with Amalia present only as a "*voice-over*, *memory*" (34). "I must admit I wanted to save her," Marisa reflects. "That's probably the whole truth of the story. And the problem is…sometimes I actually believe I could, and *sometimes* she did too" (34). Marisa's closing monologue underscores the importance of considering the question of truth, along with who has the right to express her own truth. The play concludes with Marisa alone on stage, a shawl left behind as the only physical manifestation of Amalia. Yet the final scene does not represent Marisa as abandoned or helpless; rather, she has experienced a kind of relief, if not healing, by expressing her desires without regret or apology. Marisa approaches the audience as she concludes her final monologic reflection as a woman with childhood ghosts who have returned to her past:

> It's not often you get to see people this way in all their pus and glory and still love them. It makes you feel so good, like your hands are weapons of war. And as they move up into el corazón de esta mujer, you are making her body remember, it didn't have to be that hurt. ¿Me entiendes? It was not natural or right that she got beat down so damn hard, and that all those crimes had nothing to do with the girl she once was two, three, four decades ago. (35)

Upon uttering these words aloud, Marisa valorizes her own desire, and by extension the desire of all women; she prioritizes desire over nostalgia in determining her own identity as a woman, as a lesbian, and as Chicana. She also says goodbye to all the ghosts that have haunted her and to the audience who has born witness to her psychological discoveries throughout the play. Most importantly, she embraces an alternative way of being (Chicana), a way of living that transcends the harsh reality and repressive expectations of the heteropatriarchal system in which she lives.

Unlike Henry Reyna in *Zoot Suit* and Doña Josefa in *The Day of the Swallows*, who ultimately prove unable to integrate the various parts of themselves, Moraga represents in *Giving* a unification of self for Marisa, realized through communicative acts and Marisa's identification of her own desires. As Yarbro-Bejarano points out, "[t]he play is political not just for *what* it chooses to represent, but *how* it chooses to represent it, as well as for the reception of that representation by specific and diverse social audiences" (*Wounded* 47). In many ways Marisa's journey follows that of the New Mestiza as portrayed by Anzaldúa. In *Giving*, Moraga represents Chicana characters who defy popular stereotypes through personal and dialogic monologues and an abstract set design that requires imagination and involvement on the part of the audience.

Worth noting is Moraga's complete revision of the narrative structure that informed the work of ETC and Valdez, and perhaps even the dramaturgy of Portillo-

Trambley. It is impossible to analyze *Giving* through the framework of the Western quest narrative in which a heroic or infallible (male) protagonist takes center stage from opening to closing curtain and leads us through his individual journey in a reality where women, lesbians, and even other male characters exist more as accessories than as three-dimensional subjects. Instead, Moraga's play is non-narrative from start to finish, not in the sense that it lacks direction or focus but in that the audience is not meant to follow a singular chronology of events seen through the eyes of a single character. The multiple subjects that populate the stage in *Giving* are Chicana women who reveal themselves to be more vocal, revelatory, and powerful together than they would be alone. They are not afraid to change their minds, to change the questions they pose, and, even, to change the direction of the play when a new memory or idea surfaces within them. If there is in Marisa a kind of heroism—as differentiated from the nature of a protagonist—, it resides in her unshakeable ability to undergo a decolonizing process from within and outside herself, both as an individual and as a member of a greater Chicana/o community.

While many of Moraga's later plays represent and problematize heteropatriarchal ideologies and practices—*Shadow of the Ghost* and *Watsonville: Some Place Not Here* come to mind—, in her first play Moraga already demonstrates her skill for subverting the heteropatriarchal paradigm—both theatrical and societal—entirely. This is not to say that she renders men or heterosexuality nonthreatening or irrelevant, or that she simply replaces the straight, male Chicano protagonists of *Zoot Suit*, for example, with lesbian, female Chicana protagonists who operate from within the same theatrical and cultural paradigms. What she offers to her readers and viewers, as well as to her characters, is an alternate theatrical model, in two senses. First and foremost, Moraga enables her

characters to confront themselves—selves which carry within the weight of rape, violation, desire, grief, loss, and faith—with the hope of coming to terms, if not to peace, with who they have been, are, and will become. She also transcends the limitations of identity labels suggested in *Day*; Yarbro-Bejarano notes Moraga's consistent disruption of historically static categories such as "lesbian," "lesbian sex" (*Wounded* 35). Moraga demonstrates how to stage a play in which women, lesbians, and characters who don't ascribe to singular identity labels at all can be imagined, vocalized, and represented on stage in physical form, just as their male and straight counterparts have been realized on stage and in script for as far back as Chicana/o theater has existed.

We find some of these same qualities in the dramaturgy of Josefina López, particularly in the centrality of monologues in her plays and in the multiplicity of Chicana and Latina characters and experiences whose lives and stories are interwoven on stage in thematically innovate and technically original ways. López was born in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, in 1969. At the age of five, she moved with her family to the US, where they lived as illegal immigrants in East Los Angeles until they were granted amnesty when López was thirteen (*Confessions*). She attended Los Angeles County High School for the Arts as a theater major and wrote her first play at seventeen, the Emmy Award winning *Simply Maria or the American Dream* (*Confessions*). She earned a B.A. in film and dramaturgy at Columbia College and an M.A. from UCLA in the School of Theater, Film, and Television (*Confessions*). She earned a Screenwriting Fellowship from the California Arts Council in 2001 and the Gabriel García Márquez Award from the mayor of Los Angeles in 2003, among other awards she has received for both playwriting and screenwriting (*CASA*). One of her best-known plays, *Real Women Have Curves*, was

adapted for the screen in 2002 and features actor América Ferrera. The description on the jacket of *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* describes her "currently [in 1997] the most produced Latina playwright in the country."

In 2000, López founded CASA 0101, a theatrical and artistic center in her childhood community of Boyle Heights, Los Angeles. In 2011, CASA 0101 moved to its current home, which the organization's webpage describes as "a fully-equipped 99-seat theater featuring an art gallery and a dedicated classroom" (*CASA*). Today, CASA 0101 is known as a leading arts venue in East L.A.; it presents plays and film festivals and hosts free classes in acting and the arts for children, as well as free and low-cost adult acting and writing classes (*CASA*). The organization's mission statement emphasizes the importance of future generations of cultural producers from Spanish-speaking immigrant communities: "CASA 0101 is dedicated to providing vital arts, cultural, and educational programs—in theater, digital filmmaking, art and dance—to Boyle Heights, thereby nurturing the future storytellers of Los Angeles who will someday transform the world." López describes one of her goals as a playwright and community organizer as "[affording] Latinas an opportunity to play characters that have dignity and courage, qualities that are representative of who we are" (*CASA*).

In the playwright's notes included in *Confessions*, López describes her personal motivation to write plays that center on the lives and identities of Latina women:

> Latina women have always been categorized and portrayed as 'virgins, mothers, and whores' in plays, movies, and television. I don't like that because I am none of them. I am a combination of all of them. I have a little of the mother, the virgin, and the whore. However, Latinas are much more than that. Latinas are complex, diverse, and powerful. All these women that I have written about are me and my mother. They all represent a certain confession at a different stage in my life and her life.

> When you put them all together you will get to understand the Latina that I am. (5)

Not unlike Moraga, López features Latina women and their desires, bodies, sexuality, and experiences in a way that exposes both the oppression and agency of women both within and beyond Latina/o and Chicana/o communities. López's plays tend to feature representations of more universalized and even caricaturized Latina/o characters, often of Mexican heritage but not necessarily identifying explicitly as Chicana/o. The short length of her plays and her reliance upon relatively disconnected monologues means that, in some cases, her characters come across more like caricatures than the three-dimensional, psychologically complex women we find in Moraga's plays. Still, she does not rely upon euphemisms or subtle and obscure references to female sexual desire and identity, as we find in Portillo-Trambley's *The Day of the Swallows*. Even when represented through somewhat stereotypical tropes, López's characters tend to be candid, blunt, and thorough in their articulations of their desires, identities, and experiences.

In a video interview with *Cuéntame Arts* published online in 2012, López speaks of the racism and sexism she has experienced as a Chicana dramatist and screenwriter: "CASA 0101 started because no one would produce *Real Women Have Curves* here in Los Ángeles. I would be told that this was an undignified portrayal of Latina women and that they didn't care for my Chicana diatribe. It was very condescending, insulting, and racist." It took her over three years to open CASA 0101, and she recalls days when she didn't think it would be possible for her to continue with her work as a Chicana artist:

> You try to do what's right and they throw every obstacle at you. Sometimes I go home and I swear to you I cry to my husband and go *fuck*! you know, like *What did I do in my past life to be a Chicana artist?* After twenty years of trying to get Latinos on the screen, you realize that no, it's an effort, it's a conscious effort to keep us out.

Like Valdez, López's work as a dramatist led her to explore dramatic representation through film. As broader US culture tends to recognize Valdez for the film version of *Zoot Suit* and *La Bamba*, so too is López often referenced as the writer of *Real Women Have Curves*, which came out on film in 2002. In the interview with *Cuéntame Arts*, she describes her filmmaking experiences as marked by the oppression of women and Latina/os: "[t]he big studios are owned by three people. […] So keeping women oppressed, Latinos oppressed, keeping out stories, not seeing us as powerful people, people who contribute…that's part of a paradigm. So as Latinos we must speak up, because we are the epitome of the ninety-nine percent. Women," she adds, "are way at the bottom of the ninety-nine percent" (*Cuéntame*). As we have seen in the works and lives of all of the Chicana/o writers I discuss in this dissertation, López's creative endeavors are directly motivated by and reflective of personal experience, in her case navigating US society and politics as a Latina and Chicana-identified artist and professional.

Confessions of Women from East L.A. was first staged as a work-in-progress in San Diego in 1996 and was published the following year in a small paperback book intended for use by a director, theater group, or class (*Confessions* 4). The play is structured around a series of monologues, in this case with even less narrative connection between scenes and characters than we find in *Giving*. López sets the monologues in varied locations throughout East Los Angeles and Little Tokyo ("a fancy hotel suite," "the pharmaceutical section in K-Mart," "an apartment in a housing project," etcetera) (6-7). The play takes place in "the summer of 1996" and features nine female characters to be played by only four actors (7). The diverse cast of characters includes: 35-year old Dr.

Márquez-Bernstein, who leads a seminar on "How To Be a Super Latina"; 55-year old Doña Concepción, "a widowed grandmother"; 25-year old Lolita Corazón, "a 'Hot Señorita' type"; 40-year old Calletana, a "street vendor" who challenges city law over her right to make a living; 28-year old Yoko Martínez, a "Latina trying to pass for Japanese" at the Japanese restaurant where she works; 30-year old Roxie, a "self-defense instructor" who preemptively attacks a man on the street; 20-year old Tiffany, "a Valley Girl and Chicana activist" who discovers herself through Frida Kahlo's art; 45-year old Doña Florina, "a soap opera addict in recovery"; and 26-year old Valentina, "a Chicana activist" who fights to organize Chicana/os against Proposition 187, a 1994 ballot initiative which sought to prohibit undocumented immigrants from using health care, public education, and other services in California (7)

The play's dedication suggests that López's dramaturgy is inspired and influenced by people from the Boyle Heights community in which she grew up:

> *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* is dedicated to the Mexican woman who sells corn on the cob on the corner of First Street and St. Louis in Boyle Heights, Dr. Maria Viramontes De Marin, my mother the **telenovela**[53] addict, Jon Mercedes III, William Alejandro Virchis, Catalina Maynard, and Keisuke Fukuda. (3)

"When someone attacks your humanity," López concludes in the interview with *Cuéntame Arts*, "you have a right to be angry. We need to be much more outraged, and I think that art is a safe way of being outraged." Expressions of anger and outrage are two of the features that develop a thematic and stylistic cohesion between each of the monologues represented in *Confessions*.

[53] As López explains in a note included below the stage directions, all Spanish words used in the play (and in her other published plays) are in bold. The published play includes a glossary of Spanish words and phrases and their English translations.

The set design is similar to that of *Giving* in its minimalist and abstract style; it features a mobile altar center stage with four candles and "several items," four chairs, and four coat racks with costumes, each displaying the names of prominent East L.A. streets (Cesar Chavez Boulevard, etcetera) (9).[54] The play opens with a gestural, ritualistic scene that will be repeated in distinct contexts between each of the play's nine monologues:

> Four WOMEN enter from different directions. They are all wearing black. They gather at the altar and light up some sage which they pass around circling in the air, one by one. After they have finished, they push the altar U [upstage] and transform it into a podium. Then three of the WOMEN sit on the chairs. One WOMAN exits.
>
> The lights fade in completely and the three WOMEN become young, shy, Latina students waiting for a seminar to begin. A woman wearing a dressy blazer carrying a large designer bag rushes in as through she was late. She is VICTORIA MARQUEZ-BERNSTEIN, PH.D. (9)

Metatheatricality of a different quality than that expressed in *Giving* characterizes all of the monologues in *Confessions*. Rather than a psychologically-driven and inwardly-focused monologue, Doctora Victoria Márquez-Bernstein, a self-proclaimed "Super Latina," has arrived to lead a seminar for a group of female students who are attending "The High School Latina Leadership Conference" (10). The students' roles in the scene are minimal and include a single verbal remark—"STUDENT #1: A doctor?"—, a gestural remark—"*STUDENT #2 does the sign of the cross*"—, and a moment in which all three students raise and then lower their hands (10-11). Their role can be equated to a prop employed to create the sense of a dialogic community that López employs in many

[54] See "Domesticana: The Sensibility of Chicana Rasquache," published in the journal *Aztlán* (1999), for Amalia Mesa-Bains' discussion of *domesticana*, her reconceptualization of Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's theorization of *rasquacismo* in a specifically Chicana context. Mesa-Bains analyzes the aesthetics of the domestic sphere occupied by Chicanas, a space characterized by altars and *capillas* [shrines] and one which demonstrates a resistance to both dominant culture and gender expectations within the Chicana/o community.

moments throughout the play. Although only three students appear on stage, I imagine the audience as a visual—if not theatrical—extension of the three seminar students who appear stage.

Despite the limited role played by the students and the audience, the play feels dynamic and interactive from the opening lines of the first monologue:

> No, I am not a medical doctor, my Ph.D. is in Social Psychology. That's why I decided to teach this seminar, because I am a "Super Latina." Check it out! *(MARQUEZ-BERNSTEIN pulls out a brown and lavender satin cape just like Superman's. It bears the emblem "S L" on it. She puts it on and models it for them.)* You like it? You like it? My mother gave this to me after I got my Ph.D. That's when I became a Super Latina...But for those of you who don't know me, I'm a best-selling author of several self-help books written especially for the Latina of today, like you. […] All right **pues**. I'd like to see by a show of hands, how many of you Latinas believe you can be a "Super Latina." **Aver, aver** [sic], everybody raise your hand or get out of my seminar because I don't want you here just occupying space. I want you to participate. Don't be shy. Oh, come on now, you've been taught all your life to be quiet, but today I want you to speak up. What you think matters. Shyness is a sin! (10-11)

It is easy to imagine Latina and Chicana audiences interacting directly with a show of hands during monologues like this one. The effect on audiences with fewer Latinas present would perhaps provoke a less-engaged response, depending on their cultural awareness and ability to grasp the hyperbolic humor that characterizes Dra. Márquez-Bernstein's representation. In most of the scenes, Lopez incorporates interlocutors who are physically present on stage (the students in the seminar, a K-Mart announcer, the customers at the Japanese restaurant) and who rarely speak. As we don't often see or hear these other characters, however, the audience is pulled into multiple roles throughout the vignettes. There are several scenes in which we move from outside observers watching someone else who hears the monologues into the more active role of first-hand observers/listeners from within the scene itself. This creative manipulation of what

constitutes a monologue along with the blurring of the physical and emotional boundary between actors and audience are common features throughout all of the monologues.

López also connects the nine monologues through diverse articulations of Latina and Chicana feminism, although she employs humor rather than the psychically and emotionally-driven dialogue through monologue that we find in *Giving*. Lights fade in and out as the altar is transformed and repositioned between each monologue. In several ways, López calls upon the audience to imagine; we must imagine physical environments not visually present, we must imagine four actors as nine distinct characters, and we must imagine ourselves within the varied contexts represented on stage. The first monologue introduces a multiplicity of themes related to Latina identity and culture that are revisited, often with humor, throughout *Confessions*. Beyond the most overt theme of the silencing of Latina and Chicana women, Márquez-Bernstein's seminar touches on the difficulty—as well as possibility—of being a Latina academic, birth control and accidental pregnancy, the dangers of boys and men, self-empowerment through masturbation, the role of a Latina teacher, bilingual self-expression, being a single mother, choosing a career over raising a family, memories of being a girl, cunnilingus, and a (Latina) woman's right to have an orgasm, to get an education, to be happy, to have money, shelter, and food, to have hope, and, most importantly, to be a Super Latina. As her monologue comes to a close, Doctora Márquez-Bernstein invites the (Latina) audience members to join her in an exploration of their own lives: "*(Aside.)* Have your mother make you one [a Super Latina cape] or you can get one at K-mart for $5.99 in the toy section…and follow me, my caped crusaders. Follow me as we take the first step of the beginning of the rest of your lives!" (14-15).

Doctora Márquez-Bernstein shares center stage with eight other protagonists in *Confessions*; not unlike the shared subject position I discussed earlier in the context of *Giving*, none of López's characters monopolize the subject position as singular, heroic protagonists. With no narrative transition to speak of, the second monologue takes place in St. Mary's Church where we meet Doña Concepción, "*wearing a black lace veil over her face*," who begins a lengthy confession to a Priest—*Padre*—who speaks only once during the monologue. In a comically exaggerated representation of the ultimate dilemma a Catholic widow could face, Doña Concepción confesses that she contracted AIDS from her husband before he died, that she has only two years to live, and that she has always known she was gay. She explains that after the birth of their sixth child, she refused to have sex with her husband again. In hindsight, she blames herself for forcing him to find sexual satisfaction with men. In an interesting departure from the more (stereo)typical trope of self-hating gay Catholics, Doña Concepción does not crave absolution for her lesbianism but instead seeks advice on how to tell her children and grandchildren of the secret she has kept her whole life:

> I wish I didn't have to tell you this, **Padre**, but I can't tell anyone else, and my husband's death left me so broke I can't afford a therapist…Maybe I have to come out to you first because it was God who was there with me when I lost my virginity and felt nothing. I thought it was normal not feeling anything the first time, but later on in my marriage, having sex with him seemed unnatural…It was also God who was with me when I had my first, how shall I say…"wet dream," about being with a girl at the age of six. So I just want to tell you to tell God that I have finally accepted what he knew all along…*(She checks to see if the **Padre** is listening.)* I also want to tell my children and grandchildren […] [b]ut I know this will tear them apart. […] See, that got your attention…**Padre**, how do I tell my children? (17-18)

In this monologue, it is not Doña Concepción but the priest who seems stripped of the power of speech. He offers her no advice and, even more so than the students in the

seminar, his presence is more of a prop than an actual character involved in the scene. López subverts the hierarchy of the Catholic Church as well as the unspoken hierarchy within Chicano theater of earlier decades. By featuring a female subject who makes her own decision to tell her friends and family of her sexual identity even as she recognizes the risk that this poses, she bypasses the role of the priest and the church in her process of self-acceptance and understanding. Moreover, by engaging the priest as a substitute for a therapist, her "confession" is in fact more akin to strategizing, which imbues her monologue with agency and self-determination.

In addition to characters described and represented as Latina, López represents two Chicana characters, both in their twenties, who express conflicting attitudes about what it means to be Chicana. The first Chicana monologue introduces us to Tiffany, a 20-year old college student who wants to reconnect to her Chicana roots because of her love for Frida Kahlo. Her monologue is set in a Chicano Studies class, where she is scheduled to give a presentation in Spanish expressing her opposition to Proposition 187. López describes her as "a born-again Chicana who grew up in the valley" (38). When the monologue begins, Tiffany has difficulty pronouncing words in Spanish; her presentation quickly devolves into a scattered and mildly comic rant about her reaction to the news that Madonna will play Frida Kahlo in the film about her life. "*(In bad Spanish)* '**Pos que chingados, éstos pinches gringos!**" she exclaims, before asking the class if she can read them the letter she wrote to Frida last night.

In many ways, the multiple layers of metatheatricality that coincide in this monologue render it difficult to follow and make it potentially difficult for an audience to relate to or sympathize with Tiffany, who remains self-absorbed and superficial

throughout the scene. As a result of her publicly aired identity crisis, she does become more confident in speaking Spanish as the monologue unfolds and she decides to break up with her boyfriend at the end of the scene. Yet in this scene the dialogic monologue often feels forced and the silences on the other end of the "dialogue" feel unnatural. Although I have yet to see the play staged, in my reading of it the absence of a response from the professor to whom she speaks exposes too much of the theatrical artifice for this particular "confession" to feel believable and authentic.

The Chicana protagonist of the play's final monologue is more thoroughly developed and her relationship to the entire play is made more visible. Marisa "La Valentina" Chavez is a 26-year old described as "a Chicana, who is fed up with Republicans and racism" (47). In this final vignette, she is leading a meeting of *Raza* activists in the basement of "Killer Tacos…a taco shop/hair salon by day and a revolutionary's secret gathering place at night" (46). She references Mexican American history when she explains that she chose her activist name after the female Mexican general who fought alongside Pancho Villa in the Mexican Revolution. Her monologue is historically and politically grounded in a way that pulls together the seemingly disparate contexts and events portrayed in each of the previous eight monologues. Marisa also provides testimony, not only to the others who attend her meeting but also to the audience, as to her own experience as an undocumented immigrant: "I am part of this country," she concludes without hesitation (49). She gives a detailed and impassioned explanation of how to gain US citizenship and of her decision to not feign singular loyalty to the US in order to do so:

> Do all of you know what this is?...It's an application for U.S. citizenship…Last week I applied to become a citizen. For most of you

> Chicanos who were born here, it might not be a big deal. But the people who became Chicanos recently, this might be very painful. It was to me…There are two questions in here that took me some time to answer. It asks, "Are you willing to renounce your country of origin for the privilege of becoming a U.S. citizen?" It asks, "Are you willing to fight against any country in defense of the U.S. of A?" I was going to lie and just mark "yes." I'm applying to be a U.S. citizen because I want to vote. I can go to rallies, marches, and protests and scream "**¡Si se puede!"** 'til I turn blue. **Pero no se puede** unless we can vote. There have been two elections where I could have voted against Bush, against Republicans, but I didn't. I couldn't answer those simple question [sic]…I still can't. "Will you renounce your country of origin?" Can I? Ah…Yes, but my Mexico, the Mexico that only exists in black and white movies, the only one I got to know, will always be showing in the movie theatre of my mind… "Will I fight against any country in defense of the U.S.?"…Yes, as long as it's not Mexico or any in Latin America, or any people of color, because brothers killing brothers, I'll have none of that, I've already seen too much of that…I will, someday…But I am willing to give up my country in defense of myself, in defense of my spirit. (50)

Her monologue affords the audience the chance to reflect upon the many individuals they have met throughout the play. Valentina also gives voice to many of the most pressing and complex issues around Mexican immigration, US citizenship, and Chicana/o identity and agency in the US at the turn of the 20th century.

In other moments, Valentina references specific aspects of previous monologues that remind us of the intersectionality of the individual articulations of the oppression that Chicana and Latina women encounter because of their ethnicity, their gender, their sexual identity, the language they use, and where they come from, overall emphasizing their identities as women of color in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways. This monologue and the entire play conclude as the other women on stage begin to circle Valentina while she chants "Awake, my **raza**, awake!" again and again (51). They follow her in a chant of solidarity and then pass around a stick of burning sage as the

lights fade out and the curtain closes.[55] Overall, the characters in *Confessions* are more developed than the stereotypical *tipos* featured in the improvisational *actos* performed in the 1960s and early 1970s by ETC. As an audience we are afforded glimpses into the lives of these diverse Latina women through individual monologues that nevertheless function together as a broader commentary on the gender, sexual, class, and ethnic oppression of Latinas and Chicanas in the US.

Yarbro-Bejarano considers Moraga's *Giving* as "engag[ing] and expand[ing] certain categories of white (lesbian) feminist theory as they intersect with the race, class, and cultural specificity of her project" (*Wounded* 32). She describes the alternate system of representation that Moraga constructs in *Giving* as a "radical critique [through] theatrical language that de-centers dominant theater practices" (32). On the whole, López's characters do not deliver the intellectually and psychologically-complex expressions of self, desire, and grief that permeate the monologues in *Giving*. Rather than a radical critique of dominant theater (and cultural practices), *Confessions* could perhaps be described as a tongue-in-cheek jab at traditional theatrical practices within the *Movimiento* and a comical exposition of the effects of heteropatriarchy on the Latina, and Chicana, subject. Taken together, the nine monologues also highlight the multiple strategies of resistance and subversion employed by Latinas and Chicanas into our present moment, on the stage, through their writing, and in the external world.

Moraga and López each challenge the dominant formal elements and expectations of both European-derived and Chicana/o theater, in *Giving* and *Confessions* through revolutionizing what is considered dialogue and monologue in ways that address,

[55] I would be amiss not to mention here the many potential moments of dialogue with Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos' play *El eterno feminino*, a feminist farce published in 1976 (two years after Castellanos' death).

involve, and often implicate their audiences in the plays they write and the socio-cultural realities they represent. In particular, their works can help us to consider multiple trajectories of the development of Chicana/o theater from the 1960s into the 21st century. In Chapter I, I discuss "Constructing Whiteness" and Judy Helfand's assertion that she has chosen to tear up the script she was given, as a white, middle-class, academic, in order to better engage with and problematize the intersections of race and class in her research and in her daily life. This metaphor seems a productive way to describe the artistic and activist projects of Moraga and López, who have also torn up the scripts—theatrical, political, cultural—of dominant culture that continue to oppress women of color, within and beyond the context of the *Movimiento*. When compared to Chicana/o theater of the 1960s and 1970s, Moraga and López's dramaturgy intersect in their fundamental reconceptualizations of how to create and represent the protagonists of the Chicana/o Movement. Through these plays, and their works as a whole, they insist upon the heterogeneous composition of the *Movimiento* and its participants.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: (STILL) *SEARCHING FOR AZTLÁN*

As I complete this dissertation in 2015, it might be easy to assume that the central struggles of the fight for Chicana/o liberation are behind us. In concrete and visible ways, it is true that progress has been realized through the political activism, scholarly contributions, and cultural production of Chicanas and Chicanos who have helped to inform our current understandings of the history and roots of Chicana/o oppression in the US.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the creation of El Teatro Campesino, which exists today in San Juan Bautista, California, as a playhouse and resident theater company whose mission is "to encourag[e] the young women and men of a new generation to take control of their own destiny through creative discipline, vibrant education, economic independence, and artistic excellence" (Mission).

MEChA [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlán], a student-run organization conceptualized in 1969 at the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, is active today at many institutions of higher education in the US. Its mission includes the "promot[ion] of higher education, cultura, and historia. MEChA was founded on the principles of self-determination for the liberation of our people. We believe that political involvement and education is the avenue for change in our society" (*Movimiento*).

At the University of Oregon, where I have studied and taught for the past five years, several departments offer courses that include the study of Chicana/o history and cultural production in the US. In the Department of Romance Languages, undergraduate

students can now take courses in the Spanish Heritage Language Program [SHL]. Designed for students with "a personal, familial, or community connection to Spanish," the program's mission includes "recognize[ing], validat[ing], and study[ing] the Spanish language as it is used in the US context, as well as the emerging phenomenon of English-Spanish bilingualism, with a specific focus on the use of code-switching" (SHL). US Spanish is included on the department's webpage as a language and program of study, along with French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Romance Languages. "Si vivir between different languages es lo tuyo, cruzar fronteras is your reality, and you're not afraid de ver más allá de tu nariz," the SHL webpage invites, "this is the perfect program para ti!"

In the courses I have taught on US and Latin American literature and culture, I have met students who identify openly as Chicana/o and Latina/o, students who speak up in class about their involvement in MEChA, students who speak both Spanish and English at home and in the classroom, and an increasing number of students who express relative familiarity with the existence of Chicana/o cultural production.

In the spring of 2015, undergraduate student David Alonso Rodríguez won the New Voices Playwriting Contest for his bilingual, one-act play *Sonrisa del Coyote*, whose debut at the University of Oregon's Pocket Theatre in October of 2015 coincides with Latin@ Heritage month events and celebrations across the campus and the region.

In the Pacific Northwest, Chicana/o theater and cultural events can be experienced for a relatively low cost at the Teatro Milagro playhouse and on college and university campuses that host Milagro performances, as well as performances by other Chicana/o dramatists and directors.

In the fall of 2015, in the week before I would complete my dissertation, the director of the theater where I volunteer offered me two tickets to a play by a visiting theater troupe in exchange for arriving early to greet the sponsors and set up the theater for the event. As it turned out, the event was a one-night performance of the bilingual Chicana/o play *Searching for Aztlán* on tour by Teatro Milagro.[56] Beyond my interest in seeing a new Chicano play, I was also curious to witness its staging and reception at the Oregon Contemporary Theatre in downtown Eugene, Oregon. The OCT tends to stage canonical European plays and contemporary plays by Anglo, and largely male, dramatists, and the majority of OCT patrons are Anglo, middle-aged to elderly, and from upper-middle class backgrounds.

Written and directed by Lakin Valdez, Luis Valdez's son, *Searching for Aztlán* is a one-act play that features four actors who play a total of 13 roles throughout the hour-long performance. From beginning to end, the event proved to be fundamentally different than any other I've experienced at OCT in my three years as a volunteer. Although we generally have to contend with late arrivals, on this night the small lobby was packed with patrons over an hour before the play was scheduled to begin. The play sold out almost immediately; I had to turn away several dozens of people who had hoped to buy tickets at the last minute. The generally quiet, reserved, and decorous theater patrons with season passes to OCT productions were replaced by an animated, welcoming, and multilingual crowd who greeted one another like family. At one point, I looked up from the ticket counter to see a man playing an accordion and singing in

[56] Teatro Milagro was founded in 1985 by Dañel Malán and her husband, José Eduardo González. In 1989, she expanded Teatro Milagro by creating the national Milagro bilingual touring program. Malán writes and produces plays and designs bilingual curriculum for K-12 schools, colleges, and community groups. In 2015, she enrolled in a Masters in Curriculum Design program at Portland State University. (*Milagro*)

Spanish as he danced in circles around the people waiting in the lobby. Even before the play began, the audience was engaged, with the space and with one another.

Upon their arrival at the theater, audience members were given programs—in Spanish on one side and English on the other—that also functioned as feedback sheets that they could submit after the performance. Beyond the metatheatrical moments of the play itself, the feedback sheet was one of the many ways that Teatro Milagro fostered direct interactions between spectators and actors. One question in particular asked whether or not spectators felt inspired to take action after seeing the play and, if so, what kind of action. The program also included a description of the historical events upon which the play is based, including the signing of Arizona House Bill 2281 in 2010:

> En el 2006 Dolores Huerta, co-fundadora del United Farm Workers, dio un discurso en Tucson High en Arizona, donde dijo: "Republicanos Odian Latinos". La Superintendente Suplente, Margaret García Dugan, fue a Tucson High a explicar que Huerta estaba equivocada, pero, antes de que llegara, se les dijo a los estudiantes que solo [sic] podrían preguntarle ciertas preguntas. En protesta, más de 200 estudiantes se taparon la boca con cinta y se marcharon de la escuela.
>
> El Distrito Escolar de Tucson decidió cortar el programa de Mexican American Studies (MAS). En Mayo 11 del 2010, la Gobernadora, Jan Brewer, firmó la propuesta SB2281 haciéndola ley. Esta prohibición de Estudios Étnicos elimina cursos que "pudieran llevar a derivar el gobierno". Los libros de MAS fueron confiscados de los salones de clases enfrente de los estudiantes.
>
> El programa de MAS en Tucson fue establecido en 1998 para mejorar los niveles de graduación de estudiantes Latinos. Gracias a MAS, más de 1000 estudiantes Latinos se graduaron de high school, mejor porcentaje que los estudiantes Anglos. Aproximadamente 67% de los estudiantes de MAS fueron a la universidad, que es el 179% del promedio nacional para estudiantes Latinos.
>
> Después de la cancelación de MAS, muchos estudiantes se unieron a MEChA, el Movimiento Estudiantil Chican@ de Aztlán. Cada letra en MEChA representa una parte de "la causa": *Movimiento* se refiere al movimiento Chicano; *Estudiantil* identifica que es una organización de estudiantes; en el centro está la parte más importante, *Chicano*; y la última palabra es *Aztlán*, que reconoce raíces indígenas de los estudiantes. Para

> compartir su nueva identidad, los estudiantes de MEChA se pusieron de acuerdo a trabajar juntos para luchar contra la opresión.

Searching for Aztlán represents several of these historical details through its characters, who include the School Board (played by three actors), La Lechuza (a hyperbolic and villainous representation of Arizona Governor Jan Brewer as "una bruja"), and Chicana teacher Dolores Huelga (a clever play on UFW Co-Founder Dolores Huerta and the word "huelga" [strike]). The play opens as Dolores, holding a box labeled "Banned Books," attempts to explain to the Board the value of MAS for Latina/o students. She implores them to take a thorough look at the entire curriculum before voting to ban MAS for good.

The play's intertextuality with *The Wizard of Oz* begins with a recording of the song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," which triggers Dolores' psycho-spiritual search for Aztlán through a journey akin to Dorothy's search for the Emerald City and the Wizard of Oz. On her travels through the *cuatro caminos* of body, heart, spirit, and mind, Dolores encounters others who join her in her search for Aztlán: a "Dreamer" (an undocumented immigrant who wanders the desert), a "High-Spanic" (an ex-Chicana with poor Spanish skills who has been trapped working as the *migra de Aztlán*), and a "Revolucionario" (a Chicano militant who has been searching for Aztlán to no avail since the mid-1970s). During her journey, Dolores expresses surprise at discovering that the road to Aztlán is not at all what she had imagined: "I never thought of Aztlán as a wasteland of lost, displaced people." By the end of her journey, however, *la búsqueda de Aztlán* has been revealed to be a metaphor for Dolores' discovery of her higher self and her internal strength to continue the fight for Chicana/o liberation. She has, in fact, not left Arizona at all, as Aztlán is "a place of evolving consciousness" and "un Dream-quest, set in the Southwest, where we all belong." At the end of the play, Dolores asks

Tonantzin, the Aztec Goddess represented in the play as the Mother of Aztlán, what she should do next. Tonantzin responds by encouraging her—and by extension, the audience—to "Dream, and act!" "In order to change reality," Tonantzin counsels, "you must first change yourself."

Several elements of the *acto* figure into *Searching for Aztlán*, including the character *tipos* and their lack of psychological development, the minimal use of props, the absence of scene changes or intermissions, the incorporation of music, dance, and song, the character comedy derived from cultural stereotypes, the politically current references, and the explicitly didactic nature of the play. In addition to the historical background included in the program, the introduction to the play re-presents a theatrical interpretation of the events surrounding the signing of HB 2281 in Arizona. During Dolores' journey, the people she meets also provide historical and socio-political context relevant to their particular experiences as Chicana/os in the US. The "Dreamer" speaks of US border politics and treatment of Mexican immigrants, the "High-Spanic" describes life for Chicana/os during the Reagan era, and the "Revolucionario" recalls the Chicano Moratorium of 1970 and quizzes Dolores on US-Mexico history in an effort to determine whether or not she is Chicana. When Dolores finally returns home—literally and culturally/spiritually—at the end of the play, she bestows upon each of her new friends a book from the box of banned books she carried in the opening scene—*Critical Race Theory*, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and *Chicano Psychology*—in explicit defiance to a system that bans and criminalizes the study of non-Anglo cultural production and history.

In some ways, *Searching for Aztlán* is more complex, in content and in form, than the ETC *actos* of the mid-1960s. One example of this is the fact that Lakin Valdez

challenges dominant Anglo narratives and perceptions in nuanced and comical ways throughout the play. Early in the play, Tonantzin develops a counter-narrative to the US mythos of Manifest Destiny by proposing that the Chicana/o people assert what she calls "Manifest Destiny 2," through which they will reclaim not the land but *la conciencia del pueblo*. The incorporation of music and dance, ranging from the Mexican folk song "De colores" to new interpretations of the music from *The Wizard of Oz*, recalls some of the more post-modern and hybrid features of Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit.* The humorous incorporation of Pachuco lexicon by the female character Tonantzin and the overall hybridity of language and forms of theatrical representation throughout the play also evoke aspects of *Zoot Suit* and Luis Valdez's individual dramaturgy of the 1970s and 1980s. All of these features are realized against two backdrops: the literal backdrop that reads "Raza, origin, exploitation"; and the symbolic backdrop of explicit references to a 21st century US society in which entire states vote to ban Mexican American Studies from public schools and Donald Trump is running for president.

The Teatro Milagro production of Lakin Valdez's newest play highlights some of the (r)evolutions that characterize the development of Chicana/o theater over the past fifty years. The play features a variety of Chicana/o subjects who share the stage and the script. A female actor plays the role of Huitzilopochtli, the male Aztec Sun God portrayed in many ETC plays, while a male actor plays the role of the female goddess Tonantzin. The fact that the play will tour for an entire year not only the in Pacific Northwest but across the US perhaps suggests an interest in and appreciation for Chicana/o theater that extends beyond Chicana/o and Latina/o communities. Its staging

at OCT perhaps indicates a shift toward the inclusion of varied theatrical forms and less culturally homogenizing content within traditionally Anglo performance venues.

And yet my recent experience of watching this play also affirmed the position I take in this dissertation: that even in our present moment, there still exist significant obstacles to the visibility of Chicana/o cultural production and to a broader awareness of the historical oppression of Chicana/os in the US. The staging of a bilingual, Chicano play was an anomaly for OCT and a departure from the kinds of plays—both in form and in content—usually staged there. Many of the Anglo patrons with whom I spoke before and after the performance expressed how "exciting" and "fun" it was to have the chance to see a "Spanish" play. Some expressed concern that they wouldn't be able to understand the dialogue, and others asked if we planned to host more Latino plays in the future. While certainly well-intentioned in their enthusiasm for their first experience with Chicana/o theater, these statements underscore the relative invisibility of Chicana/o theater and performance, as well as language and culture, within dominant Anglo society. They also speak to the fact that plays like *Searching for Aztlán* still tend to be viewed by dominant culture as exotic alternatives or exceptions to the norm of Anglo-centric and European-derived theater and performance. As MEChA's website affirms, "[o]n campuses across Aztlán, MEChA and Mechistas are often the only groups on campus – Raza and non-Raza alike – that seek to open the doors of higher education para nuestras comunidades and strive for a society free of imperialism, racism, sexism, and homophobia" (Movimiento). As this statement attests, evidence of increased visibility of the cultural production of Chicana/os, within specific and often isolated sectors of US society, do not always signify changes in policy, shifts in practice, and heightened

consciousness around the continued oppression of Chicana/os, and their history, within dominant US narratives and in our actual present reality.

Within *Searching for Aztlán*, the representation of gender in a Chicana/o-specific context also reveals continued obstacles to the visibility and representation of Chicanas within the *Movimiento*. Although the protagonist is a woman whose role highlights the real-life accomplishments of Dolores Huerta, her intellectual approach to the fight for Chicana/o liberation stands in constant contrast the more physical, militant, and assertive activism of the Chicano male characters. Dolores is frequently portrayed as confused, lost, and in need of guidance, not only from Tonantzin and the Huitzilopochtli, but also from the two Chicano men she meets on her journey to Aztlán. In many moments, her role could be equated to that of a narrator, a structurally necessary character whose portrayal is often less engaging, less comical, and less high-energy than the portrayal of the male characters. In other words, Dolores' role does not accelerate or develop the plot, but instead serves to connect the historical details of the *Movimiento* to the lives of the other characters in the play.

Even more problematic is the portrayal of both of the antagonists to the fight for Chicana/o liberation as women. The lead villain is an Anglo woman, "la bruja," who represents Arizona Governor Jan Brewer; the secondary antagonist is a(n ex-)Chicana who has been secretly helping the evil bruja to bring to fruition her plan to permanently expel all the Chicana/os from Arizona. The male characters represented in the play rarely reveal flaws or express doubts in terms of their belief in the existence of Aztlán and their own abilities to eventually reach the Chicana/o homeland. On the whole, the female

characters are portrayed as more insecure, more malleable, or more fickle than their male counterparts.

Despite these issues in terms of the representation of Chicana/o gender identities, *Searching for Aztlán* stood out to me as one of the most dynamic and interactive performances I have experienced in any theatrical context. After the play's final scene, the actors remained on stage and invited the audience to continue the dialogue with them for as long as it took to engage all of the questions and comments we might have. They shared that this version of the play had come together after only ten, 5-hour rehearsals, and they underscored that anyone with a story to tell can, and should, find a medium through which to express it. They encouraged the Latina/o middle-school students who attended the performance with their teacher to pick a topic about which they are passionate and to find a means of creative expression that fits their particular interests and skills. Above all, the actors underscored Teatro Milagro's belief that knowledge is power, especially for Chicana/os engaged in the ongoing fight for representation and liberation within dominant US culture. "If knowledge isn't power," actor Ajai Terrazas Tripathi concluded, "why would so many people [keep] trying to control it?" In these ways and others, Teatro Milagro actors emphasized the importance of Chicana/o theater that educates and engages directly with spectators and that invites them to reflect, together, upon the performances they experience. The format of the entire event reinforced the idea that the fight for Chicana/o liberation, through activist theater and other forms of mobilization and cultural production, is ongoing and requires the active participation of Chicana/os and non-Chicana/os across the US.

Consideration of plays like *Searching for Aztlán* can help to broaden our understanding of Chicana/o history and identity at the same time as they demonstrate the continued existence of significant obstacles to the visibility of the history of Chicana/o oppression. As we find in the works of Anzaldúa, Moraga, and López, these obstacles have often rendered the accomplishments and struggles of Chicana and gay/lesbian/queer/bisexual Chicana/o subjects doubly invisible, as they encounter multiple forms of oppression due to their identities as Chicana, as women, and as non-straight. In the 1960s and early 1970s, grassroots theater set the stage for Chicana/o activism and for the development of individually authored and published Chicana/o dramaturgy. By the 1980s, both new and previously unheard Chicana/o voices began to problematize the representation of the protagonist of Chicana/o liberation only through heteropatriarchal subjectivity. As we find in the works of Moraga and López, by the 1990s Chicana dramatists had developed new models of the theatrical representation of multiple Chicana/o subjects who collaborate, dialogue, and share center stage. Central to the decolonizing projects undertaken by Anzaldúa, Moraga, and López is the assertion that in order to consider history as a means through which to better understand our present condition as a society, we must broaden our critical and cultural lenses to include the experiences and identities of the diversity of Chicana/o protagonists, both on and off the stage.

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