

The **JOURNAL** *of*
LATINA CRITICAL FEMINISM

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Preface

What is the Journal of Latina Critical Feminism?

The journal will provide a voice for the articulation of feminist and social justice concerns from a Latina perspective, broadly construed to include Latinas in the U.S., Latin America, and other countries.

The journal will be an online, open access, blind peer-reviewed academic journal that will include narrative and poetic entries as legitimate forms of scholarly feminist analyses.

The basic normative commitment of the journal is to expand the analysis of the ways gender relates to social justice in its multiple forms, including a critical examination of intersectionality, the role that men and women play in oppressing animals and the earth, and the complex connections between minority cultures and the oppression of women.

We particularly encourage submissions that draw from our indigenous values, norms, and perspectives to articulate views of sociopolitical, economic, and natural environments that promote the mutual well-being of human and nonhuman species.

The journal wants to explore the social justice implications of different forms of gender and sexual identification, including gay, lesbian, transgender, pansexual, bisexual, and other forms of sexual identity.

The journal welcomes articles that discuss ways in which feminist struggles can be systematically integrated with broader social justice issues. In particular, we believe that to achieve its true potential as a revolutionary transformational force it is important for feminism to support a planetary ethic that expresses moral concern for all inhabitants of the earth community, understood in intergenerational terms.

We construe feminism broadly to include gender analyses that examine the ways men, particularly minority men, can be oppressed by patriarchy.

Articles should as far as possible use language that is understandable and accessible to wide audiences and avoid obscurantist and convoluted terminology that conveys a false sense of profundity. Also, the journal will include poetry, experiential narrative accounts, and other forms of creative expression.

Perhaps most of all, the journal will strive to exemplify the highest standards of intellectual and moral integrity and fairness. We believe that the true potential of feminism will never be realized unless these ideals are fully embraced and implemented.

Poetry

Pretty

Rita Carmona

I'm not pretty like white girls are pretty

my beauty is something that is whistled at on side streets and ogled at frat parties

The way I feel beats in my body and dance is taken from me as a gift to the men who leer as I sway

I am not allowed to be beautiful on my own

I am the waiting to become mother, child bearing hips but ass I wanna fuck and then forget kind of beautiful

Drunk at a party, alcoholic spirits weighing on my own, I confessed to my white cousin that men didn't treat me like they treated her

Her stories of frat boys lying in bed with her tracing her hips and telling her she's beautiful don't echo the way my friends asked me to keep secret that we'd spent the night together

She said it was because the world was fucked up and she was white and I'm brown and it's not fair but the world is fucked up

and I thought back to the first party she brought me to where older college guys looked at me like a piece of meat and I was instantly enamored that someone could want me like that

and then to see them all surround the skinny white girl who walked in to leave me and my cousin alone

Her latina makes her interesting

Mine makes me foreign

My beauty is not my own
it belongs to the white men who want to colonize me and tell me I'm spicy

I tried to dance on a table with a white girl, trying to allow myself to feel free at a cast party, and she backed down and away saying she couldn't dance like me

and I shook my hips and moved to the rhythm and I felt sexy and amazing and my beauty was finally mine

and no one was paying me any mind

I was free and suddenly reminded of my cage again

standing above them on the table, watching drinks disappear and boys surround girls lights
flashing

I felt like a spectacle
the boring movie he puts on when you Netflix and chill

the entertainment

Freedom stripped of me again and I left

I'm not pretty like white girls are pretty

I'm fuckable for a few good nights, laughs to share with a buddy

when I own my sexuality, no one is pro hoe
they are uncomfortable
I do not look like the other girls

I'm not pretty like white girls are pretty

Men are not sure of how to tame me
bc to them I am wild
exotic
different
special
stranger

The world's fucked up she said

Caressed hips nights are something to dream of she said

I deserve it but men will not treat me the way I deserve to be treated

because I'm not pretty like the white girls

That Night by the Pool

Taylor Polito

██████ picks me up me by my wrists says:

what

fuck the is wrong
with you?

pulls me to my tip toes

shakes shakes
shakes shakes me

(the moment the polaroid didn't capture)

██████ is mad we can't have sex @familyvacation

pushes my heels to the water & threatens to let go

I punch him

he cries & now
I'm the abuser

Behind the Staircase

Taylor Polito

■■■■ asks me to take my bra off
for the Polaroid /bare hips

I don't take my bra off
"Lay down," he says

I contort /pale skin
my body
to look /black straps
small & /spine line
mousy /head shy
like
a
good
girl /butt tucked

it's unrefined:
unsmiling

Suburbia

Marcela Rodriguez-Campo

It's in the air. Even here,
Sitting on my porch, The
wind blows Blonde hair Into
flying fairies, And delivers
them at my feet. A reminder:
That even now, Even here at
home—I do not belong.

I answer the door To
curious neighbors Who
bring with them Soft
whispers And wide eyes.
You do not belong. You do
not live here. You do not
own this house—It owns
you.

I breathe it in.

Blow on my coffee,
Inhale the smell of home.
And use the disdain To
ease the burn. I sit and
smile, And wave from my
porch. They do not know,
That I am my own.

East Division Supermercado

Regina Gort

My sister who is whiter
than me opens the door:
Gringa, go straight back to the taqueria.

She follows the instructions. Instead I go
down the aisles: boxes of flan and tembleque.
Just add water.
Dulces de coco and flat, red and gold tins of guava paste.

I don't know why our father didn't let us pray
in Spanish or teach us to cook
Carne guisada or talk about Vietnam.

I know why he wouldn't eat
chicken but he ate that paste, that thick red jelly
from a can, sliced, on a piece of gouda.

In college, I'd drive to the Hispanic district
and as I stacked supplies on the counter,
the cashier with the perfect cat eyeliner
would whisper: *Gringa.*

Now, trembling my hands bring a tin
to the table where my sister is sitting.
And after our tacos de pollo
I pop the lid, slice the paste in half.

Neither of us were at his bedside
to witness his final breath.

I see him in dreams,
always wearing a tuxedo and drinking rum
from the bottle.

No hay nada, he says.
There is nothing.

cuicacalli

ire'ne lara silva

i. body of song

never say we did not speak.

our tongue is an infinite tongue.
strong in its ignorance of your
american time. its roots reaching
deep into the earth where sunlight
and the memory of sunlight live in
the darkness. there are songs
breathing in our words. there are
songs breathing in the sunlight. there
are songs breathing in the earth.

our hands are breathing with songs.

we are inhabitants of a border
inhabited by a border. we say
tejanos. we say mexicanos. we say
mexicans from this side. mexicans
from that side. we say mexican
americans. we say chicanos, xicanos,
xicanxs. we say tex mex. we say
indigenous. some of us know the
names. Kickapoo. Apache.
Comanche. some of us know. many
do not. but we know. we know. we
say here. we say there. we say there
is no line. we say. we say. we mean
us the people. we mean we who
belong to this land. to all our lands.
we mean we. our hands working this
soil. we mean we. our feet dancing
on this earth. we keeping it turning.
we mean we. our blood spilled here.

we mean we. equal parts earth and
sun.

ii. earth of song

February 2, 1848—Treaty of
Guadalupe Hidalgo

is it a treaty when one side never
intended to honor it. when the ink
itself was greed made manifest. we
are the lost children of a broken
treaty. the dispossessed though the
ink provided for the protection of
persons and property.

we are the many times dispossessed.

Land of the Alabama. Land of the
Apache. Land of the Aranama. Land
of the Atakapan. Land of the Bidai.
Land of the Caddo. Land of the
Comanche. Land of the Choctaw.
Land of the Coushatta. Land of the
Hasinai. Land of the Jumano. Land
of the Karankawa. Land of the
Kickapoo. Land of the Kiowa. Land
of the Tonkawa. Land of the
Wichita.

we claim all of our blood. all of this
land. all of these americas.

though we were dispossessed when
the spanish came. dispossessed when
the mexican shamed the indigenous
of us. dispossessed when the whites
came as immigrants to texas which
was still mexico then. dispossessed
when they fought mexico in order to
preserve slavery.

dispossessed when the united states
said manifest destiny.

in school we are taught manifest
destiny as if it was everything—

doctrine and driving need.
inescapable destiny. the happy ever
after. but remember always
remember though our history may be
written in blood—what they teach us
is only the slightest sliver of the
truth. not everyone believed in the
necessity of a western coast. the
necessity of war. the necessity of
dispossession. the necessity of death.

and always always there are those
who resist.

iii. blood of song

we do not forget to sing.

we sing when we are screaming. we
sing when we are whispering. we
sing when we are praying. we sing
when we are dying. this is what my
blood knows. my ancestors have sung
unceasing.

they still sing.

they translate the matanza of 1915
as a massacre but matanza is more
accurately translated as slaughter. as
in the slaughter of animals. the treaty
of 1848 ended the mexican american
war they say but the war on
mexicans on mexican americans
never ended. decades upon decades
of our people killed in plain sight.
killed with impunity. bodies hung
from trees. bodies collapsed on the
ground. bodies left to rot. some of the
killers were vigilantes. some of the
killers were eager to steal the land
steal the land steal the land. if the

history books admit to 187,000
acres of land taken in this time in
south texas alone how many acres do
we imagine were lost in reality.

some of the killers were known as
texas rangers.

the history books use careful
language. say there were 'excesses'
of force but even they will admit the
rangers were created with the intent
to kill mexicans. mexicans on both
sides of the river. created with the
intent to kill native americans. they
saw our people as animals to
slaughter and they slaughtered them
and they slaughtered them.
thousands and thousands from 1915
to 1919 alone.

a bitter thing to see brown-skinned
children playing pretending to be
texas rangers.

the slaughtered are still singing. there
is a song only spilled blood sings.
one part lamentation. one part
prayer. one part rage. one part
creation. one part fractured into
many nameless parts.

iv. memory of song

No dogs or Mexicans Allowed.

No dogs, no Negroes, no Mexicans
Allowed.

We serve Whites only, no Mexicans
or Spanish.

my mother was born in 1940. had a first grade education but she could read those signs. she remembered those signs. and all the places where those signs were not necessary because she knew she was not welcome. in this land of segregated schools. segregated wealth. segregated neighborhoods. segregated graveyards.

when my mother told me her first memories of language she told me about learning to sign her name. how at least she didn't have to sign with an x. and she told me about those signs.

my mother died in 2001. all her life it seemed she never entered any space without looking for the signs explicit or intangible that would say she was not welcome.

all her life, she never assumed safety. never assumed protection.

v. people of song

what is a border. what is a nation. what are citizens. what is north. what is south. what is a people.

blood recognizes blood.

lines on a map are not real. history is a story told and told crooked. nations are a falsehood.

until they are not. until the lines are used to dispossess. to rip. to tear. to say these families have no right to

be together. this person has no right
to their land. this person is no longer
a citizen. no longer legal. no longer
human.

because only humans have rights.

what was repatriation but another
way to break the treaty. what was
repatriation but another way to steal
land. another way to render us not-
human.

400,000 to 2 million mexicans and
americans of mexican descent
deported to mexico in seven years.
citizenship did not matter. 60 percent
of them were born citizens and were
still deported. it was their names
their skin that made them targets.

they did not use the phrase ethnic
cleansing then.

but what else can you call it. then.

or now.

vi. bones of song

you ask if the bones are heavy. bones
are always heavy.

they bear the weight of a life. the
weight of all the lives that came
before them and the lives that
followed. they bear the weight of
blood and muscle and sinew. of grief
and work and loss and time.

Falfurrias, Brooks County, Texas

the words 'mass' and 'grave' live in
the nebulous place where we put all
the words we must keep at a distance
so that we can breathe. and sleep.
and live. so that we can work. so that
we can hope. the distance at which
you keep nightmares. the distance at
which you keep history. the distance
at which you keep the stories that all
these words invoke:

lynching
traincar
texas ranger
separation
repatriation
border wall
death.
murder.
death.
murder.
death.

and the word that is poison:
forget.

if remembering was not important,
the bones would not remain. bones
would rot and fall away like flesh.
bones would liquefy dry and flake
away. bones would be the
consistency of flower petals and
dragonfly wings. bones would bear
no stories no names. bear no essence.
bones would bend and sway as
inconsequential things do.

they didn't come here to die.

they came looking for work for the
end of violence for life for family for
dreams.

they didn't come here to die.

how many other deaths in the desert.
there are bones from the gulf of
mexico to the pacific ocean. when
there is dust you must ask yourself
how much of it was bone. how much
of it is anguish. how much of it is
now nameless.

they said. enforcement through
deterrence. they said it. they say it
again. they are saying it now. let
them risk their lives. let them lose
everything. and when they are
nothing bury them like animals.

because they dare to cross a line.

in falfurrias. little town so close to
the border. little town with its name
of uncertain origin. lipan. spanish.
french. bastard name for a little town
that might as well be named
checkpoint. checkpoint texas. little
town where brown people live and
brown people die. many brown
people die. what else do mass graves
signify.

what mass graves always signify.

these

are not humans. mass graves with
bodies in trash bags. mass graves
with skulls and bones all tossed in
together. names are lost in mass
graves. and many someones are still
praying for the safety of their father
mother son daughter wife husband
child child child but they are praying
for bones.

nothing but bones.

sometimes it seems the border is a
graveyard. soaked with blood. all the
bones beneath the ground rattling
rattling. but remember the border is
not a line. the border extends
hundreds of miles both south and
north and even further. the border is
everywhere there are bodies. and
bones. the border is everywhere we
die because of lines on a map.

El Paso/Juarez

we will say femicides. we will say
border and mean a narrow strip of
land. we will say border and think of
the women who have marked their
panties with blood. women who
cross with morning after pills
because they know they will be raped.
women on both sides dying. women
on both sides killed. we will
say femicides and think border but
indigenous women across these
continents are missing are taken are
killed. bodies abandoned. women
killed and no one names the killers.
women killed and women killed and
women killed and when will it be the
end of women being killed. women
being taken and women being killed.

voices whisper from all their bones.

vii. breath of song

in the beginning, before the first
word, there was a breath. and an
infinite moment of decision. to
whisper. to scream. to speak. to sing.
or perhaps there was no such
moment. perhaps there was no doubt.

perhaps there was only ever one
choice.

because the first breath was created
for song.

because we were created for song.

so let us be song. shaped by song and
shapers of song. carriers and keepers.
inheritors and creators.

let us be song.

viii. house of song

if i sing you songs, will you listen.

i am a house of song. you are a house
of song. we are a house of song.
however we began wherever we
began however and wherever we
end. whatever we might have been or
could still yet be. we are a house of
song.

rage and love intermingled in us.
and only the song to keep us name us
make us heal us remember us whole.
the song the house the place where
grief and tenderness sleep. where
remembering wakes and daydreams.
wakes and daydreams. the place
where the daily choice to sing is
made is carved is lit and set alight.

this is the house where we sleep and
then wake to stare at the sun and
pace the earth and chant, we survive,
we survive, we survive. and by
chanting we live. by chanting we do
not forget. we sing. we wail. we pour

ourselves out of our mouths until
'sing' and 'wail' are not distinct
things.

until we are both song and wail. and
in return, the land sings us.

sings us until we are and are not the
history. until we are and are not the
bodies. until we are and are not the
dispossessed. until we are and are
not the hunted the rejected the
repatriated the violated the lost.

the land sings us so that we do not
surrender.

not then. not now. not ever. not in
this time or that time. not in this time
of lost children. not in this time of
walls.

we cede nothing. forget nothing. the
voices are here. the voices are with
us. within us.

the voices do not end. the singing
does not end. the voices sing and the
voices sing and the voices sing and if
you hear silence you hear it only
because all the voices have become
one all the voices have become
many. sometimes it will seem as if
you are hearing silence but what you
are hearing is the singing of all the
voices in the universe singing at once
with one unending breath the voices
do not end the singing does not end
and the voices sing and the voices
sing though bodies may suffer and
bodies may die the stories do not end
the song does not end this is a house
of song and in this house of song
singing does not end the singing does
not end the singing does not end the

singing does not end the singing does
not end the singing does not end the
singing does not end the song never
ends

La nada

Ana Martinez

“Se hicieron de la nada,” dijo mi madre.
Pero ella no es nada. Ella es madre.
Madre que se perdió en la nada de los días.
Luchando contra las noches americanas,
cargando el peso de dos hijos.
Dos hijos que buscaban la atención
de la nada en otro idioma.

Juntos sobrevivieron el tiempo.
La hija encontró el sol en el horizonte.
El hijo, los edificios en la ciudad.
La madre, el regreso al vientre del mar
que nutre el universo.

“El Ilegal”

Miriam Mosqueda

“Al norte llegue sin un centavo”

Barren garage
And Dad’s shirt catching wet memories on dirt covered cotton sleeves

“Con dolor me aleje de mi país”

54
But still 16

“Hay, si hablara el río bravo”

That song plays
And his mind drags him to the day he left

“Que cruze en una vieja raíz”

I don’t think he ever told Abuelita he was homeless
Or had no money for food
Or slept in the strawberry fields
I don’t think he ever told anyone except Ama

“los extrana su amigo el ilegal”

Trauma trapped too torturous to tell
But it speaks in this song

The words wrap their arms around him
And 38 year old wounds breathe

“Regreso su amigo el ilegal”
The coming and going
“Ya se va su amigo el ilegal”

There is no hyphen between us and them

Jeni De La O

If you're a woman
you're an accident waiting to happen:
sorry, I didn't see you there
sorry, I didn't hear you
sorry, I didn't know you meant it

y si eres negra,
you're an obstacle:
dammit, you're in my way
dammit, speak up for yourself
dammit, say what you mean

y si eres prieta
you're a nuclear bomb:
they always make a scene
they always go off
they always blow things out of proportion

steady climbing monuments,
steady burning sage,
steady getting shot. shot.
shot. gutted.

digamos:
when they go around us
we're getting off easy.

which is to say, it feels like
every flower that blooms 20 years from now
will have fed off the flesh of our mothers.

Nameless Butterflies

Jonathan Andrew Perez

Making fun of the pastoral is difficult
because it's like cut trees
but they first cut me.

There are nameless butterflies that don't even belong
in the horse pasture across the way:
there are yellow ones, green ones, tiny ones,
flappy silver ones, gun-blue ones
nervous ones, horny ones, searching ones,
ones with a tuft of sedge, ones that unfurl
radio antennae like Nature's kaleidoscope,
pancake ones, paranoid ones, horrible ones,
regardless of the circumstance.

In lieu of them, swallows
meander through the clear openings
taking advantage of their stupidity.
The land takes no time to fill in
their predatory gaps.

After a lunch break,
in the proximal distance
come the return of the well-to-do diggers, energized
hyper-masculinized, sweated; they do not disturb
the collection of festering wings that has gathered
in the absurdity.

Crews of eleven to thirteen men
kill the butterflies, murder the swallows
in a torrent of salt and salt mines
like men who have been brought up, beaten up,
by old growth now edging to take over uninhabited hillsides.

Sutura freudiana

Anna Christine Rodas

Con una incisión precisa
me abriste
del útero al tórax—
sacaste mis órganos
y los vendiste
to the highest bidders
dejando la chatarra
en el parqueo
like an auto trade-in.

Somehow
they managed
to sew me up
con el hilo de mi ser
y sutura freudiana.

Ahora me consuelo
con vino tinto
y pan dulce
en las mañanas.

Me too haiku

Leonina Arismendi Z

I cannot identify
ME from the too's any less
than from No's a yes,

Cold limbo. Ice box.
Under the sun. Knee to ground.
Unexpected blow.

Time passed yet a flash
brings forward a rush back to
unspoken places

Creative Writing

Today is the Day

Yvette Chairez

Today marks seven months since my divorce.

I married my husband in a desperate attempt to try and live normally. I knew our marriage wouldn't last forever. I didn't feel womanly enough to be a wife, or sensual enough to be a lover. As a result, I didn't know how to treat him the way my abuela said a man expects to be treated, and I wasn't motivated to try.

Though it embarrassed him that I wanted to see a doctor about my problems, I went anyway. His resentment over my decision and the resulting bill, I knew, would take months to blow over. The psychologist said that I had to be patient, and I had to be considerate of the fact that my husband was never going to fully understand what I had been through – so I was expected to be the bigger person in these circumstances and excuse any lapse in consideration on his part. Such a thing takes quite some time to process, she said, and a lot of conscious effort needs to be made to come to terms with it. She was speaking about him. These were more reasons I needed to be gentle towards *him*. I was exhausted enough simply trying to live day to day. Hearing that I was doomed to continue living this way, and sentenced to helping my husband through what I had been through, didn't provide any hope for my future – or ours, as a family.

The OBGYN said, very casually, when I sought to find out if physical rehabilitation therapy existed for vaginas, that I was “lucky” the man I was molested by had only inserted his fingers inside me; otherwise the damage could have been worse. I have scarring on my vaginal walls, but it is “only” slight and isn't anything to worry about. The muscles in my pelvic area do not function normally, but I am “lucky” that a life of sudden incontinence and defensive tightening – which made it nearly impossible for my husband to enter me – are the “only” permanent effects of what he put me through.

I like to think I might have turned out witty and attractive if he hadn't done what he did. But instead, I am paranoid and awkward. Being molested stifled my social development and self-esteem. As a kid, I wasn't happy and carefree. I didn't think many things were funny. I didn't see the use in having a good time. Anything good was overshadowed by what I knew was going to happen when I went to my abuela's house after school.

I didn't enjoy lustful looks from boys as a teenager; the looks made my pelvis hurt. And I didn't enjoy loving touches from my husband when I was married. I was simply fed up with feeling fingers down there. I had been forced to feel them since I was three; I dreaded the touch. My husband's fingers were polite, but that wasn't enough to make the feelings of dread go away.

Tension and repulsion are part of my being. They were the very first emotions I remember having and they were reinforced so often that they have become everlasting. My husband couldn't change that; no matter how hard I cried and begged for him to figure out how to make me feel better, he couldn't. I have never been able to achieve orgasm; my clitoris has been desensitized to pleasure. My body doesn't want pleasure if it has to be delivered in the same ways he had delivered pain and humiliation. My husband grew exhausted of feeling unwelcome inside of me.

I tell myself it could have been worse. I tell myself I was “lucky” I wasn't *raped*. But I wonder, had I been raped *once* by a *stranger*, as an *adult* – as a strong, confident, rational adult who

had not been molested day after day, year after year, as a *child* – I might have had a chance at a better existence. Had I been raped by someone outside the family, maybe my abuela would have been outraged; she probably would have comforted me and called it an injustice. I like to think she wouldn't have considered it something trivial, something that I just needed to wait out, something that I needed to stop making a big deal of in order to keep our family at peace. If I had been *raped* as an adult instead of *molested* as a child, I would have understood it wasn't my fault; I might have known who to turn to. I could have made him pay. I would have at least enjoyed a portion of my womanhood before it became exactly what made me a victim.

I didn't want to have children. My husband talked about children non-stop, always pointing out how many kids his brothers had and how much meaning they would bring to my life. But I didn't believe a baby girl should be forced to have a mother who couldn't teach her the joys of being a woman. And I didn't believe a baby boy's female role model should be me. I had nothing worthwhile to pass on to a child. No wisdom, no words of encouragement, no nothing. I knew I would emotionally withdraw from my children if they ever really needed anything from me. I didn't want to be close to a child; I didn't think I possessed any traits that were worth them getting close to.

2.

Today marks one year since I aborted my baby.

I only knew I was pregnant for eight days, but from the moment I read the home test, I knew my baby was going to be a girl. I've always heard that mothers just know.

I had assumed motherly feelings came naturally, magically, once a woman finds out she is pregnant. That didn't happen for me. I didn't feel like a *mother* that week. Instead, I felt like a bitch for considering bringing someone into a world of emotional burden. I was ashamed for the fact that a poor defenseless being would have to forever suffer in the aftermath of what happened to me. I hated myself for the fact that any time she looked into her mother's eyes, she'd only see someone who was no longer there – someone who had never even gotten the chance to be present. My daughter wouldn't see anyone she could look up to.

I was absolutely certain she would be molested as a child. I tortured myself – and, probably, her – with thoughts of how incompetent I'd be at dealing with it when it happened. I was scared I would passively accept the tragedy as something inevitable that girls go through.

I wouldn't be able to tell my baby that time healed the pain. I wouldn't be able to say I'd help her through the emotional madness. I wouldn't be able to promise she'd eventually start to feel okay. I would probably shut down and wish I hadn't brought her into this world anyhow. Time hadn't healed my pain; I didn't know what it was like to be helped, and I knew I was never going to be okay.

My weeklong pregnancy was characterized by nightmares of him touching her the way he touched me when I was a child. I couldn't stop him from doing it to me then and I wouldn't be able to stop him from doing it to her either. In one of the nightmares, he plunged his arm elbow-deep into my womb, sloshing blood around as he molested my tiny daughter who didn't even look human yet. With his other hand, he molested me. I watched on, hour after hour, as he looked at her unformed fetus face and felt between her fetus legs for something that wasn't even there yet. She was helpless. She couldn't move away. She couldn't know what he was doing was wrong. She had no choice but to trust any person who happened to loom over her. She had no choice but to let him touch her the way he wanted to, even if it caused her pain.

I never once saved her in any of the nightmares. I didn't know how. Nothing I did or said ever

stopped him. Even in my belly, even in my imagination, I couldn't keep my daughter safe.

The worst part about being pregnant was that my nightmares weren't only of *him* molesting her. I had nightmares where I molested her, too. The nightmares were out of my control. All I thought about while I was pregnant was sexual abuse. It was always at the forefront of my mind. I could never push it aside. Whenever I saw parents hug and kiss their children in public, or change their diapers, or comb their hair, I saw the gestures as very inappropriate. Very sexual. Every interaction between mother and child or father and child looked like an act of molestation. The thought of holding my daughter close didn't feel right. The sentiment was marred by the way he used to force me close to him.

I didn't want to be a mother, but I was curious to watch my baby grow up. I wanted to know what a little girl who hadn't yet had her innocence fondled to death acted like. But I was afraid I would resent her for being happy and free and full of hope.

When I tried to imagine what I wanted my daughter to learn from life, I immediately thought of sex. I wanted her to be in touch with, and have a strong understanding of, her own sexuality. I wanted her to experience lust and orgasms. I didn't want her to shy away from being touched. I didn't want sex to make her uneasy or afraid. I didn't want her to go through any experience that would make her feel less than beautiful. I wanted her to find a man that she could not wait to get in bed with. I wanted her to find immense pleasure in sex before someone came along and forced that pleasure away. I wanted her to experience happiness at the thought of motherhood.

I did not want to be a mother because I was repulsed at the inappropriate thoughts I had of my daughter. I didn't picture her as a tiny infant smiling and wiggling her toes. I pictured her as teenager, or young woman, having sex and enjoying it. I saw my daughter arch her back and heard her moan. I thought of how seductively I wanted her to walk. I thought of sexy things I wanted her to say to strangers on the bus – things that would make them yearn to make love to her at the next stop. I wanted her to give in to the seduction of well-intentioned men and women. I wanted her to seduce them back. I wanted her to practice masturbation, with friends, with boyfriends. Had I been able to find any delight in masturbation, I might have found it hard to resist showing her how to do it myself. I wanted her to be familiar with her body, so she could discover what she liked and have steadfast control over her sexuality.

I was no better than a child molester for these thoughts. It was easy to see I needed to terminate the pregnancy.

Though I sensed deeply that I loved her, I couldn't help thinking she'd be better off that way. I tried talking myself out of it. I tried telling myself that killing a baby girl was much worse than molesting one.

Then again, death is over in a few seconds, but being molested has made me feel like I've been half-dead for over a quarter of a century.

Since letting her go I feel even dead. I have started wondering if her preciousness would have inspired me to speak out, to seek a true love, to reclaim my sexuality. They all seemed like daunting, useless tasks when brought up in therapy; it seemed more exciting to die than take on such things. But I cannot help wondering if seeing my daughter would have given me reason to take them on – to create a better atmosphere for her, one where I could be a semi-respectable mother and she could be a carefree little girl.

3.

Today I sit here, a shell of a woman, as I've always been, and I am no longer trying to find any sustenance.

I have known all along that it was useless trying to be strong. Everything positive in my life is always, always eclipsed by what he did to me.

And so he stripped me of my clothes, my childhood, and every joy associated with being a woman: motherhood, marriage, and my sexuality.

4.

Today marks the day that I've decided there's no reason to continue on.

Mara Was Killed

Paulette Jonguitud

Mara didn't die. "Mara was killed!" people were chanting as Olive looked up at the sky. She was lying on her stroller, sweat running down her round cheeks. It was hot day in Mexico City and Olive and her mother had walked a long way to join the vanguard of the march. Her mother was strange that morning, her eyes watery and her teeth clamped, she reminded Olive of a wooden stick, stiff and dry. They walked in the first contingent, only women were allowed to walk up front. "*¡Hombre consciente abandona el contingente!*" They had watched a couple of male photographers being dragged out that morning. Sensible men walk in the back, female voices chanted as the biggest woman Olive had ever seen carried a camera man by the waist and put him on the sidewalk. I'm doing you a favor, I'm documenting your struggle, the man shouted. Do me a favor from the sidelines or tell your newspaper to send a female photographer to a women's march. Olive's mom was a photographer, but she had left the camera at home.

No, I said no, *pendejo que no*, my body is mine, only mine, I said no! Olive heard music and thought that the march was a carnival. There were drums, trumpets, purple body paint. She was happy, at first, she was out with her mother, just the girls, no little brother, no father in sight, they wore matching purple t-shirts. The march seemed like a parade, rainbow flags, purple scarfs, colorful signs. But once they joined in, she realized something was off. No one was happy. They chanted curse words. Someone had died, she heard, or rather, someone had been killed. Mara. She reached under the stroller for her water bottle, opened and dropped it. Her mom didn't notice, she didn't stop, they kept on moving, she was chanting along We want us alive! Mom had tears in her eyes and sweat marks under her arms. A girl wearing a pink ski mask and pigtails offered Olive a bottle of water. She drank. The girl wet her hands and ran them over Olive's face, over the back of her neck, then she patted her on the forehead and said: Stay strong, little sister, before she disappeared into the crowd.

Who is Mara? What happened to her? Who killed her? Why are we here? she finally asked. This is no place for children, an elderly woman said. This is the only place for children, a young woman replied, she had her baby wrapped around her chest in a purple foulard. I shouldn't have brought you here, Olive's mom said, but we must walk, you need to know, don't you? I shouldn't have brought you here. Who is Mara? Mara was a young girl. Someone took her away. Someone hurt her. She got in a cab. She was alive. And then she wasn't. We take cabs all the time! I know we do. Why are we here? We walk to make sure no one hurts another girl again. Will walking work? No, it won't. Nothing has worked so far, but something will. A collective of somethings. I'm hot. I'm thirsty. We want us alive! I shouldn't have brought you here, what was I thinking. "*¡Verga violadora a la licuadora!*" I want ice cream. We'll soon be home. We should move away. This is not a country. This is a clot. I shouldn't have brought you. This is no place for a girl. This is the best place for a girl, the woman with the baby insisted. I meant this country. Oh, I can't argue with that.

Mom, I want to leave.

So do I.

The Grief of Lupita Ramírez Ospina

Karina Lickorish Quinn

Sometimes, when I am waking up in the night, I am thinking I am back home in Colombia, standing in my garden, and I am hearing the toads groaning, *groá groá groá*, and the bugs singing, *tic tic tic*, and the frogs shrieking, *pip pip pip pip*. I am believing that outside is the forest and Manolo is waiting on the step – Manolo our monito – waiting for a banana or the papaya juice in a bowl with squeezed lemon.

But when I am opening my eyes I am remembering. And all my memories is crashing down on my chest like a black avalanche falling from the mountain top. Manolito is not here. Colombia is far away. And Julita, I have buried her in the ground.

Se lo dije. Yes, se lo dije so many, many times. I swear to God I tell her ten thousand times but she not listen. I am always telling her to stay away from the gringo boys and find herself a nice boy from our own community. A Catholic boy who is sharing our same values. But Julita, she always so stubborn. Stubborn like una mula and even when she is a little girl she is saying, No, Mami, and doing exactly what she want. I do not understand this but her papi always say to me that she will make a rich and powerful woman one day, so I say, OK, and I bite me the tongue.

But all the time I am thinking to myself, into what trouble is she getting, this little girl? My sons is never doing this. My sons is always obeying me. Not one of my five sons is saying yes but doing no.

But my Julita, she is nothing like the daughter I have always pray for. I was never wanting sons. What for, to have sons? Just to have them be kill by the narcos or to join a pandilla? No, por Dios. So all my life I am praying, God send me girls. But after I have five sons I am giving up hope and saying to myself I will have no more babies. And that is when Julita decide she is being born. Just when I think I am finish with children. But Julita she say, No, Mami, I am coming now.

From the start Julita is not a girl for to play with dolls and buy the pink dresses and put the ribbons in her hair. She is not the little compañera that I hope for. She is wanting from the start to be independent. She is telling me always, Mano no, Mano no, when I try to hold her hand. Very young she is learning from her brothers about building with the bricks and climbing up the walls. Except Julita, she is smarter than her brothers. At the age when my sons is running around with diapers on their heads, slamming into walls, Julita is drawing pictures with the crayons and building things with the bricks. And she is not building only shaky towers that fall down. She is building architecture. When she is four she is building tunnels and bridges and an aqueduct and she is asking, Mami, Mami ayúdame a poner agua. And my husband he is saying, You see, Lupe. This niña will be rich and powerful woman. And I am hoping that he is right. Because all the time I worry for my children what will happen to them in the future. Especially because Eddy, the oldest brother, want to be a police just like his papi, and that is not a good career in my country.

As well I am worrying about Julita and her health because she is always complaining about a pain in her belly, and she is getting full of gases and then getting diarrhoea another time and another time. Because of the diarrhoea she is getting smaller and smaller. We cannot afford a doctor so I rely on other remedies. My suegra suggest to me membrillo con arroz which help with the diarrhoea but not so much with the pain. When the pain is coming, Julita lie with me on the sofa, and I stroke her hair. These are the only times she is curling up with me like this.

Many years later, when we arrive in the United States, I take Lupita to see a stomach doctor who examine her entirely but find nothing wrong in her whole gastric system. He tell me it is the irritable bowel because of the nerves. The nerves of how her father is shot. The nerves of how she just move country. But I am sure back then that he is wrong because she always have these pains. Even as a baby. And for what is Julita nervous as a baby?

Now, when I am looking back, I am thinking more and more about these belly pains. I am wondering if the body have a memory of things it have not yet experience. Because, you see, my Pepe, all his life, he have these terrible headaches. Sometimes these headaches is coming so fast and so fierce that he fall to the floor, and he cry out in agony. So I am asking myself, did Pepe's head have already this memory of the future? Did the cellulles in his skull and in his brain have already a scar for what is going to happen? A scar for where he is going to be shot in his head? I don't know. I am just asking myself. Asking myself if the body knows.

Julita is five when my husband is shot, and I am praying God to make me die too. But Mercedes at church she is telling me, Lupita, you still young, you will find another husband. And I am telling her, What for, another husband? I meet Pepe when I am fifteen years old and we are being married now for more than twenty years. I want no other husband.

Then Consuelo is telling me, Lupita your family have a curse. And I am thinking maybe she is right, because every generation is one son murdered in the family of los Ramírez, the family of my husband. And Consuelo is telling me, you must pray down the blood of Jesus and cut the Ramírez curse so your sons will be safe. But when I tell my brother he say, Don't be superstitious, Lupe. In every generation a son is dying because in Colombia we have civil war, and Pepe make it worse because he become a police. But I am not running the risk of letting Satan swallow my sons, so I pray the blood of Jesus on my sons just to be very sure and cut them from the curse of their ancestors that bring murder upon the Ramírez children.

So now I am left alone with my kids. Julita, who is five, through Eddy, who is eighteen, and my brother is always telling me, Come to the United States. There is good jobs here. There is good public school for the kids. No one is killing anybody here for a cell phone or a wallet. Bring Julita and the boys and stay a while with me. And I am thinking to myself this United States is a paradise. In this United States I will not have iron bars on my home. In this United States I will not be afraid to wear a watch on my wrist. So I am telling myself, Yes, I will go.

At that time we is speaking very little English, but Julita is going to the first grade and there she learn the language very fast. And she is always correcting me, saying Mami, it is not 'I telling you'. It is 'I *am* telling you'. And she say it with the rolling eye that make me want to smack her little butt for being cheeky to her mother. But I am proud of my clever daughter who is learning everything faster than her brothers and faster even than the American kids in her class. And when she is seven she tell me, Mami I am going to college. And I say, muy bien, mijita, but you know that you Mami and you uncle cannot afford to pay the college fees. And she say, Do not worry, Mami. I get a scholarship. And she ask me, Do you believe in me, Mami? And I say, claro, mijita, because she is so stubborn like a little mula that I know she can do anything she want.

Julita is never asking me for things like her brothers. Her brothers wants Nintendo. Her brothers wants new sneakers. Her brothers wants a BMX. But Julita she is wanting only to go to the library and borrow books for the studies. She is not caring about the clothes or the make-up like the American girls. She is not asking me to buy her this thing or buy her the other thing. Before, when I am praying for a daughter, I am dreaming of the day that we will be shopping together or going to the beauty salon together. But now I am thanking God for sending me this bookish boy-

girl because me and my brother we have no money for buying her nice clothes or painting of her nails. And thanks to God we not have to buy her books because there is a public library near my brother home.

No, Julita is never asking me for buy things. But she is always complaining me to give her more of freedoms. She wants to stay out later after school. She wants to join this club or this club. She wants to get a job in an attorney's office so she can write it in her curriculum. And I am always saying, No, Julita. Is not safe for girls to be going out alone. And she is saying, Pero, Mami, this is the United States where it is safe. And I am saying to her, No, mijita. There is nowhere safe for girls. You do not know the things that happen to girls. For your brothers it is different. For you, no. I must protect you.

So all the time I am worrying, where is this girl? And what she is doing? My brother is working nights as a security guard at the mall. And I am working from four until nine in the morning at cleaning and again from six in the evening until eleven in the night. So I am all the time away and only on Sundays I am at home and knowing what is Julita doing. And I am asking her brothers, she is coming home on time? She is cooking the dinner for her brothers who is working all day? She is doing the laundry when I am not around? Yes, Mami. She is doing all these things.

Only later am I learning that it is my *sons* who is not coming home on time. Dalton, he is having sex with girls. Herson is getting in trouble with the police. And Brayan, too. They are getting too much like the American way. There is no respect in them.

Then I am paying more attention to what is it they are doing, my sons. I am searching their bags. I am noticing the music they is listening. This Reggaeton. And I am shocked at the lyric. This song about the gasolina. It is not taking a professor to guess about this metaphor. Filling them with gasoline as if the girls is cars. And all these songs about pegándose and perreando. I am asking my friends at church if this is normal music for the young people and they is telling me yes and not only how the children is listening but also dancing the perreo like dogs in the streets.

One day, I call in sick to work, but I pretend I leave for work just the same. Then I am waiting outside my building. I am hiding in the alley way to see my sons leave. And I am watching them leaving the front door, Herson and Brayan, and Eddy, too. And they is coming out one at a time, dressed in that *dejado* way, and they is walking down the street, pretending they not know each other. They is twitchy. They is looking over they shoulders. They is scratching they noses. They is making me think of nervous cucarachas scuttling. In this moment my sons is disgusting to me.

Then I am watching them hanging in the streets like *ratas* with nothing to do. Like they is not living with a mami and uncle who is working to the death for them. Like they is not having a sister and little brother at home. And I am looking at the young girls they is touching. These young girls dressed like *cholitas* in the streets and I am thinking, This is the kind of girl my sons is choosing.

Following them, I am noticing they is all wearing black and yellow. Yellow beads around Eddy's neck. A yellow shirt under Herson's too big black jacket. A yellow scarf tie around on Brayan's head. They is like *avispas* – like, how you say? Like the wasps - buzzing around in this all black and yellow. What is this all of a sudden love of yellow, I am asking myself? And it is like God is hearing my thoughts, because I am waiting outside a corner store, hiding my face, pretending to smell the lemons, and the shop assistant he says to me, You see those boys with yellow and black? They the Latin Kings. So I am asking, What is Latin Kings? And he is snorting his nose and shaking his head like a burro, and he is saying, Lady, you not want to know what is Latin Kings. Then I am figuring it out myself.

That night I am weeping and begging my sons, Mijos, I bring you from Colombia. We escape

from the wars and the killing. And you want to come here and play at soldiering. You little boys, fighting each other for nothing. And they telling me, Mami we not killing nobody. There is money in this game. We will make the big money for Julita's college fees. And I tell them, No. I do not want your dirty money. You are taking the short route. But on the short route there is evil. We are not come to the United States to take the evil road. Pandillas bring death and death is not a game, I am telling them. And every night I am praying, God, save my sons from the Ramírez curse. I see that the Ramírez boys all is thirsty for death. There is no fear for God in them.

It is only Julita who is doing the right thing, even though she is a stubborn mula and gives me the contrary, she is listening to me. And then I am telling her brothers, Why cannot you be more like your sister? Why cannot you get a good grades and read big books and choose good paths? Mira a Julita. Learn from her. And they agree. They say, Yes, Mami. Julita is the best of us.

Julita is sharing my bedroom, because we have only three bedrooms in our place. And every night I am coming home and Julita is still reading her books. And I am saying, Mija, sleep now. Then she sleep and I am lying in my bed, listening to her breaths in the dark. Sometimes she exhale and then there is silence, and I am holding my breath, waiting to hear her inhale again. If she not breathing, I not breathing. And on some nights, when she is having her stomach ache, I bring her a manzanilla, and she is curling up in my bed with me, like when she is a little girl back in Colombia.

When she is twelve, Julita is starting the menstruation overnight in her bed. She is waking up screaming like she is being murdered and I am jumping out of my bed and screaming and my sons is running into the room, shouting and they is bringing weapons with them – Herson have a baseball bat and Brayan have a big knife from the kitchen and Eddy have a gun and then I am screaming at them, saying why my son have a gun in the house? My God, is this madness never finish with you, my shameful boys searching for death? My God, my God, get out of this room! And my brother is grabbing Eddy by the neck and shoving him against the wall and shouting at him about what the hell he is thinking with a gun? And Julita is still in bed and she is crying with her legs all folded underneath and tangle in sheets all stain with blood, bright red and wet. I am wrapping her in my arms and saying, shhhhh, shhhhh, my hija, shhhhh, shhhhh. And she is crying saying, Mami, I am dying. I am dying. But I say, no my hija, you not die tonight.

I should be explaining to her before this time about the menstruation and how is a natural thing, but I am not yet seeing my Julita as a woman. She is still my little girl playing with the blocks and climbing the walls. But no, this is not true now. So I am telling her what is menstruation and why is it happening. And I am telling her, Julita, you become a woman now. This mean your body is ready to have the children.

And she say, But, Mami, I don't want children.

One day you will want children.

No, Mami, they just give you trouble.

And I laugh at her and I say to her, Only if you have sons, mi vida.

Scholarly Articles

Surviving the Alamo, Violence Vengeance, and Women's Solidarity in Emma Pérez's *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory*

Adrianna M. Santos

Abstract

This article analyzes Chicana feminist texts to frame a discussion of survival as a theoretical concept. Using Emma Pérez's historical novel *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory* as a window into the decolonial imaginary, I introduce the concept of *survival narrative* as a framework for analysis of Chicana literature, and briefly review Chicana feminist theory to support the argument. Examples from Pérez's novel illustrate the power of the survival narrative to advance a decolonial perspective. The novel reinscribes mainstream representations of gender violence that characterize the traditional Western by focusing on the empowerment that comes from solidarity amongst women and storytelling as central to cultural survival in the borderlands.

Keywords: survival, narrative, violence, borderlands, Western

Chicana feminisms often address issues of violence and survival as they pertain to the lives of marginalized peoples whose stories have been erased and/or misrepresented, actively engaging with the discourse of rape and assault to challenge the dominant narrative. Their counter-stories act as corrective narratives by documenting the lives of women, people of color, and queer subjects specifically. Chicanas have also addressed the shifting geopolitical space of the U.S.-Mexico border in their cultural productions in order to illuminate the ongoing effects of colonization. My research analyzes Chicana feminist texts to frame a discussion of survival as a theoretical concept. In this article I will specifically examine one case study that is part of a larger project of defining a body of literature I call *survival narratives* (Santos 124). Using Emma Pérez's historical novel *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory* (hereafter *Blood Memory*) as a window into the decolonial imaginary, I introduce the concept of the survival narrative as a framework for analysis of Chicana literature, and briefly review Chicana feminist theory to support the argument. Examples from *Blood Memory* illustrate the power of the survival narrative to advance a decolonial perspective. The novel reinscribes mainstream representations of gender violence that characterize the

traditional Western by focusing on the empowerment that comes from solidarity amongst women and storytelling as central to cultural survival in the borderlands.

Emma Pérez's historical novel, *Blood Memory*, is a border revenge tale told through the memories of a lesbian, gender fluid, Tejana anti-hero. By queering the Anglo-centric, masculinist representation of the South Texas borderlands, Pérez's main character, Micaela, offers an alternative protagonist to the rogue white cowboy of the popular Western genre. She is herself a survivor of violence and her journey, as well as her relationships with other victimized women in the novel, contest mainstream understandings of the region and the genre, and examine the long-term effects of colonial trauma. I refer to *Blood Memory* and other Chicana literary works as *survival narratives* because they are social protest literature that articulate subjectivities beyond victimization for survivors of colonial oppression, as well as demonstrate broader implications for anti-violence movements. I define the survival narrative as a hybrid form of literature that emphasizes collective struggle and storytelling as radical acts of cultural survival that are key components of empowerment and healing and that challenge the cultural erasure of colonization. Survival narratives are grounded in a long tradition of texts by marginalized peoples that address oppression and violence, participate in the subversion of the dominant narrative, and promote resistance through writing.

Blood Memory revisions the boundaries of genre and critiques the culture of violence that has been perpetuated through heteropatriarchal and colonial projects in the borderlands. The imagined community of *Blood Memory* disrupts the dominant historical and cultural narrative that has obscured the stories of women, minoritized, and queer individuals in the postcolonial project of nation-building in the United States of the Américas. Of particular note are the relationships forged between the characters, which demonstrate the survival strategies by which "herstory" recuperates the American epic and destabilizes a traditionally exclusionary representation of the border. What's more, the novel highlights the importance of networks of women coming together to save themselves and each other, and the importance of alternative family constructions through a distinctly Chicana feminist lens. While the novel does not have a "happy ending," it does feature a queer anti-hero who survives to tell the tale, strongly emphasizing the theme of survival and importance of storytelling, demonstrating the cultural imperative to return to our historical archives and as Pérez has argued *write* Chicanas into history.

Chicana Survival Narratives: Healing Colonial Wounds

Chicana identity is influenced by indigenous roots as well as settler colonialism. The story has always been violent, but the women have always been survivors. I center "survival" as a key thematic consideration in order to intentionally highlight agency and the power of storytelling, reframing "victimization" as a consequence of the colonial project that purposefully excludes subversive voices. In so doing, I examine how literature that addresses violence seeks to actively participate in social change through radical storytelling.¹ Through documenting their experiences of trauma, Chicana artists, activists, and scholars have cultivated methods of healing that are based in collectivity, creativity, and empowerment. Chicana literature often includes both graphic descriptions and symbolic representations of gender violence and Chicana feminists have frequently written about the importance of centering survivor's narratives in order to specifically challenge the status quo that criminalizes, ignores, and erases their stories. Rather than sensationalize or exploit these experiences, Chicana authors present strategies of both personal and cultural survival in response to that violence. Further, the writing, publishing, and distribution of this politicized liter-

ature constitutes a series of socially conscious acts that resist mainstream representation as well as add depth to the depiction of Mexican American women's experiences of life in the borderlands.

The battle cry "Remember the Alamo!" is generally meant to invoke nostalgia and nationalistic pride but when examined in the context of a Chicana feminist lens, it becomes a critical juncture to employ the tools of the decolonial imaginary that Pérez introduced in her germinal work. The phrase, "*Forgetting the Alamo*" in the title of Pérez's novel thus becomes a reference not to a heroic narrative of sacrifice and bravery that has characterized American nationalism, but rather to the causalities of a war for independence that dispossessed Texas Mexicans, further entrenched systems of slavery, enabled the genocide of indigenous peoples, and established white, patriarchal, heteronormative control in the borderlands of south Texas. *Blood Memory* opens in 1836, the end of the Texas Revolution, in the area near the "Golfo de Mejico," as it is marked in Chicana artist Alma López's map that accompanies the novel. The story is told mostly through the eyes of Micaela, who is quick-witted, intelligent, and confident, though she often goes unnoticed by others. This trait allows her some flexibility of movement in the story. In fact, the first scene features a card game in which Micaela holds the winning hand against the men she plays, but she gets no recognition for it. Fighting erupts between the men over the outcome of the game, particularly between the scoundrel Rove and Micaela's bi-racial cousin Jedediah. The fight is a petty display of violence, narrow-mindedness, and self-aggrandizement that foreshadows the later bloodshed at the battle sites. Pérez, therefore, begins her story by critiquing pervasive masculinity and aggression through the metaphor of a card game.

The novel is told in flashbacks, as a series of memories that Micaela cannot forget, in spite of reliance on alcohol as a coping mechanism. She becomes obsessed with vengeance, to the detriment of every relationship in her life, her own health, and her family's remaining stability. In Micaela's revenge story, Pérez constructs the kind of "imagined violence" to which Judith Halberstam refers in describing a representation of rage against oppressive, powerful white men in literature and art, what she calls "ground for resistance" (188). Micaela is driven to vengeance after she runs away from home, leaving her mother and young siblings alone, to follow her father and cousin Jed to the Alamo, a place where she, as a young woman, is not welcome. She begins to transform, adopting a masculine gender identity, after arriving at the Alamo and finding her father dead amongst the carnage. After donning her father's jacket and taking his knife, she returns to her family's ranch only to find it pillaged, her mother raped, and her twin brother and sister murdered by a gang of what she calls "Anglo thugs," who were searching for the Spanish land grant to her father's 49,000 acres. She writes, "All that kept me alive was my conviction to find the men who killed the twins during a senseless battle that ruined our peaceful lives" (45).

Unlike many revenge stories, in which the moral code is clearly defined, Micaela's journey is fraught with contradiction and ambiguity. Her revenge story as grounded in this violence is an investigative commentary on racism and dispossession, and the ongoing suppression of women's freedom. She writes, "An ache in my heart reacquainted me with the reason I had left home at all, reminding me that I could not return until my purpose was fulfilled" (81). She has a mission and she feels compelled to fulfill it in the name of her parents, her siblings, and all the people who lost their lives and their lands in the bloody conflict. There has been a recent revival in interest of the rape revenge film genre, a hybrid, feminist mode of cultural production (Barker 2015; Henry 2014; Hellar-Nicholas 2011). Similar to the rape-revenge film genre, Pérez has created a hybrid genre with elements of the historical novel, the Western, and the rape narrative. This amalgamation of literary methods informs my reading of the novel as a survival narrative, articulating the importance

of challenging colonial violence in both a historical and contemporary context and empowering communities through storytelling.

Healing colonial wounds of trauma is an unremitting project. And while rape narratives are important tools for individuals to describe their experiences of rape and assault, survival narratives are stories that emphasize collective healing from trauma as a result of colonization. They often do this by highlighting instances of personal victimization but do not stop there. They contextualize these individual experiences with larger systems of oppression and violence that effect entire communities. Micaela inhabits a hostile world, yet also manipulates the social norms and expectations of that time and space in order to enact her revenge plot. It does not go well, and in the end she is saved by women who love her and have also been affected by the violence she seeks to avenge. It should be noted that the women in *Blood Memory* are not able to flourish; they survive but cannot thrive. This is an interesting commentary on the limits of the decolonial imaginary to challenge the historical record. Even in the fictional world Pérez creates, the characters are subject to the violent processes of colonization and the struggle for geopolitical power. In *The Decolonial Imaginary* she writes, “The repetition of struggles, of oppression, seems endless, as if never to gain movement forward into another future, one where change would be hopeful or better. Perhaps all one can really hope for is survival” (76). Pérez further underlines this point by continuously referencing Micaela’s self-inflicted facial scar that refuses to heal throughout the narrative but which she fails to mention in the end. Ultimately, the best one can hope for is empowerment, choosing one’s own fate, and as Micaela muses, the only real power lies in “telling our own stories” (206).

I draw upon several citational footprints to identify this specific Chicana feminist Western revenge tale as an example of a survival narrative. My standpoint is based in several critical approaches. Centering a Tejana lesbian subjectivity in the heteropatriarchal, Anglo-centric genre of the Western genre, *Blood Memory* offers what Alicia Gaspar de Alba has called an “alter-Native intervention” into American literary history, a view of a culture that is “not immigrant but indigenous, not foreign, but colonized, and not alien but different from the overarching hegemony of white America” (106). More crucial to my own critical perspective, however, is Pérez’s own scholarship and creative work. In “Queering the Borderlands: The Challenge of Excavating the Invisible and Unheard,” she reflects, “I write fiction not only because I have a passion for literature, but also because I am frustrated by history’s texts and archives. I’ve always wanted to find in the archives a queer *vaquero* [cowboy] from the mid-nineteenth century whose adventures include fighting Anglo squatters and seducing willing *señoritas* [young ladies]” (122). She fashions this character in Micaela, who survives a violent sexual assault, and bears witness to the rape and murder of close members of her family as well as a mass slaughter of an indigenous tribe.

All of these acts of violence are committed in service to the land-grabbing and villainous acts of White supremacy that characterized the struggle for “independence” which led to the short-lived Republic of Texas and eventual Mexican American War.² Pérez crafts a distinct historical project in *Blood Memory*. Through a fictionalized account of the contested territory that the Mexicanos called Coahuila y Tejas, she demonstrates the theories she originally proposed in *The Decolonial Imaginary*. In this germinal text, Emma Pérez describes the decolonial imaginary as “a rupturing space, the alternative to that which is written in history...that time lag between the colonial and postcolonial, that interstitial space where differential politics and social dilemmas are negotiated” (6).

Authors of survival narratives are necessarily concerned with the links between embodiment, representation, and social justice issues because violent acts generally manifest as both physical

and psychological trauma and have implications inter-generationally. Pérez also implies that a historical transcript of events is forever inscribed in the cultural memory of a people and that all are affected by the legacy of conquest and colonization. According to Pérez, cultural memory is passed down through generations. Chicanas live with the inherited scars of their foremothers (109-12). They are born in the context of colonial violence that continues to affect brown women through disproportionately higher poverty rates, incarceration, and lack of access to social services like health care and education. The lasting inscription of violence to the physical body has been a necessary component of Chicana feminist theory. For instance, Pérez argues, “The past, its memories, becomes so much a part of the body’s desires that it will attempt to re-create what has come before, the way flesh has been caressed. The memories, even when objectionable – such as in sexual abuse, for example – haunt the body” (109). The wounds of colonization are deep and lasting and continue to effect communities for generations.

Moreover, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria E. Anzaldúa famously wrote of the border as an open wound, suggesting the violence that border-crossers encounter in passing between worlds. She outlines how Chicanas survive everyday lived experiences of assault in what she defines as the borderlands and acknowledges the border, both physical and metaphorical, as a trauma from which Chicanas are constantly attempting to heal (102). Chicanas, however, learn to survive through oppositional tactics of resistance like those described in Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Survival narratives describe Chicanas who make their own fates, write their own stories, subvert the norms and continue to struggle for equity of representation, opportunity, and agency. Chicana writers articulate a discourse of survival through adopting language to reflect their personal and collective experiences as oppressed peoples. So, my research begins from the premise that the kind of profound storytelling in Chicana survival texts that questions hegemony, acts as resistance through writing.

Intersections of Genre: Not Your Typical Western

Emma Pérez demonstrates her decolonial imaginary in *Blood Memory* by creating a narrative community that is multi-racial, multi-dimensional, and non-gender binary conforming, one that is reflective of the lived reality of Texas shortly after the contested territory was seized from Mexico by invading Texians. Some other books on Texas history that represent the complexity of multicultural, multiracial populations in the region include *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the US-Mexican War* (2008) by Brian DeLay and *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas borderlands* (2009) by Julianna Bar, but the common image of the Republic of Texas remains Anglo-centric and hypermasculine. So, the use of the Western genre to tell these particular stories of women’s and queer resistance is apt for several different reasons. First, the form generally romanticizes the “frontier” of 19th c. America through hypermasculine, Anglo heroes. Women or people of color in these narratives are either mute, one-dimensional, or evil, an antagonist to the hero or a plot device to drive the action. As Madelon E. Heatherington writes, “The ladies of duty blend into a single creature, whose fictive function is to swell a procession, to gather firewood, to keep the children out of the way and the dishes unbroken in the flour barrel, to minister to her man’s marital advances, and occasionally to be abducted, raped, or murdered in order that the men might avenge her” (646).

Nina Baym adds in her sweeping study, *A History of American Women’s Western Books, 1833-1928*, that in the white privileged works of women of the American West that she reviewed, the

“menacing Mexicans” appear often “as the all-purpose villains of Southwestern White mythology” (77). Further, the father of Southwest Folklore, Américo Paredes, considered the border corrido, or ballad, one of the earliest representations of Mexican American cultural production, as crucial to understanding Mexican American literary history. He points out the positioning of the Tejano man in these songs as adopting a rebellious stance against the violent Anglo Texas Rangers, with “his pistol in his hand.” Catriona Ruida Esquibel points out, however, that Chicana Lesbian re-envisionings of this history make use of this phallic symbol as well as other historicized mythologies to trouble gender norms and representations.

As a response to the lack of multidimensional women in Western narratives, Pérez’s novel complicates the representation of women and women’s relationships, though the themes of rape and revenge persist. The novel functions as a device to challenge both limiting literary representations and the historical erasure of women’s perspectives. This is important work in recuperating female experiences of life in our historical record. *Blood Memory* therefore subverts the traditional Western literary genre by both “writing Chicanas into history” while at the same time contributing to the construction of a queer archive that privileges non-mainstream histories. Pérez writes, “I have no intention of offering conclusive stories about Chicanas and our past, a past that crosses geographic terrains and political borders. I am more concerned with taking the ‘his’ out of the ‘story,’ that often becomes the universalist narrative in which women’s experience is negated (*Decolonial Imaginary* xiv)” As she notes, the book is aimed at breaking down a singular history of White supremacy and misogyny in Texas. Pérez creates a revisionist history in which the erased narratives of women, Native Americans, enslaved blacks and Texans of Mexican descent are told. Lucius, an enslaved black man who Micaela encounters on her travels through south Texas, and one of the only men who perceives her biological sex, refers to the coming changes in Texas and warns Micaela that she should get out with her love while she still can. He urges, “Look here, you better wake on up to what’s coming. You might as well get yourself back to Mexico and leave this place to ole whitey because, darlin, it’s slave lynching country and it’s Mexican killing country and it’s Indian scalping country and it’s going to be that for a long time” (102).

In American literary canon, certain points of reference – manhood, whiteness, middle-class status, heterosexuality – have reinforced heteropatriarchy and linked it with citizenship and subjectivity. This is particularly true of the Western genre. Heatherington argues that limited characterization of women into “the virgin and the bitch” begs examination of how “the basic dynamics of romance are aborted in these novels and therefore most fiction of the American West has never allowed itself to explore and develop its own full potential” (644). Furthermore, Baym contends that while the body of *women’s* work about the West is much larger than previously documented, of the documents she uncovered, only 3% were penned by what she calls “ethnically ‘minority’ women” (63) and those from California and Texas “insist on their pure Castilian – as opposed to Native American – legacies. Native women affiliate with their local groups [and] usually accepted some kind of assimilation as at least inevitable” (65). Pérez’s novel offers multiple perspectives of the Texas borderlands through the development of several main characters of Mexican, African, and Native American descent that transcend the racist representation on which Westerns have historically relied.

Other scholars have explored alternative constructions of the West in contemporary novels, like Linda Lizut Helstern who argues that American Indian author Louis Owens’s *Nightland* “reminds us that westering was never a single story but rather a multiplicity of stories, often conflicting [that] interrogate the myth of the Old West and its associated racial and gender stereotypes” (119). Al-

though more recent Westerns may have begun to trouble the flat female characters and stereotypical representations of natives, however, none have attempted to subvert the genre so completely by centering lesbian desire, female masculinity, and survival through the bonds of sisterhood like *Blood Memory*. As Pérez notes, similarly to Helstern, “There is no pure, authentic, original history. There are only stories – many stories.” (xv). The Texas that Pérez describes through Micaela’s eyes is a third space territory, a liminal place, shifting between national allegiances, economic alliances, and the evolving identity of its rapidly increasing inhabitants. This is echoed in the make-up of multiracial and sexually fluid characters that Pérez creates.

Pérez’s protagonist is a queer border crosser and survivor of violence who contests mainstream representations of Texas history and women in the Western. With the singular goal of avenging her family’s murder, Micaela takes on a male persona in order to gain access to certain spaces that have been historically occupied by men only. She has what she sees as the misfortune of being born a woman and therefore having no access to her wealthy Tejano father’s land as an heir. She is also unwelcomed at the saloon and in male-only poker games, and she is unable to biologically father the children that her lover, Clara so desperately wants. And, so she straddles the gender binary, cross-dressing and passing as a man on most occasions in her quest for revenge. She enacts many forms of stereotypically masculinized traits of violence and jealousy, alcoholism and gambling addiction, challenging the mutually exclusive binary categorizations of what is male and what is female, exemplifying the border-crosser, or what Anzaldúa would call a “nepantlera” or shape-shifter. Her embodiment of what Halberstam has deemed “female masculinity” is best represented as oppositional and indicative of a rejection of the normalized version of masculinity performed by the biological males in the story, a “queer subject position that can successfully challenge hegemonic models of gender conformity” (9). These affirmative representations of gender fluidity serve to expand notions of subjectivity and cultural productions as sites of exploration and resistance to oppression. Francisco Galarte notes the importance of Pérez’s text to the inclusion of transgender individuals in narrative:

In the decolonial imaginary, transgender Chican@s are also actors and part of the project of re-writing and disputing what is written in history. The decolonial imaginary allows for the unraveling of binary gender categories and relations we have inherited from historical circumstances that have rendered the transgender Chican@ impossible, unseen, or adrift in a sea of discourse. (133-4)

Galarte argues that the representation of the embodied experiences of trans people makes visible their contributions to Chicanx history and literature and that Pérez’s decolonial imaginary challenges the historical legacy of erasure present in mainstream history books. Additionally, as a man, Micaela enjoys some limited gender privilege and is free to roam about in male-only spaces. This does not, however grant Micaela access based on skin color. The character is subject to the same racial hatred, profiling, stereotyping, violence, and oppression that other men of Mexican origin experienced at the time due to the shifting allegiances between the Mexican government and the rebelling Texians. Because of the bloody turn of events at the Alamo, life in Texas is changing rapidly and the outlook for residents of Mexican origin is dire. As Micaela’s experiences demonstrate, the Republic of Texas is hostile towards non-whites, women and anyone who expresses same-sex desire or has a fluid gender expression but in Pérez’s novel these historically marginalized characters are the hero(in)es.

For example, Clara, Micaela’s love interest and often voice of reason, also embodies the liminality Pérez describes. She is both bisexual and biracial and Micaela is drawn to her not only for her

beauty, but also the allure of mystery represented through her romantic, but often ambivalent, character. Micaela feels hidden in the safe nature of Clara's femininity, noting, "I was content when no one gazed at me but instead at her and the stares did not indict or suspect" (113). Through this relationship, it is revealed that Micaela is also struggling with her ethnic and racial identity. While boasting and lying to Clara about her own heroism at the Battle of the Alamo, refusing to accept a reality of exclusion and loss, Clara questions why she would murder her own people. Micaela, however, explains that she does not identify with Santa Ana's Mexican army, but rather with the Tejanos with whom she closely interacts, fights, laughs, and drinks. It is with Clara, however, that she plots her revenge against two of the men that harmed her family. It is Clara that dresses her in feminine clothes so that they can get close enough to lure the men through sexual advances. Clara represents the possibilities of transcending both sexual and gender borders set against the backdrop of a fictional borderland. Though Micaela prefers to present as a man, it is ironically in female dress that she is able to perform the acts of vengeance she so desires. But, as she begins to accept the violence to which she has been subjected, and the shifting gender expression that tenuously drives her journey, Micaela eventually comes to realize that this kind of justice does not bring the satisfaction she was hoping for.

Other scholars have also examined the queering of literature and its relationship to history, time and space (Rivera 2015; Cuevas 2014; Morgensen 2011; Freeman 2010; Hernández 2003). One notable example is Karen Alison Fielder, who observes the female masculine in *Blood Memory* in a queer studies context. She writes, "Femme-macho character, Micaela dwells outside of traditional norms of feminine performance, rejecting both compulsory heterosexuality and modification by men" (35). Her study primarily focuses on Micaela's butchona lesbian identity as the central point of focus in the novel as an articulation of Anzaldúa's *nepantla*, or in-between. An important intervention, indeed. Fielder reads Micaela through several key Chicana scholars like Hurtado and Moraga, while also incorporating Hall and Halberstam to situate her female masculine subject within a broader cultural context, particularly to address the erasure of those same subjects. She also briefly invokes Foucault and Bhabha to address the "gaps" in the tether between literature and history that Pérez seeks to fill.

Fielder notes further that "As a displaced figure within the already inferior classification "women of color," Micaela as female masculine heroine represents a kind of outer limit of cultural representation" (37). This specific reading of female masculinity as a "powerful form or interstitial opposition" is crucial to understanding how Chicanas resist misrepresentation and erasure. My characterization differs from Fielder's because in my estimation, the romanticization of the character is not necessary to see her value within the American literary canon, particularly in the context of the hyper-masculine genre of the Western. Her character is not a paragon, perfect representation of an ideal of female masculinity or an idealized *nepantlera*. She is an anti-hero, flawed and single minded in her quest for vengeance. She is often thoughtless, selfish, and rash. She objectifies her lover, and drinks until she blacks out. Fielder also highlights the "violent marking of the racially other, [and how the] female body becomes an important trope in Pérez's novel, forcing us to examine the very harsh corporeal realities for mestiza women in mid-nineteenth-century South Texas" (39). And, while Fielder merely hints at the importance of the other female characters in the novel to the challenging of a heteropatriarchal ideology and representation of the old west, I posit that it is precisely this interconnected web of female allies that are crucial to the novel's main premise of survival, both individual and collective. Micaela survives because of the women in her life.

Women's Networks: Violence in Common

Survival narratives are also defined by collective struggle. The network of female relationships between Micaela, Carla, Ursula, and Miss Elsie are indicative of Pérez's grounding in Chicana feminisms. To further illustrate my point, the characters' common experiences of violence represent a range of reactions that often include solidarity, resistance, and healing. Pérez humanizes women who have been abused, but have then found community and safety in Miss Elsie's whorehouse, giving voice to characters who, as I indicated earlier, rarely speak in Westerns. Miss Elsie is quick to refute the claims of heroics at the Battle of the Alamo, having witnessed first-hand how some of the valorized men:

used to beat up on women. [One] poor girl...got scars on her back cuz them boys used to whip her and once they took a knife and cut her, thinking they wanted to brand her like she was an animal belonging to them. And that Bowie. Nothing but a damn drunk. And a thief to boot. Stole so much land you cain't even count how much. Them boys ain't heroes" (23).

She even describes one "gringo" firing his gun in church and killing a "meskin baby" a crime for which he receives no punishment "Like a meskin baby don't matter none" (23). She admonishes the changes in the area swearing "it didn't used to be like this" and that it "was downright peaceful" (23). Moreover, Miss Elsie later defends her position as madam saying,

I ain't one to sit in judgment. Look around. I'm a whore and I live in a whorehouse and what's more its my whorehouse and I keep whores for the like of men like Walker and old man Barrera. You think I like what I do? Alls I know is somebody's gotta give them poor girls a place to live cuz they been run out of their homes by some mean husbands or papas or brothers or uncles who raped them or beat them or expected them to be their dang slaves. Well, let me tell you, here they got a home and I ain't never let a man raise a hand to them and if them boys is gonna get a poke, well then they better pay up. I ain't proud of what I do but I'm sure pleased they ain't out on the street begging (25).

Ursula's sister, Lena, was one of Miss Elsie's girls, fleeing a family of abusers who began molesting her from early adolescence. Elsie condemns Ursula's family for turning away from Lena and not even coming to her funeral. Though she often disagrees with Ursula and resents gender norms and expectations themselves, expressing pity for their situations, Micaela has respect for her mother, describing her as such: "She had strength...a valor belonging to soldiers in battle. Somewhere between the death of her sister and the death of so many babies, she had become a warrior whose grieving my papi ignored but it was her strength that kept us all alive" (27). Ursula may be one of the strongest characters in the novel but her full story is restricted in Micaela's perception of her flaws. It is the witnessing of her mother's infidelity that drives Micaela to ride after her father to the ill-fated battle that would claim his life. It was a secret she already knew but the "particulars she had witnessed" were just the excuse she needed to run away, having never felt accepted by her mother.

In survival narratives like *Blood Memory*, relationships between women, the most saliently grounded networks of love and labor, actually make resistance sustainable in the borderlands. What's more, without the support from Miss Elsie, Clara, and her mother, Micaela would not have escaped the wild west "justice" for her crimes of vengeance against the men who violated and murdered her family. At one point, Micaela tries, in vain, to help a young girl named Juana who has been raped and impregnated by the villainous Walker, a white ranch hand vying for her family's land. Micaela takes her to a curandera who gives her a tea that terminates the pregnancy, but both

Juana and Micaela will later be raped. Micaela witnesses Juana being strangled to death by two of Walker's cronies and survives her own assault by denying the victimization for a time. It is her relationship with Clara that will later allow the memories to the surface.

Ultimately, Pérez turns the victim script on its head by metamorphosing the narrative into a vengeance odyssey in which she is assisted by other characters who have also been victimized by patriarchal and colonial violence. Secondary and tertiary characters like Miss Elsie, Ursula, Lucius, unnamed members of the native American community who are massacred, and Jed's mother all play a role in Micaela's coming to consciousness about her situation and that of her loved ones in the shifting space of the Texas Mexico borderlands. In one poignant and graphic scene, Micaela witnesses a massacre so gruesome she can hardly speak of it and passes out. Her inability to process the violence around her is indicative of the untold horrors of cultural genocide and attempted erasure of indigenous peoples that have taken pace in the contested space of the south Texas borderlands. Finally, Micaela is in denial for much of the novel about her assault, but her relationship with Clara and sexual awakening, as well as her commitment to children and family bonds of love, allow hope to emerge in the novel, though in the form of an ambiguous as opposed to "happy" ending. *Blood Memory* demonstrates that survival narratives create important spaces to represent what has been carved out and covered, revealing storytelling as an important process in the healing of colonial wounds.

Justice en La Frontera

As I have noted, Chicana writers specifically pen works that inform social justice movements against violence by using radical forms of storytelling in order to bring attention to the shared experiences of oppression that marginalized communities experience. Survival narratives are constructive insofar as they display pathways to recovery and a rewriting of the script of violence. Micaela embodies this imperative as a survivor who copes with pain in both productive and unproductive ways, all in an endless journey of self-healing. Micaela ultimately survives, abandoning the quest for revenge, unable to stay home, however, and on the run from a corrupt police force eager to serve out their own warped version of justice for the rapists and murderers Micaela killed. While this sequence of events is not a typical self-defense situation by today's standards, the imagined experience does point to an affiliation with the growing number of convicted survivors that crowd modern penitentiaries and are punished for protecting themselves by retaliating against their attackers. Micaela escapes with the help of Clara, Ursula, Elsie, and other female allies to live on and tell the story. Even though she is exiled from her homeland, Pérez explains in an epilogue that she returns annually and heals a little through each return. Micaela claims Clara's children, visiting them periodically and vowing to give future generations the tools to understand their own histories. Micaela no longer wishes to forget or deny her history, traumatic though it may be. Pérez ends the novel with the following passage, "Maybe the only justice we'll ever know is in surviving to tell our own side of things. Maybe that's enough for now. Telling our own stories so we won't be forgotten." (206).

In my broader research, I have identified survival narratives as social protest novels that represent resistance in the face of both interpersonal violence and structural oppression. Survival narratives are important tools of self-representation, empowerment, and healing for marginalized communities that have experienced racialized and gender violence. I argue, in line with many other Chicana feminist literary critics, that this type of radical storytelling builds bridges between liter-

ature and social justice movements. I ask how Chicanas, in particular, have constructed feminist texts of resistance by writing not only about violence but also methods of survival and resistance to that violence. By reading certain texts as survival narratives, i.e., as social protest novels that bring attention to violence and erasure, works like Pérez's demonstrate how literature can be an effective catalyst for social protest and positive transformation. The writing, publishing, and distribution of texts that attempt to ameliorate these cultural wounds of erasure, then, are particularly important to the self-representation and self-determination of these communities.

When stories are told that do not portray survivors as victims, but rather empower them, we have the potential to access new ways of thinking about legacies of colonial violence and gender policing. Much more attention should be given to Pérez's work, as well as other authors who are reimagining history and narrative. My main aim in this paper was to contribute to a body of scholarship devoted to framing literary spaces as platforms for change through a specific look at one Chicana novel that centers violence as a central theme. The characters in *Blood Memory* must fight for survival, through suffering, desire, redemption, and death. They resist the forces that obstruct them. If creative work is practiced as resistance to oppression, literature, art, and other cultural productions become a transformative method of healing. For Chicana cultural producers, art as activism has been a driving force behind social justice movements. But, as Ana Castillo writes, "Survival means you exist and we're not just survivors. We are women who go way beyond survival. We don't just exist. We have great faith and optimism in the future" (148). Survival narratives like *Blood Memory* are, in and of themselves, transformative but also point to a world in which the outcomes of social justice struggles are grounded in a variety of artistic, political, and academic interventions. By renegotiating the terms of the Western genre through the lens of the decolonial imaginary, Pérez has demonstrated the power of storytelling to transform our perspectives of women and survival in the borderlands.

Notes

- 1 Ways to talk about victimization vary depending on the aims of the individuals or organizations describing the phenomenon. The term "victim" is commonly used by law enforcement and the criminal justice system to delineate someone who has been the subject of a crime. Often those who have been victimized by assault tend to be retraumatized by the system itself; the term for this phenomenon is "re-rape." The term "survivor" was made popular by the anti-violence movements of the late 20th century in order to emphasize a move away from focus on the act of assault to the reality of life after assault. Some people who have been victimized by violence, however, still choose to call themselves victims because they wish to emphasize that the wrongdoing of the perpetrator and de-emphasize the expectation that they are compelled to participate in anti-violence projects simply because they have been victimized. Talking and writing about victimization, therefore is complex and there is not one way to describe all experiences of violence and trauma because individuals and communities experience it differently based on any number of factors. I choose survivor in solidarity with anti-violence movements.
- 2 Pérez's fictional novel was the first of its kind to be printed by the University of Texas Press, which, as is the case with most academic publishing houses, mainly distributes textbooks and social science texts.

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Transformative Expressions: Latina Third Space Feminisms and Critical Theory-Aesthetic

Roberta Hurtado

In “Beyond Survival,” Liza Fiol-Matta contends that “I must struggle to reappropriate my history and take back the power to define myself” (121). As part of a tactic for the radical work of an organic intellectual, the process that Fiol-Matta points to is one of addressing the sociostructural constructions of her identity as well as articulating her existence beyond them. The tools needed to enact this shift are neither easily made nor utilized. Indeed, the “struggle” Fiol-Matta describes in the process she depicts demonstrates their great complexity. For, as Latina Third Space Feminist expressions demonstrate, these tools must enable strategies to examine, engage, critique, and challenge the limits of structural power, and create spaces that exist in and beyond these limits. Further, the tools deployed in this process must be keenly attuned to the needs emerging from different communities that exist across temporal moments, regions, and demographics. This article explores how Latina Third Space Feminists cultivate resilient strategies of creativity that attend to the needs that Fiol-Matta points to. It examines how these strategies transform into a critical theory-aesthetic that resists practices of erasure wrought by Anglo-U.S. coloniality and pressures of conformity within their own cultural-communities. Here I analyze the kinds of knowledge that Latina Third Space Feminists have, how they express this knowledge, and to what ends. Further, I seek to understand how Latina Third Space Feminist expressions can formulate a decolonial praxis for empowerment by engaging the process of which Fiol-Matta writes.

These explorations are engaged in an attempt to articulate a Latina Third Space Feminist critical theory-aesthetic that emerges as part of a decolonial turn. This article begins with the premise that Latina Third Space Feminists engage in a continual self-reflexive process of knowing the cultures in which they circulate, knowing socio-cultural expectations, and yet functioning in a space that neither accepts nor defines itself using the limitations of these expectations. The self-reflection needed in this process, in many ways, emerges from what Sonia Sotomayor has postulated within her model of the “wise Latina,” which is an individual who has come to know in an intimate way how power dynamics work in Anglo-U.S. society. This intimate knowledge, as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga’s “theory in the flesh” from the landmark Third Space Feminisms anthology

This Bridge Called My Back shows (19), emerges from the lived experiences of socio-structural and cultural formations of identity for Latinas, and the need to remain critical of what those identities are and mean within any specific social context.

Latinas intimately know both Anglo-U.S. hegemonic structures as well as the boundaries of their own communities. Indeed, Kimberle Crenshaw has argued that women of color face multiple forms of oppression in the United States as a result of the varying intersections of identity that function as technologies of domination and create what I describe as processes of sociosexual geo-racialization. These processes develop definitions for identity categories involving socioeconomics, gender, geographical location, and race that limit the possibilities afforded to different people. Yet, it is not just Latinas' knowledge of these impositions that could be argued as making them "wise" in the sense that Sotomayor depicts. I contend that this wisdom is fashioned in how they know *and* respond to these structures while not being constricted to only reactionary battles with them. As Barbara Christian notes, responses to socio-structural power can evince a process of theorizing born out of the epistemologies and methods of cultural communication that are specific to a non-hegemonic community. A theory-aesthetic, as I define it, takes up the impetus of what Christian details, and engages the act of artistic creation in the form of literature, visual art, music, and more, as a means of theorizing. Latina Third Space Feminist expressions—as I term the critical theory-aesthetic emerging from artistic creations that engage the processes of theorization that Christian describes—resist hegemonic Anglo-U.S. and their own cultural communities' disciplined boundaries of "Latina" potential and how Latina identity is defined. While these women do not inherently, or solely, challenge the view that Latinas are labeled as "women" with Latin American origins or ancestries, I posit that they do challenge the boundaries of their own possibilities in terms of cultural engagement, production, and the ability to move beyond the limitations ascribed to them as a result of these terminological definitions. I contend that Latina Third Space Feminists create and mold their resistance through engagement with Third Space Feminist methods of theorization and critique, as well as creativity and construction, that artistic expressions can formulate to challenge the boundaries of their socio-cultural possibilities.

Third Space Feminisms emerged out of women of color artistic-theory movements in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Emma Pérez contends in *Decolonial Imaginaries* that "Third space feminism allows a look to the past through the present always already marked by the coming of that which is still left unsaid, unthought. Moreover, it is in the maneuvering through time to retool and remake subjectivities neglected and ignored" (127). In this conceptual framework, individuals engaged in these tasks have an opportunity to not only forge nuanced understandings of social history but also construct new narratives for their own potential within these histories in recollection of Fiol-Matta's statement. Of particular interest to this article are the kinds of tools that are utilized to forge these alterations and the strategies for creating a critical theory-aesthetic that they foster. This interest emerges because, and as Sonia Saldívar-Hull has argued in *Feminism on the Border*, the tools provided heretofore by hegemonic structures do not prove adequate for such endeavors and so there must be new constructions.

Within Third Space Feminisms, theorists engage in producing new and nuanced tools through the development of a critical theory-aesthetic: they engage creative acts that theorize and critique social injustices while simultaneously constituting methods for cultural-production ingenuity that, themselves, function to create a type of third space. Anzaldúa writes in *Making Face/Making Soul* that "[f]or many of us the acts of writing, painting, performing and filming are acts of deliberate and desperate determination to subvert the status quo. Creative acts are forms of political activism

employing definite aesthetic strategies for resisting dominant cultural norms and are not merely aesthetic exercises. We build culture as we inscribe in these various forms” (xxiv). She continues:

[i]nherent in the creative act is a spiritual, psychic component—one of spiritual excavation, of (ad)venturing into the inner void, extrapolating meaning from it and sending it out into the world. To do this kind of work requires the total person—body, soul, mind, and spirit...Art is a sneak attack while the giant sleeps, a sleight of hands when the giant is awake, moving so quick they can do their deed before the giant swats them. Our survival depends on being creative. (xxiv)

The acts that Anzaldúa describes thus hold multiple types of critique and creation as they emerge from spaces of tension—which result from processes of sociosexual geo-racialization both within the larger social ordering of a nation-state as well as the confines of a cultural-community—to constitute new forms of potential.

This article explores how Latinas can engage Third Space Feminisms to construct expressions of critique and innovation. It begins by first exploring the need to shift towards third spaces, “third space” as a concept, and the transformations of “third space” that emerge from its early conceptualizations in the second half of the twentieth century. It also identifies the development of Third Space Feminisms expressions that emerge as part of a decolonial turn in the late twentieth century. This article moves on to examine the theoretical underpinnings of creative acts that Latina Third Space Feminists can produce when engaging in Third Space Feminisms. It identifies the importance of different creative productions such as storytelling, historical narrative, and *testimonio*, as well as the production of visual arts. The final section of this article considers how such acts can function as resistance to Anglo-U.S. coloniality and cultural boundary policing, as well as creating platforms of empowerment for Latina Third Space Feminists. I contend that this empowerment serves as a foundation for ruptures in power and thereby contributes to a decolonial praxis.

Knowledge and Third Spaces

The shift to Third Space Feminisms as a means of critique and empowerment emerges out of the wisdom born from awareness of power dynamics in the United States. Anzaldúa and Moraga note in their description of “theory in the flesh” that “we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience: We are the colored in a white feminist movement./ We are the feminists among the people of our culture...” (19). In their depiction of the bridges they must cross in the “contradictions,” Anzaldúa and Moraga point towards competing spheres of domination that are created by and simultaneously underpin the manifestation of such contradictions: 1) an Anglo-U.S. coloniality and, 2) community maintained boundaries of authenticity and inclusivity. Important to consider is how these spheres constitute different forms of domination and how these become so insidiously entrenched in processes of identity formation.

To begin, these scholars first note that they are the women of color in a white feminist movement. Implicit to this statement is knowledge of how processes of sociosexual geo-racialization in the U.S. create whiteness as a center, and how gender affiliation is inherently connected to this centering. The structure from which this phenomenon emerges is that of the Anglo-U.S. coloniality, which forms the hegemonic social system in the United States. Historically, Anglo-U.S. coloniality formed out of Western European colonial endeavors. The originating ideologies, mores, and social structurings have developed and transformed over the course of centuries into the institutional processes of sociosexual geo-racialized experiences of people of color, and specifically—for the purposes of this article—Latinas today (Pagden *Lord of all the Worlds*; Quijano “Coloniality and

Power”; Hurtado *Not Flesh of Empire*). Thus, if Anglo/white identity is centered as the “norm,” then “white feminism” itself becomes part of the process of domination in that it inherently recreates the social structure by continuing a process of “othering” women of color.

However, and as Anzaldúa and Moraga’s statement points to, it is also important to consider how different communities of color respond to imposition by Anglo-U.S. coloniality. They note that, within their own communities, they function as “feminists” and this term appears to distinguish and/or distance them from—rather than inherently anchor them into—their communities, leading to questions regarding the source of this distancing. Scholars such as Lorena García and Mérida Rúa, as well as Patricia Silver, have described how resistance to Anglo-U.S. cultural hegemony has led to activity centered around constructing cultural objects and cultural memory in order to contend with assimilation efforts and cultural genocide practices that exist in the United States. Often depicted as calls to “authenticity,” a strict policing of imagined cultural boundaries can be witnessed in the push to keep a sense of what is “really” Latino culture and identity via constrictive regulation of gender identity, restrictive mores regarding sexuality, and/or family dynamics (Anzaldúa *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Arroyo “Roots”). Issues of language and the construction of ethnic affiliation are also some of the ways in which maintaining a “Latino” identity becomes a form of resistance to Anglo-U.S. cultural genocide (Anzaldúa *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Espada *Zapata’s Disciples*). And, it can also lead to callings for imagined homelands on distant shores where that identity is not under threat but instead hypothetically given an ability to flourish (Lugones *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*). The boundaries of these imposed limitations might appear to be tools with which to combat hegemonic violence, but they also function as methods of control within the cultural communities themselves.

Latinas, in general, contend with these two spheres of domination—among others—and I posit that Latina Third Space Feminists directly challenge these spheres and their imposition. Indeed, and as Anzaldúa writes, “my job as an artist is to bear witness to what haunts us, to step back and attempt to see the pattern in these events (personal and societal), and how we can repair el daño (the damage) by using the imagination and its visions” (“Let Us Be” 304). This activity—both the refusal to be subsumed by these competing spheres and the drive to heal—requires the construction of a space of articulation beyond them that is forged by the imaginative work that Anzaldúa describes. I posit that what emerges is, in many ways, a kind of third space: not necessarily of hybridity or liminality, but a nuanced space of expression. The concept of “third space,” that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century and was first articulated in post-structuralist Henri Lefebvre’s *Production of Space*, marks the discursive patterns in various Western-European intellectual fields that obfuscate the meaning of “space” or the unaccounted bridges between the mental and material worlds (4). In this discussion, Lefebvre argues for a knowledge of space that is theoretical and considers processes of signification and signifying in conjunction with subjectivity and space (9, 17). These new codifications have the potential to recreate spaces with new significations that move beyond the previous limitations of understanding social-spatial production. Although he does not specify the individuals who can take up this practice, or who is restricted, the new space does offer potential for transformation.

Scholars in other fields have since taken up the concept of “third space” and its potentials. For instance, postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha has argued in *The Location of Culture* for a third space that functions as a space of negotiation of negation for the marginalized, notable for its temporality but primarily as a site of hybridity. Within this depiction, the third space provides room for exploration of hybridity in relation to the past and what has formed as a result of that history

(53-56). Such activity is necessary to grapple with how historical events impact contemporary social relations and identity constructs. It also indicates the importance of nuances in relation to the needs of differing communities. For instance, in her analysis of Postcolonial descriptions of “third space,” Candace Zepeda’s “Chicana Feminism” points to the intricacies of Chicanas in the U.S. who do not exist in a colonial/postcolonial dichotomy (142). Indeed, and as Pérez notes, a “time-lag” exists between coloniality and postcoloniality that accounts for Chicana diasporic experiences. This distinction is necessary because the development of an Anglo-U.S. coloniality as it is experienced by women of color in the U.S. differs from experiences in other countries that, while having endured Western European coloniality, nevertheless have quite different post-formal Western Colonial era experiences.

Scholars in fields such as spatial ontology studies have also engaged the concept of third space to draw out its potential. Edward Soja’s *Third Space* explores the third space as an actual space that is marked out geographically—reliant on his conception of spatial ontology—for purposes of creating alternative perspectives on the relationship between humans and the spaces they inhabit or places to which they lay claim (50). The interlinking between place and space can lead to understandings of tension that result from Anglo-U.S. relations to different communities within its national boundaries. Such awareness, however, must also take into consideration the impact of how different Latino communities in the U.S. experience the relationship between geography and identity formation. For instance, as Zepeda demonstrates, there is difficulty for Chicanas to engage in Soja’s tri-ceptual understanding of space as objective, conceived, and lived, emerging from Lefebvre’s work, because of Chicanas’ unique diasporic experiences and developments relating to border consciousness (143-44).

I believe that critiques such as Zepeda’s are not only vital but also can be drawn from by other Latinas in the U.S., who currently grapple with the reality of Anglo-U.S. coloniality as well as differing relations to space and place.³ I engage and expand Zepeda’s claims by noting the importance of accounting for the contemporary experiences of Latinas—with necessary distinctions between communities but also awareness of solidarity within the term—in the United States regarding Anglo-U.S. coloniality and the need to engage in a decolonial turn. As previously noted, Latinas in the U.S. experience processes of sociosexual geo-racialization specific to the Anglo-U.S. coloniality—which have themselves emerged out of historical Western European colonialities of power—as well as within their own communities. For Latina Third Space Feminists, the need to articulate and critique experiences of coloniality and cultural disciplining requires an understanding that these women navigate structures of domination for survival. Indeed, it requires what Nelson Maldonado Torres has pointed to in “Thinking through the Decolonial Turn” as a decolonial turn.

What has emerged out of the aforementioned need and latterly noted turn is the development of Third Space Feminisms in which women of color critique structures of power through creative acts. In recognition of this development, I return to the landmark anthology for Third Space Feminisms, *This Bridge Called My Back*, which is now in its fourth edition, and of which I have already pointed with reference to “theory in the flesh.” Co-editors Anzaldúa and Moraga describe in this anthology how “[w]e are Third World women writers, so similar yet so different, similar in the issues we confront, different in approach and style. What we have in common is our love of writing...in our writing we reclaim our tongues” (161). Although living within the legal boundaries of the United States, the writers articulate an understanding of how processes of sociosexual geo-racialization demarcate them as “outsiders” in an Anglo-U.S. coloniality. Significantly, there is no conflation of women of color or “Third World women” as all being the same. Indeed, while

it is true that impositions of power structures are experienced by all of these women, it does not mean that how these experiences manifest themselves or how these women theorize and respond to these experiences are identical.

Further, these women express that they will “speak” and create regardless of how Anglo-U.S. hegemonic structures perceive such activities. The decision to engage in creative acts—in this passage, depicted as “writing” in order to “reclaim our tongues”—as part of a decolonial turn enables a transformative mapping of potential for women of color in the U.S. In *Bridge*, Anzaldúa describes a need to “act in the everyday world. Words are not enough. We must perform visible and public acts that may make us more vulnerable to the very oppressions we are fighting against. But our vulnerability can be the source of our power—if we use it” (195). Anzaldúa directly points to the dangers that exist in self-exposure: being made vulnerable to attack and drawing attention to the self/community by refusing to be silent. However, this vulnerability can also be considered an opportunity to step beyond the restrictive logics and limitations created by spheres of domination. The potential that emerges in this transformation exists within the processes of critique and construction.

Critical Acts of Expression

Latina Third Space Feminists engage different genre expressions made possible by the activity that Anzaldúa describes. Latina Third Space Feminist expressions are not guided by a sense of being limited to a reactionary stance or attempting to compromise their positionalities. Instead, Latina Third Space Feminist expressions elucidate the forging of resilient strategies to carve out new methods for communicating both knowledge of and challenges to the limitations imposed upon them. In this article, I am attempting to articulate an understanding of Latina Third Space Feminist expressions—a critical theory-aesthetic—that move beyond the boundaries noted in the previous section. This section considers the theoretical underpinnings for why Latina Third Space Feminist expressions—both the process of creating and the activities produced—are vital to critique power structures and take a decolonial turn that develop a space of empowerment.⁴

I begin by exploring the opportunities provided in storytelling as a communicative art. Processes of storytelling that are witnessed in genres such as fiction and poetry emerge from the kinds of potential that Third Space Feminisms offers to Latina Third Space Feminists. Shari Stone-Mediatore, in *Reading Across Borders*, indicates that storytelling can be a nuanced form of narrating history as well as a form of empowerment because of the potential to move away from rigidly guarded claims of “truth” (7). Further, and as María Cotera notes in her discussion of twentieth-century women of color fiction writers, storytelling becomes a method for considering what these claims of “truth” mask in terms of power dynamics and cultural production (141). Storytelling thus can function as a method through which to conjure images of potential and simultaneously critique processes of, and the resulting cultural phenomenon wrought by, sociosexual geo-racialization as seen in works such as Dahlma Llanos Figueroa’s *Daughters of the Stone*. In this manner, Latina Third Space Feminists can build new narratives and nuanced languages—as Ada María Isasi-Díaz discusses in “Mujerista Discourses”—that are not beholden to either Anglo-U.S. hegemony or the dictates of authenticity that would otherwise limit their ability to grow.

Similarly, what some Latina Third Space Feminists express is also, in many ways, a process of excavating, identifying the silences that have been forced on and by a cultural-community and attempting to find what is hidden. It can include creative non-fiction that tells stories of people’s

lives and experiences. Such narratives have the potential to function as nuanced historical chronicles of what are left unnarrated or ignored. Such storytelling takes up what Aurora Levins Morales describes in *Medicine Stories* as the “historian as curandera.” She defines this person as someone who, as a historian, looks for gaps and uses creative processes to shift from narratives about what is missing being lost to the potential that such voids hold (27-28). It is a fashioning of works, such as Norma Cantú’s *Canícula* that include “snapshots” from those who are not inherently included in historical narratives carved by an Anglo-U.S. coloniality. Such work acknowledges that pieces are missing from hegemonic narratives but that what is missing is not a limitation to knowledge but instead the foundation for creative construction of possibility (Anzaldúa *Borderlands/La Frontera*). Such acts also become a praxis for healing from the wounds wrought by power structures as Anzaldúa (“Let Us Be”) has described.

Latina Third Space Feminists can also engage the power of *testimonio*, which first developed in Latin America during the latter half of the twentieth century, as a strategic expression. The Latina Feminist Group’s *Telling To Live* describes that the genre has historically been known as a narrative emerging out of intense struggles that was transformed by transcribers and editors as part of “an effort by the disenfranchised to assert themselves as political subjects through others, often outsiders, and in the process to emphasize particular aspects of their collective identity” (13). This genre challenges limitations of political agency. It also constructs a space to reconceptualize meanings of collaboration and how to communicate alternative forms of subject-position formation.

However, as the Latina Feminist Group notes, there is a need to also consider how this genre’s potential as a platform for speaking of socio-structural violence can be drawn out. Thus, developments of “*testimoniando*” and “*testimiantes*” by the Latina Feminist Group assist in nuancing the genre and promoting a transition in language and self-affirmation that this genre can provide. They describe how “*testimoniando*—telling our stories— [that] generated renewed energy and deeper trust. Initially, we addressed the following key questions: Have we made *testimonio* the core of our work? What are some important turning points of consciousness? What are we transgressing?” (12) Processes of sociosexual geo-racialization that motivate the telling also function as an omnipresent threat against those who expose the systems of oppression. The *testimonio* genre provides Latina Third Space Feminists a method to address both sociostructural violence and boundaries that they routinely confront in their daily lives (2001, 3). For instance, Rosa Linda Fregoso documents in *MeXicana Encounters* the experience among Chicana writers of being confronted with accusations of “airing dirty laundry” and fostering racist stereotypes of Latinos (33). The ability to speak of experiences from within their own positionalities while constituting an integral right to lay claim to these experiences indicates a decolonial praxis. Indeed, the “*ando*” within this term indicates an agency that these women take on in their self-asserted right to describe their experiences and self-represent rather than being the representations present within colonial imaginations, taking up Fiol-Matta’s assertion from the beginning of this article.

Importantly, and although I have focused thus far on verbal narratives, visual arts are also a vital genre for Latina Third Space Feminist expressions. Indeed, non-literary genres such as visual arts also hold within them kinds potential for Latina Third Space Feminist expressions that are not available within alpha-numeric forms. Scholars such as Laura Pérez have discussed how the construction of visual arts become tools in which Chicanas transform their positionalities in the U.S. to be more than the sum offered by coloniality. In her book, *Chicana Art*, Pérez explores contemporary artists, like Amalia Mesa-Bains and Diane Gamboa, who depict culturally specific forms of art such as altars that follow Chicana/o spiritual practices as well as contemporary fashion

designers who utilize “paper” to create clothing. In many ways following the rasquache movement documented by Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, transforming what is considered viable “media” as art is a nuanced artistic creative expression within the Chicana/o community. Its symbolic transformation, however, into fashion that is lived-in-art demonstrates how visual art can play with the boundaries of culture, the role of abject-status, and the ability to critique. Importantly, it is a critique that is not limited to a reactionary stance and instead becomes part of the foundations for Latina Third Space Feminists as they engage the process of constructing a theory-aesthetic in, at, through, and beyond the competing forces of domination existing in the United States.

Foundations of Empowerment

Latina Third Space Feminist expressions also contain foundations of empowerment for Latinas. I contend that this empowerment comes from consciousness regarding the need not only to challenge the boundaries of what Anglo-U.S. coloniality renders available to Latinas in the U.S., but also to disrupt normative narratives regarding the potential for women in their own cultural communities. These expressions foster the manifestation of decolonial potential that functions as a means of not only subversion but also creation. This section considers the theoretical underpinnings for such a praxis as well as the kinds of possibilities it affords.

I contend that Latina Third Space Feminist expressions contain decolonial potential for empowerment. This potential is born out of what Emma Pérez describes as a “decolonial imaginary.” She writes of the “decolonial imaginary as a political project for reconceptualizing histories” and its ability to act as a space to decolonize the subject (4, 5). The act of decolonizing the subject, as her work demonstrates, begins by dismantling the narratives that fashion how those existing within a coloniality are interpreted and defined. While it attends to the manifestations of coloniality, it also acknowledges the ramifications of that coloniality as part of the coloniality itself, rather than inherent to the individual or community that has been imposed upon (Walter Dignolo *Darker Side of the Renaissance*, Quijano “Coloniality and Power”). It also requires moving outside of binaries and dichotomies that exist in such narratives.

Latina Third Space Feminist expressions participate in constructing the potential found in a decolonial imaginary via the ability to navigate and resist colonial imposition through creative acts. Important to this navigation is Chela Sandoval’s concept of differential consciousness. Detailed in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Sandoval writes that “the differential can be thought of as a constant reapportionment of space, of boundaries, of horizontal and vertical realignments of oppositional powers... Differential consciousness is thus a crossing network of consciousness, a trans-consciousness that occurs in a register permitting the networks themselves to be appropriated as ideological weaponry” (181). It is the critical movement, the oppositional framework, through which it is possible to move between spheres of domination and into new realms of understanding: transformational consciousness. Further, it “can be represented as a form of awareness that touches human reality as encoded in ideology on every side: it provides the condition or medium through which difference both arises and is undone; it joins together through *movement*” (180). It is this very notion of mobility that positions this concept as integral to moving into a decolonial imaginary, as Emma Pérez defines it, and constituting a space of empowerment.

Indeed, transformation is only possible after moving beyond the notion that the limits provided by and created in reaction to colonial ideologies define subject-potential. Sandoval states:

this is why the oppressed have only one true mode of revolutionary activity. The ability

to perceive and decode dominant-order sign systems in order to move among them with a certain literacy, thus ensuring their survival, and one true mode of revolutionary consciousness, which is the ability of consciousness to differentially move through the being of meaning, and *toward* a possible and utopian world of desire, social and psychic life. (183)

The ability to decipher, to decode, to interpret the meanings of definitions placed upon those experiencing marginalization is to know that these structures are rigid and yet potentially can be transcended. Indeed, it is critical to know that these limits are navigable and as such can be moved through, around, and beyond. It also indicates the importance of constructing a discourse that allows for the complexities, contradictions, and movements to express this consciousness and articulate alternative ontologies.

Empowerment within Latina Third Space Feminist expressions emerges as part of a decolonial praxis for moving beyond an Anglo-U.S. coloniality/hyper-cultural policing binary. The need to constitute nuanced forms of expression as moments of rupture emerges from a decolonial consciousness, and the manifestation of these expressions demonstrates nuanced methods of theorizing and creating (Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Lillian Comas-Díaz “Puerto Ricans”). Inherent to the strategies explored in the previous section of this article is not only a differential consciousness maneuvering but also the development for emancipatory practices. One such practice emerges in what Sandoval describes as a “hermeneutics of love.” This concept demonstrates the revolutionary potential of “love” to be both beyond a coloniality’s reach as well as a source of healing (147, 153). This empowerment is more than being able to survive these two interlinked spheres of domination. Instead, the empowerment comes from being able to create a third space in which neither of these spheres of domination function as the limits of potential for Latina Third Space Feminists. What emerges is a decolonial praxis in which new cultural tools for identity formation can be fashioned beyond these stagnant boundaries. It is not, by definition, a refusal of cultural lineage or a refutation of those cultures. It is, however, an ability to see beyond the boundaries bequeathed within a coloniality and a conscious decision to choose from what is available, forge what is not, and create new pathways for the future.

Latina Third Space Feminist Expressions

The creation of Latina Third Space Feminist expressions provides an opportunity to engage in consciousness raising artistic resistance that is not limited to the restrictions manifested by Anglo-U.S. coloniality or governed by strict cultural policing. Latina Third Space Feminist expressions elucidate the ways that a nuanced space can be created to theorize how power dynamics work as well as affording techniques to conceptually move beyond these structures. Engagement with such a space requires an awareness of what is at stake, the need to confront structural dynamics, and the transformation of vulnerability into a source of strength from which to reclaim and redefine as Fiol-Matta pointed out at the beginning of this article. For Latina Third Space Feminists, these expressions function as a vital arena in which to reconceptualize the past, present, and future utilizing artistic methods as ways to constitute new pathways of knowing and constructing alternative visions of possibilities.

Notes

1. I do not argue that Zepeda’s claim does not lend itself to this expansion. However, within her definition she is drawing out the intricacies of Chicana experience in the U.S. This specificity

is necessary, as the experiences of other Latinas—such as Puerto Rican women—are indeed different due to issues of Anglo-U.S. colonization processes and technologies. Here, however, I attempt to show how the complexities that Zepeda points to for Chicanas can be drawn out for other communities as well, following necessary nuances. Although my use of the term “Latina” might appear to create the same kind of aggregation that I note as being important to avoid, I postulate that the term itself does not require the collapse of differences and instead can function as a term of solidarity where differences can be respected as well as engaged.

2. The genres of artistic communications that I explore in this article are not meant to comprise an exhaustive or restrictive list. For instance, other than writings and visual art, genres such as music and theatrical performances are viable methods of communication, as demonstrated by work such as conducted by Marco Cervantes and Lilliana Saldaña, as well as Marci McMahon, respectively. While I do not explore these genres in this article, they can also be explored as having the critical theory-aesthetic potential that I define in this article.

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The #MeToo Movement and the College Literature Classroom: Creating Safe Spaces of Expression, Healing, and Consciousness

Margaret E. Cantú-Sánchez

Abstract

The literature classroom is one that often incorporates a series of multi-disciplinary approaches and subjects depending upon the course's focus. In courses on multi-ethnic literature, various social justice issues can often arise in connection to current events. One such social movement that has recently pervaded my classroom is the #MeToo movement. The #MeToo movement as it presents itself in various industries has also emerged as a point of discussion in the publishing and literary world as certain authors like Sherman Alexie and Junot Díaz have been accused of sexual harassment. The issue of whether to continue to use such authors in literature courses is the focus of this discussion. I maintain that we can continue to include writers accused of harassment if safe spaces are established in the classroom for our students. This discussion will also demonstrate the necessity of continuing to use texts written by authors accused of harassment, especially during the #MeToo movement, as it allows the emergence of consciousness—Gloria Anzaldúa's path of *conocimiento*—regarding feminism and sexism to take place in the classroom. Part of the discussion also includes creating open spaces and being prepared for students to reveal their own #MeToo experiences. Questions like how we as literature professors create classrooms which allow for healing, how to extend invitations for students to share their experiences, and how to establish appropriate responses to these stories, all arise in classrooms which address contemporary issues like those of the #MeToo movement. These questions are especially relevant at universities like my own, where the majority population identifies as Latino/a, given that the #MeToo movement originally emerged as one aimed at aiding women of color who are sexual assault survivors.

Keywords: #MeToo Movement, Feminism, Literature, Classroom, Consciousness

Pulitzer Prize winning author Junot Díaz recently added his voice to the multitude of men and women sharing their #MeToo moments with the world. Díaz shockingly describes his sexual abuse experience in *The New Yorker* article titled, "The Silence, the Childhood Legacy of Childhood

Trauma.” The story begins with Díaz’s confrontation with a woman who asks if he had also experienced sexual trauma, his response is initially dismissive, but through further reflection he reveals:

I know this is years too late, but I’m sorry I didn’t answer you. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you the truth. I’m sorry for you, and I’m sorry for me. We both could have used that truth, I’m thinking. It could have saved me (and maybe you) from so much. But I was afraid. I’m still afraid—my fear like continents and the ocean between—but I’m going to speak anyway, because, as Audre Lorde has taught us, my silence will not protect me. (Díaz, “The Silence..”)

What is telling about Díaz’s revelation is that it comes shortly before he is accused of committing sexual abuse against other women. The accusations come at a pivotal point in time when many are struggling with how to deal with the revelations of such transgressions. The struggle is especially persistent among those of us who teach literature written by Díaz and authors accused of similar misbehaviors. To add to the complexity of the problem is the question: Should we as scholars and professors of literature, especially multi-ethnic literature, continue to teach the works written by the accused?

The literature classroom is one that often incorporates a series of multi-disciplinary approaches and subjects depending upon the course’s focus. In a course on multi-ethnic literature, for instance, or women’s literature, it isn’t surprising that the recent controversial topics of the #MeToo movement emerge as a point of discussion for students. Part of that discussion includes creating open spaces and being prepared for students to reveal their own #MeToo experiences. Questions like how to create classrooms which allow for healing, how to extend invitations for those to share their experiences, and how to establish appropriate responses to those stories, all arise in classrooms that address multi-disciplinary, contemporary issues like those of the #MeToo movement. These questions are especially relevant at universities like my own, where the majority population identifies as Latino/a. Also significant is that the #MeToo movement originally emerged as one aimed at specifically aiding women of color who are sexual assault⁵ survivors.

Further controversies emerge as the #MeToo movement continues to strike all areas of professional and personal life, including the realm of literature and those who write literature, namely, the authors. Along with the countless accusations made against Hollywood elite like Harvey Weinstein, those of us who work in the world of literature have encountered shocking accusations against notable writers like Native American author, Sherman Alexie, and Dominican American writer, Junot Díaz. As a literature professor whose research and classroom interests focus on multi-ethnic writers like Alexie and Díaz, the complex problem of whether to continue using such authors arises as a very real dilemma, especially considering the lack of diversity in the literature world. To begin to address the issue of the #MeToo Movement, both from a healing perspective for students and to bring about awareness of the larger societal problems behind the movement, it is necessary to examine how we have come to this point in history and ultimately what it means for those of us struggling to incorporate diverse literary texts and authors into a curriculum already lacking in writers of color. Given the rise of the #MeToo movement and despite allegations of sexual assault in the literary world, I maintain that we should continue to include the texts of accused writers in order to instigate discussions about feminism⁶ and sexism, while creating environments where students can share their experiences and consciousness about such issues, inviting them to decide for themselves which texts remain worthy of continued attention.

A Brief History of the #MeToo Movement

Though the #MeToo movement has become synonymous with the sexual assault allegations made by many of the Hollywood elite against equally elite men like producer Harvey Weinstein, the movement began as an effort by an African-American women to address sexual assault against working class women of color. Tarana Burke, the woman originally behind the #MeToo movement, established it as "...a grassroots movement to aid sexual assault survivors in underprivileged communities 'where rape crisis centers and sexual assault workers weren't going'" (Ziyad, "Tarana Burke..."). Burke further explains the intent behind the phrase, "[i]t was a catchphrase to be used from survivor to survivor to let folks know that they were not alone and that a movement for radical healing was happening and possible" (Ziyad). Burke's goal in establishing such a concept was to ensure that sexual assault survivors on the fringes knew they were not alone.

Before the establishment of the #MeToo movement via social media, Burke recognized the need to facilitate connections between sexual assault survivors and bring awareness to the larger issues behind sexual assault, namely, patriarchal expectations of society, rape culture⁷, and the silencing of those who had been assaulted. Burke explains that the idea for #MeToo emerged after a conversation with a young girl who shared with her the sexual abuse she encountered at the hands of her mother's boyfriend (Langone, "#MeToo..."). Years later, in 2006, Burke founded the non-profit Just Be, Inc. which attempts to help victims of sexual misconduct, especially young women of color.

The #MeToo movement we all know today officially took off on October 15, 2017 via social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, when actress Alyssa Milano indicated to her followers that they should reply "me too" to her tweet if they had been sexually harassed or assaulted. In response to Milano's tweet, "more than 66,000 users replied, and the tweets kicked off an online tidal wave overnight as women flooded social media with their stories of being harassed and abused—using the #MeToo hashtag" (Langone "#MeToo..."). Such tweets eventually led to further revelations of sexual abuse of women and men at the hands of high-profile people in all professions. Attention was especially focused on the accusations made against Hollywood producer, Harvey Weinstein, which set off a chain reaction. Other high-profile people have been accused of sexual assault by colleagues, former employees, students, etc. In every profession and realm of life someone emerged with stories of sexual assault and harassment. Even the literature realm has been fraught with similar allegations of abuse against famous writers like Sherman Alexie, Junot Díaz, James Dashner, and Jay Asher, just to name a few.

The #MeToo Movement and the Literature and Publishing Industry

The #MeToo movement has rocked various industries, and the literature and publishing industry has not been left out of the conversation. With the emergence of such allegations, people are having serious conversations about the implications of the movement and what it reveals about society, expectations for men and women, relationships between men and women (professional and otherwise), and how we react to allegations of sexual assault in the workplace and beyond. The #MeToo movement has also shaken the writing and publishing industry in various ways, such as publishers establishing morality clauses for their authors, libraries and bookstores being confronted with whether to continue to include authors accused of such allegations, and professors and teachers reflecting on how they should address the movement in the literature classroom.

One of the major areas of the literature realm which has been affected by the #MeToo movement has been libraries and bookstores. Many librarians and bookstore owners have been confronted with whether not to continue to include works of literature written by recently accused writers such as Sherman Alexie, Junot Díaz, and James Dashner. The responses by various libraries across the United States have differed based on their reactions to the accusations against various authors. Jennifer Dixon describes the reaction of some libraries, “In Stockbridge, MA, the Stockbridge Museum, Library, and Archives, MA recently partnered with a local domestic violence and sexual assault services organization, The Elizabeth Freeman Center, to present a two-part discussion series in honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month in April” (Dixon 15). Other libraries have also been forced to address the issue of continuing to include the works by accused harassers and events featuring them. For example, at the Somerville Public Library, MA, “. . . recently selected Aziz Ansari’s *Modern Romance: An Investigation* (Penguin Pr.) [was chosen] as its February read” (Dixon 15). Librarians at this library discussed possibly excluding the event, but instead chose to hold it because they felt exclusion would “. . . place the librarians in the position of dodging a controversial topic while censoring patrons’ reading choices” (Dixon 15). In contrast to some of the libraries in Massachusetts, another library responded by cancelling Junot Díaz’s presentation at a Summer Reading Kick-Off event.

More thorough discussions of the implications and consequences the #MeToo movement within the publishing industry yielded different responses by librarians concerning whether to include or exclude the works of accused authors. Shannon M. Oltmann, assistant professor in the library science program at the University of Kentucky in Lexington explains how libraries can respond to the #MeToo movement, “[o]ne of the core values of the American Library Association (ALA) is intellectual freedom: ‘We resist all efforts to censor library resources’” (81). In examining such a statement from the ALA’s perspective, Oltmann indicates that librarians should not remove or censor books written by authors accused of sexual misconduct or harassment.

In the case of bookstores, especially small, individually owned ones, judgment lies with the owners. The New York Times recent article regarding sexual assault and the publishing industry provided several examples of bookstores and owners who chose not to include the books of numerous accused authors. The Times revealed, for example, the decision made by Jamie Thomas, a manager and children’s book buyer at Women and Children First, a bookstore in Chicago, to no longer include books by Sherman Alexie, Jay Dashner, and James Dashner. Thomas explains “‘I don’t want to have our customers having to come in here and ask why we’re supporting someone accused of sexual misconduct’” (Alter, “Canceled Deals”). Other bookstore owners have followed suit and also canceled events with such authors.

Other responses by the publishing industry to the #MeToo movement have resulted in addressing ethical dilemmas. Some publishing companies like Hachette Book Group are expanding the use of certain moral clauses and “author conduct” clauses in book contracts. Such clauses allow publishers to cancel book deals if the author is “credibly accused of unethical behavior” (Alter, “Canceled Deals. . .”). In contrast, some editors and publishers believe such morality clauses are an overreach of imposing certain codes of conduct upon writers.

The #MeToo Movement in Public Libraries and Bookstores versus University Classrooms

Despite the various responses which public libraries and bookstores have had in response to the #MeToo Movement and accused authors, it is important to note the marked difference between

these spheres as general public spaces versus academic responses of the University classroom. While public libraries and bookstores do offer spaces where education, knowledge, and information can be shared amongst the general populace, one of the main differences between them and University classrooms is who retains the power to choose which texts and authors remain the focus of analysis. The power to choose certain texts in the University classroom often lies with the professor and thus it is up to them to decide whether to include authors who have been accused of sexual misconduct or dismiss them entirely.

This issue becomes more problematic when we consider courses like multi-ethnic and ethnic studies classes which primarily focus on authors of various ethnicities, who are not commonly represented in the traditional literary canon.⁸ Libraries and bookstores often lack an emphasis on writers of color, let alone contain sections where only books written by writers of color can be found. It is somewhat easier for a library and/or bookstore to dismiss writers of color and their texts because this way of thinking remains part of the industry, as it always has been. In contrast, in academic settings like universities, courses focusing on multi-ethnic literature continue to struggle with bringing to light literature written by, about, and for diverse readers. The accusations against writers of color like Sherman Alexie and Junot Diaz allow professors the opportunity to explore and expand beyond the “token” multi-ethnic canon authors and texts—creating spaces where people of color, women of color, and/or queer authors of color may have an opportunity to speak for or against such accused writers. Though these two spheres are different in their educational approaches, libraries/bookstores and universities can share the common goal of extending access to less-known authors and texts that remain marginalized.

The #MeToo Movement in the Multi-Ethnic Literature Classroom

The #MeToo Movement extends far beyond the publishing and library industries into the very places where readers encounter the books written by the accused, namely the classroom. I currently teach a core literature class required by all students of various majors. My institution is a Hispanic Serving Institution, primarily serving a student body mostly composed of students who identify as Latino/a, Chicano/a, and Hispanic. Much of the student population is also female and many come from working class backgrounds. The course focuses on introducing students to a wide-range of diverse, multicultural authors and texts from contemporary literature including: *George Washington Gómez*, *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *Ceremony*, and *Paradise*. Many of the texts deal with feminist themes and some directly address sexual assault, rape culture, and violence enacted against women. The recent emergence of the #MeToo movement has initiated further discussions about sexual assault and harassment in our society. Especially problematic has been the accusation laid out against the author of *Diary*, Sherman Alexie. Alexie has been accused by multiple women throughout the Native American community of sexual harassment over the years. The author addressed the issue shortly after the topic reached fever pitch on social media sites,

‘[o]ver the years, I have done things that have harmed other people, including those I love most deeply’ ...[t]o those whom I have hurt, I genuinely apologize. I am sorry.’ He added: ‘There are women telling the truth about my behavior and I have no recollection of physically or verbally threatening anybody or their careers. That would be completely out of character. I have made poor decisions and I am working hard to become a healthier man who makes healthier decisions. (Maher 8)

The accusations made against Alexie in addition to his response to the allegations, seemingly offering apologies for transgressions that may or may not have occurred, raise questions about the appropriateness of continuing to use his texts in the classroom.

What makes the decision process more complicated is the fact that of all the books read in this class, Alexie stands as the favorite and many have indicated the powerful impact he has had on their initial introductions to Native American literature and culture. Further thwarting the issue is the desire to support and respect the women who have survived Alexie's harassment, while also noting that few authors of Native American backgrounds persist in the literature realm. The importance of having diverse authors and books representing multiple cultures has long been an issue within the literature world. Further, students who can identify with the cultures, traditions, identities, and protagonists because they have experienced the same things are more inclined to continue reading and engage in critical discussions about the readings and beyond.

Research studies on the reactions students have regarding certain texts, especially books which represent diverse cultures and protagonists they can relate to, are few and far between. Maria E. Emerson offers her experience as a librarian in Montana at St. Labre Indian School as she mentored 6th-12th grade students from the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations:

[s]chool is challenging for many children on American Indian reservations. Academics may seem insignificant to the more serious and pressing matters in their lives. Yet there was a time I did not have to push the students to finish their schoolwork. Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, was assigned for a class reading and the students enthusiastically read it. (Emerson 126)

Though there are few Native American students on my campus, my experience in teaching Alexie's text, although in the university setting, is a similar one. Students find the text easy to read, relatable, funny, and thought-provoking. Many students explain that they find themselves relating to the experiences expressed by Arnold, the main character. Some point to the bullying elements as parallels to their own experiences and many students express shock at some of the knowledge they acquire about life as a Native American residing on a reservation.

For some students, the experience of learning about Native American life, the struggles Native Americans encounter, and the history behind their culture strikes a chord which resonates and encourages them to engage in further research and writing for their final research projects. The vast majority of students (they are given the option to choose their topics) choose to learn more about Native American cultures, history, struggles, and identity because Alexie's text impacts them in such powerful ways. Emerson's experience working with young Native American students is like my own. She explains

When I view collections in libraries and consider resources to add, I think of the students in Montana, and their excitement over seeing themselves in a story. I think of the importance of having writers that have not abused their power. Selecting the right resources can change a person's worldview and introduce them to topics they were not always aware of. In order to help create an environment of familiarity, a library's collection needs to include resources that are familiar or representative of all backgrounds and demographics. (127)

Though Emerson speaks from a librarian's perspective and specifically addresses Native American students, her main sentiment rings true. It is necessary to expose students to writers who can help change a person's worldview.

At the same time, it is important to note the historical implications of sexual assault and colonialism within Native American communities. Unfortunately, American history is rife with exam-

ples of the use of rape and assault by European colonizers against indigenous peoples as a means of conquering and colonizing America. That history of sexual assault continued in the instances of boarding school⁹ abuses that Native American children endured. Andrea Smith outlines the various abuses Native American children encountered at the hands of their “teachers” in these schools, “[s]exual, physical, and emotional abuse has been rampant, but boarding schools have refused to investigate, even when teachers were publicly accused by their students” (Smith 38). Smith further explains, “[d]espite the epidemic of sexual abuse in boarding schools, the BIA did not issue a policy on reporting sexual abuse until 1987...” (38). Such allegations, abuse, and violence continue to this day, CNN reports “[i]n 2018 alone, more than two dozen Native Americans—the majority of them women—went missing in sparsely populated Montana” (Díaz “At least 24 Native...”). Current statistics and research demonstrate that violence against Native women continues to run rampant, especially on reservations, without any signs of formal investigations occurring.

Given this disturbing information, it is important to have conversations in classrooms about sexual mistreatment and violence against Native American women. I often couple discussions of Alexie’s works with statistics and information about Native Americans and the struggles they endure, much to the shock and dismay of my students. Such information allows the floodgates to open with regard to discussions of the #MeToo movement, violence against women of color, and the deep-seated history of assault as part of the colonialist campaign which continues to this day. In addition, I assign Alexie’s *Diary* to accompany the seminal text, *Ceremony*, written by Leslie Marmon Silko. The two texts complement each other in that they both speak to numerous issues affecting Native American communities with regard to alcoholism, violence, implications of colonization, and addressing stereotypes. *Ceremony*’s focus on the feminine as a powerful healing element is especially important to the discussion surrounding sexual violence against Native women.

In keeping with that same sentiment, I often use Junot Díaz’s short stories in class as examples of short story writers from diverse backgrounds. My classroom experience with Junot Díaz’s works, however, is different altogether because it takes place with graduate students. Though the allegations made against Díaz came out shortly after the class ended, we did address his admission of his own #MeToo experience and other accusations against various writers. The reactions to whether we should continue to use texts by authors accused of sexual harassment ultimately boiled down to a resounding yes if we could address those accusations in discussions about the author’s biography. Some students even referred to more canonized writers like Ernest Hemingway, Lewis Carroll, Phillip Roth, and others, many of whom have also been accused of similar misconduct and pointed out that such authors continue to be part of the literary canon.

Such writers and the allegations against them are often dismissed no doubt because of our country’s prejudices when it comes to white men versus men and women of color. Current research and statistics indicate that minorities disproportionately experience sexual assault in contrast to their Anglo counterparts. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) cites numerous studies indicating that “American Indians are twice as likely to experience a rape/sexual assault compared to all races,” while 19% of all victims of sexual assault identify as Black (“Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics”). In addition to power dynamics between majority and minority populations, some studies theorize that certain cultural attitudes—particularly ones that place greater blame on female victims for not doing more to avoid assault in the first place—can result in greater rates of sexual violence (“How does sexual assault...”). The works of Junot Díaz often directly address the issues that Dominican-Americans face, including sexual assault and the different treatment of men and women within Dominican/Latinx cultures. Such texts like those of Alexie and

Díaz invite important discussions of the disproportionate sexual assault against minorities and the connections to colonization, history, and stereotypes that persist regarding men and women within minority cultures

Student Encounters with the #MeToo Movement

It is important to acknowledge the accusations against authors, the information behind the text itself, and its potential complex impact on students, like prompting discussions about the #MeToo movement. With the emergence of the #MeToo movement students have been more inclined to reveal their experiences with sexual assault and harassment. In both cases, the discussions leading up to such revelations center on topics like feminism and the sexist attitudes which still pervade our society. Many of the texts previously mentioned directly address sexist attitudes of American society from the late 1800s and onward into contemporary society. Discussions about these topics often begin with addressing whether students identify and utilize the term “feminist” to describe themselves. Not surprisingly, most students (men and women) shy away from the term because their associations revert to radicalized, extreme views of feminism often portrayed in the media, which depict feminists as anti-men, men-hating, and supporting the belief that women are superior to men. Despite refusing to utilize the term “feminist,” students overwhelmingly agree that there continues to be a need for equity between the genders and that sexism continues to persist, though most identify workplace salary disparities as the main equality issue. In recent months, however, the conversation regarding feminism and sexism has transitioned thanks in part to the #MeToo movement. Margaret Smith Crocco notes in her discussion of teaching women’s studies in the #MeToo movement era that it has brought “...attention to the lack of progress U.S. women have made in economic, legal, and political arenas, and the ongoing threat that women’s rights may be rolled back further...” (8). As such information comes to light, students have responded by relaying their own stories of sexism, sexual harassment, and more.

Most notably, two students of color, in two different classes, openly spoke about their previous sexual assault encounters. One student identifies as a Black woman, while the other student identifies as a Queer Chicana. In both cases the women indicated that after they disclosed their sexual assault to police, family members, and others, they expected support but received none in return. In one case, the disclosure of her assault occurred on a college campus, which resulted in her having to change schools, rather than the aggressor receiving punishment.

The openness with which the two students discussed their experiences surprised me. Especially astounding was their hopeful attitude as survivors of assault, even though no real justice was taken against their aggressors. Such revelations brought up discussions surrounding rape culture, patriarchy, victim-blaming, double-standards, and the need for advocating feminism. As the #MeToo movement has shown us, there is no doubt that more students in classes share similar sexual assault experiences but are not quite ready to share them publicly.

In addressing the terms mentioned above, discussions about the very definitions of these terms are often a necessity. When using the concept of patriarchy, I revert to the simplistic definition proposed by the Merriam-Webster dictionary of a society primarily controlled by men with a disproportionately large share of power. Within the context of patriarchy other concepts emerge such as rape culture and victim-shaming. Rape culture is defined by Emilie Buchwald as a complex set of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It is a society where violence is seen as sexy and sexuality as violent. In a rape culture, women perceive a

continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women as the norm. (Buchwald vii)

Included with the notion of rape culture, is the idea of victim-blaming, which emerges in patriarchal societies and is self-explanatory. The term refers to the idea of blaming rape victims or victims of sexual assault for their own assault, suggesting that they were in some way inviting the violence enacted against them. Beginning discussions about the concepts, especially in the classroom starts with establishing safe spaces to have these conversations.

Creating Safe Spaces of Expression, Healing, and Consciousness in the Literature Classroom

The question that begins to emerge from these everyday dealings with sexual assault, either through the literature students are exposed to or their own personal experiences, is how to make classrooms safe spaces to discuss the underlying issues of the #MeToo Movement like patriarchy, rape-culture, victim-blaming, sexism, and feminism. Crocco's discussion of addressing the #MeToo movement in the social studies classroom suggests that one solution lies in "[p]romoting allyship... especially in support of the most vulnerable individuals in our society, whether due to race, class, sexuality, language, religion, or immigrant status" (11). This notion of allyship is an important element of the #MeToo movement. The history of the movement itself began with women of color and has emerged in all industries including upper-class, famous women, and continues with alliances established across racial, gender, and class lines revealed in the farmworkers' response to the Harvey Weinstein accusations.

Even though we work in very different environments, we share a common experience of being preyed upon by individuals who have the power to hire, fire, blacklist and otherwise threaten our economic, physical and emotional security. Like you, there are few positions available to us and reporting any kind of harm or injustice committed against us doesn't seem like a viable option. Complaining about anything — even sexual harassment — seems unthinkable because too much is at risk, including the ability to feed our families and preserve our reputations. ("Female Farmworkers")

Allyship cannot be established until we achieve an understanding of why sexual assault continues to persist at all levels despite a seemingly progressive society. In the classroom, allyship can emerge through educated discussions about ideas like patriarchy, feminism, and sexism, which may in turn help to bring about consciousness.

Notable Chicana feminist and scholar Gloria Anzaldúa addresses the concept of consciousness, in relation to identity, in her discussion of what she terms the path of *conocimiento*. Anzaldúa's description of *conocimiento* (consciousness) can be applied in the literature classroom setting to help students become conscious of the harmful effects sexism and patriarchy has on society and individuals. She explains:

We stand at a major threshold in the extension of consciousness caught in the *remolinos* (vortices) of systemic change across all fields of knowledge. The binaries of colored/white, female/male, mind/body are collapsing. Living in *nepantla*, the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional labelings obsolete. Though these markings are outworn and inaccurate, those in power continue using them to single out and negate those who are 'different' because of color, language, notions of reality, or

other diversity. You know that the new paradigm must come from outside as well as within the system. (541)

As Anzaldúa explains, the idea of immersing oneself in critical thinking about identity and society's influence must occur in a world where so much change is occurring, including the rise in discussions about sexual assault because of the #MeToo movement. What Anzaldúa's theory suggests is that identity markers like female or feminist must be re-evaluated given the experiences being shared by women. More importantly, discussions about feminism and sexism must also occur because in doing so, we work to disrupt the power of patriarchy, rape-culture, and victim-blaming to establish a new way of approaching diversity in terms of gender.

Anzaldúa further asserts that *conocimiento* is a coming into consciousness through the immersion of oneself in creative acts. Anzaldúa suggests that

...*conocimiento* is reached via creative acts—writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as a site of creativity). Through creative engagements, you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the Earth itself. (542)

Giving students the opportunity to read others' accounts of surviving sexual abuse, exposing them to feminist literature which addresses the issues behind assault, and inviting them to add their voices through creative projects on identity, can promote understanding of the problems exposed by the #MeToo movement and how to remedy them. In reaching *conocimiento*, Anzaldúa writes that one must first experience something to jar one out of the "normalcy" of life, shifting one into an in-between point (*nepantla*), where one is between the point of knowledge before and after the jarring event. This middle point is where one questions and re-evaluates former ways of knowing, including conventional understandings of why sexism persists and why sexual assault still occurs. Lastly, Anzaldúa asserts that one truly comes into consciousness when one can share one's stories and experiences with others and, in the case of the classroom, create a space where students can freely discuss feminism, sexism, sexual assault, and the #MeToo movement. This process invites them to question why society continues to be invaded by violence against women and how we can disrupt the "normalcy" of that fact.

Critical examination of the #MeToo movement itself and the place that women of color may or may not have in the movement also emerges as an important factor of *conocimiento*. Jacqui Alexander's exploration of violence against women of color reveals that "[w]omen's sexual agency and erotic autonomy have always been troublesome for the state. They pose a challenge to the ideology of an originary nuclear heterosexual family that perpetuates that the family is the cornerstone of society" (22). In short, women in certain cultures like Latinx and Native American cultures have been forced to absorb the ideology of the state and its culture, including the need for a woman's sexuality to align with procreation and the nuclear family. So how exactly do we contest such an ideology that continues to be perpetuated by the government and society? Alexander suggests that all women should join forces, rather than divide ourselves by class, race, nation, ethnicity. It is important to recall that one of the tools of oppression and colonization is to divide and conquer. The #MeToo movement can only be effective if it invites and unites all, which can start in the classroom. As Alexander further asserts through her "pedagogies of crossing," "[t]he Crossing is also meant to evoke/invoke the crossroads, the space of convergence and endless possibility; the place where we put down and discard the unnecessary in order to pick up that which is necessary" and

for women of color this is undoubtedly an essential element of allyship and *conocimiento*, working together as a united front to encourage real change to occur.

Critique of the ideologies that invite sexual assault begins with the theories of Anzaldúa and Alexander, and includes various classroom examples, including Krissy Ford's and Rachel Bellande's, among others, who have created interdisciplinary units and lesson plans to specifically address the #MeToo movement in the classroom from a language and literature perspective. Their lesson plans begin with readings of various accounts of sexual assault by survivors and include responses to those readings by answering the question, what is the #MeToo movement, in Tweet format? Students are further guided into defining terms like sexual harassment and how language plays a role in our understanding of such concepts.

Other approaches which can be used in addressing the #MeToo movement in the literature classroom emerge from education theorist Laura Rendón and her *sentipensante* pedagogy. Like Anzaldúa, Rendón proposes a need for consciousness-raising, but from a classroom and educator's perspective. Rendón develops her theory of *sentipensante* pedagogy from her own involvements in the school system, which she explains was devoid of her personal experiences: "[n]o one asked me to write about what I knew best—*mi familia, mi barrio*, my life experiences and what I had learned from them" (3). Rendón further notes that

...little time is spent on cultivating relationships among students and between teachers and students. Precious little time is spent on helping students to work with others, deal with emotions, recognize personal strengths, develop social responsibility, be good listeners and communicators, resolve conflicts ethically and creatively, and embrace diversity as well as what we hold in common. (3)

Rendón's observations are especially important to consider if we who teach literature would like to address significant social issues, sexism and feminism for example, within the context of the #MeToo movement. Creating space to engage in Anzaldúa's path of *conocimiento* and Alexander's pedagogies of crossing approaches to the #MeToo movement first requires that we as educators establish spaces where students are comfortable to share their academic opinions and personal experiences. Rendón's pedagogy offers a way to establish classrooms as safe spaces of expression and healing by combining two Spanish terms: *sentir*, which roughly translates to sense or feel and *pensar*, to think (Rendón 131). *Sentipensante* pedagogy, a combination of both terms is one that "...asks instructors to work with individuals as whole human beings—intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual" (135). Such an approach may allow for a more inviting classroom, which often supports and encourages students to engage in strictly academic knowledge. In opening a classroom in such a way, professors validate and accept the previous knowledge and experiences with which their students come to the classroom, which is a key component to addressing such personal issues and sets the stage for achieving *conocimiento*.

Conclusion:

The Necessity of Addressing the #MeToo Movement in the Literature Classroom

There is no doubt that as I write this essay, more accusers will come forward with further allegations against other writers, politicians, actors, etc. further demonstrating the continued need to address the #MeToo movement. We are at a point in history when the issues of sexual assault, harassment, feminism, sexism, etc. are in the spotlight and finally being addressed by mainstream media. While it is discouraging and disheartening to learn that famous writers have participated in

the sexual abuse and harassment of their fellow human beings—it does allow the opportunity to give those survivors a voice, while encouraging students and educators to engage in discussions of the larger issues behind the movement. Choosing to exclude such texts because of these accusations may silence the writers, but it also closes the door to conversations about sexual abuse and more importantly how to find real solutions to the complex problems behind them, such as sexism and rape culture. Throughout the history of literature, examinations of the lives of writers of noteworthy texts have revealed problematic issues, including alcoholism, suicide, depression, various mental disorders, and accusations of different kinds of abuses. As scholars of literature it is our job to present and examine both the lives behind the literature and the texts themselves.

At the same time it is important to note the complexities behind such movements like the #MeToo movement. Though the movement emerged as an attempt to aid women of color who are sexual assault survivors, the movement we know today has focused overwhelmingly on privileged upper-class celebrities. In the wake of the movement, women of color continue to be relegated to the margins, which is why it is especially important that ethnic studies courses address and talk about sexual assault against women of color. Literature by and about women of color allow for these conversations to take place, which in turn evolves into action, and more importantly gives a voice to survivors.

The decision to possibly exclude literary works like those by Junot Díaz and Sherman Alexie silences these authors, but it also silences discussions about the accusations and the survivors' accounts, as well as larger thematic topics like racism, identity conflict, assimilation, internal racism, etc. As a scholar of literature and self-identified feminist I certainly have problems with the accusations laid out against these authors, however, as an educator and professor of multi-ethnic literature it is my job to expose students to diverse authors, topics, themes, and texts. If I choose to no longer include these texts, then the same can be done for the countless other authors exhibiting problematic behavior, and yet history shows us that we do not exclude the literature of alcoholics like Ernest Hemingway or those who suffered from depression and anxiety like Emily Dickinson, Anne Sexton, and countless others.

Perhaps in choosing to continue using texts like Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and the various works of Junot Díaz, I can also offer the other solution of changing the literary landscape to be more inclusive and diverse so that then we can make the difficult decision of possibly excluding these writers. Until that time, students, especially in the college setting, should be provided the opportunity to choose for themselves which works of literature garner merit and influence their lives. As Emerson points out in her analysis of reading Alexie's *Diary* in a reservation school setting, [r]epresentation is critical in all things, but in particular for the underrepresented. The students read this book and saw a story about poverty, alcoholism, and abuse, but they also saw a story about the strength, resilience, and love found on reservations. They enjoyed reading *Part-time Indian* because it gave them the feeling of comfort that often accompanies familiarity (126).

What kind of literature professor would I be if I made the decision to exclude a text that may speak to a student and offer a form of representation never encountered before in literature by that student? The sense of familiarity and comfort found in literary representations may one day expand because of students', future writers', exposure to literature where they discovered themselves. In a world where exclusion of others out of fear continues to persist, literature professors and scholars have the option to choose to directly confront those fears, and what better way to do that but through critical discussions of literature and the worlds they represent.

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Carmona has been writing poetry for seven years now. She competed two years in Louder than A Bomb, a slam poetry competition in Chicago, and had a leadership role in the spoken word club at her school, Kenyon College; she has performed her pieces in many venues to many audiences. Poetry has served as a space for Rita to explore her pain and express her doubts and fears. In the pieces of her *Healing* collection, she deals with a sexual assault from her childhood. Coping with this trauma changes for her over the years, as she grows and begins to understand sex and intimacy in her own ways. In reclaiming her own body and understanding how her past and her present affect her concept of love, Rita confronts her experience with sexual assault through poetry.

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Chairez is a Chicana writer, PhD student at UTSA, and mother of four. After living in London, Las Vegas, and Key West, she is back home in San Antonio, Texas. Yvette's work in prose and academia boldly explores the experiences of women, mothers, and the marginalized, and aims to spread truth and empowerment. She is currently working on a memoir of sorts exploring the generational abuse in her family by way of the traumatic points in her late mom's life. Her debut novel *Cabeza*, about two abusive individuals who fall in love, is out now by ALL CAPS Publishing.

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Miriam Mosqueda

Mosqueda chooses poetry as a space in which she explores memory, revealing aching and joyous reflections of self-love and acceptance, romantic love, familial trauma and healing, among other topics that encompass the human experience. She does her best to honor her pain by transforming it through her art. With this submission specifically, she highlights multigenerational stories that have woven their way into her lifetime. She seeks to offer an opening for those cuentos to come forward and breathe, so she and her family have an opportunity to do so as well.

Ana Martinez Orizondo

Ana Martinez Orizondo’s essay, “Sandpainting Silence” appeared in *Confluence: The Journal of Graduate Liberal Studies*, and her poetry in *From Whispers to Roars* and *Dreamers Creative Writing* where she received an honorable mention for her haiku “Convergence III.” Most recently, her short story “Apparition on Elmhurst” appeared in *Newtown Literary* Issue 13. She holds an MA from Florida International University and a BA from the University of Pennsylvania. On her free time, she enjoys photography, drawing and works on her first novel and poetry chapbook. Follow her work @amoexpression and @amo_writing.

Taylor Polito

The submitted poems are part of a larger manuscript written in partial completion of a Departmental Honors paper for the Hood College Department of English and Communication Arts. What began as a journey to rediscover and analyze her cultural identity soon became a more holistic endeavor: She realized how intertwined her identity as a first generation Cuban-American was with her identity as an American woman. She was born on her Abuela’s birthday in 1995 and grew very close to her as she grew up. As a child, she cherished her Cuban roots. She was practically raised by her Abuela and Papi, spending her days sitting in the heat of their retirement home in New Jersey eating several servings of congris, tostones, and sopa de pollo, her Abuela’s voice constantly repeating: “No Comia Nada!” and filling her plate. It took Polito until her senior year in college to analyze her childhood traumas and understand the complex social, cultural, and political reasons behind them. As a very young woman, she was immersed in the counter-culture pop-punk scene in New Jersey. After navigating a labyrinth of gaslighting and manipulation, she began to open up about these traumatic experiences through her poetry.

Anna Christine Rodas

Rodas is an itinerant teacher and educator in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her academic research has explored the social realities of war, violence, and poverty. Her poetry is an effort to bring the voices of these experiences to the page, especially those of women. She sees the female body as a colonized space and the written word as a practice to reclaim sovereignty.

Marcela Rodriguez-Campo

Rodriguez-Campo is an emerging writer and has a great passion for the tenets of Latina/ Chicana Feminisms, particularly the goals of challenging traditional notions of knowledge and critiquing eurocentric approaches to research. The poems submitted describe her experiences as a Latina, los consejos de familia, and the struggles of working in historically White spaces. She is a Colombian immigrant and first generation American. Previously, she served as a high school teacher and debate coach in the Las Vegas Valley.

Adrianna Michelle Santos

Santos earned a BA (2002) in English from University of Texas at Austin, and an MA (2009), and PhD (2014) in Chicana/o Studies with an emphasis in Feminist Studies from University of California, Santa Barbara. She is an Assistant Professor at Texas A&M University-San Antonio where she teaches classes on Latinx/Chicanx literature, borderlands theory, women of color literary criticism, and decolonial methodologies. Recently accepted into the Nat'l Women's Studies Association Women of Color Leadership Project, she has published and spoken on issues of equity for women, immigrants, and marginalized communities and has promoted anti-violence advocacy. She volunteered at the Santa Barbara Rape Crisis Center, Martinez St. Women's Center, and Child Advocates of San Antonio. She won funding awards for her dissertation project from the UC Center for New Racial Studies and UCSB Chicano Studies Institute and advised the A&M-SA Mexican American Student Association for which she won a Jaguar Award for Student Organization Champion of the year, 2016-2017. She co-coordinates the Mexican American, Latinx, and Borderlands Studies minor and recently directed a student production of *The Panza Monologues*.