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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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ABSTRACT

Approaches to the critical theory advanced by Chicana scholar Gloria Anzaldúa tend to focus primarily on the concept of borderlands or other concepts—such as El Mundo Zurdo, the Coatlicue State, mestiza consciousness, nepantla, and the path of conocimiento—in ways that disconnect them from one another. Understanding the connections between each concept threads together Anzaldúa's scholarship on identity, reflexivity, and community. Through close examination of Anzaldúa's reinterpretation of Mesoamerican symbols and ideas, this dissertation project proposes that a new understanding of Anzaldúa's thought surfaces when considering the concepts' connection to each other. The project tracks the indigenous Mesoamerican influences in Anzaldúa's theoretical paradigm, and through this indigenous Mesoamerican lens, the cyclical nature of Anzaldúa's critical development emphasizes the relationship between her theoretical concepts. I refer to this connected process as Anzaldúa's spherical framework. The notion of Anzaldúa's spherical framework is influenced by El Teatro Campesino's Theater of the Sphere, the name given to the theater company's pedagogical practice rooted in Mayan philosophy. This project aims to contextualize Anzaldúa's spherical framework through Mesoamerican and Chicana/o/x histories; further, the project proposes that Anzaldúa's spherical framework functions as both praxis and analytic. The interpretation of Chicana/o/x literary texts highlight the analytical properties of Anzaldua's spherical framework. Additionally, film production strategies and Chicano mural making practices model the praxis of Anzaldúa's spherical framework. Ultimately, this project demonstrates how framing Anzaldúan theory through the notion of a spherical framework offers new ways to enact practices of self-reflection, cultivate alliance building efforts, and develop transformational epistemologies (ways of knowing) and ontologies (ways of being).

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandpa Tony and my grandma Elvira. You both are always in my heart.

También una dedicación especial a mis amigos de infancia Maribel, Martha, y Román. Gracias por compartir conmigo sus experiencias de ser indocumentados en un país extranjero.

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CHAPTER 1

ANZALDÚAN THEORY: INTRODUCTION

Border communities along the United States (U.S.)-Mexico border are unique spaces of cultural, social, and economic interactions. Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa takes up these issues in her widely known text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. By introducing the idea of the Texas-Mexico border as "una herida abrieta[1] where the Third World grates against the first," Anzaldúa constructs a metaphor of the border as an open wound because of the pain she associates to the divisions of an "unnatural boundary" created by this national border (25). She proceeds to describe the artificial nature of the U.S.-Mexico border by offering a historical account of events occurring in the Américas, preconquest. Her discussion of the Aztec migration from what is now considered the southwestern part of the United States asserts the legitimacy of those who identify as Mexican American[2] or Mexican and presently live on the U.S. side of the border. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa depicts people of Mexican heritage as having a Mesoamerican ancestral lineage that she identifies with Aztec indigeneity. The relationship between Mexican Americans and their indigenous ancestry advances Anzaldúa's discussion of the colonial violations Mexicans have endured since the Spanish conquest. The metaphor of the border as an open wound suggests that the traumas created by colonialization continue to occur in this transnational space. Anzaldúa describes the undocumented people who cross over from south of

[1] Anzaldúa blended Spanish and Spanglish in her work to demonstrate the two major languages used along the U.S.-Mexico border. She intentionally did not translate some of her Spanish or Spanglish words to make a point about the ontological (way of being) ways of border dwellers. In consideration of my readers, I decided to translate the Spanish text in this project. The footnotes will provide the translations. Herida abrieta means open wound. In her post-*Borderlands* works, Anzaldúa does not italicize the Spanish she includes. I will follow Anzaldúa's example and italicize only the Spanish words she italicizes in her pre-*Borderlands* texts and *Borderlands*.

[2] In *Mestizos Come Home!*, Robert Con Davis-Undiano outlines his reasons for not hyphenating Mexican Americans. He posits that the hyphenated term takes on a "contingent, adjunct status" (xix). He follows the more recent practice of dropping the hyphen as a gesture that acknowledges Mexican American as a cultural identity that stands for itself, not one that hinges on something else.

the border and manage to evade deportation. She explains that they will "find themselves in the midst of 150 years of racism in Chicano barrios in the Southwest and in big northern cities" (*Borderlands* 34). The injuries created during colonization continue to manifest in different ways. Through the concept of borders, Anzaldúa explores the damages created by both metaphorical and literal borders, including racialized, linguistic, and gendered violence. In her exploration, Anzaldúa devises a theoretical framework to cope with and constructively address the marginalized spaces created by borders.

Although much of Anzaldúa's ideas center on the violent consequences of border spaces, she identifies the wound as a source of agency. She offers personal and collective narratives of resistance to illustrate the methods others with similar experiences have taken to contend with their marginalized positions. Anzaldúa named this approach autohistoria, which constitutes a significant component of her methodology. Autohistoria is the process of using a personal life story to explore the representational experiences of marginalized groups. Anzaldúa maintains that in sharing their own story, autohistorians tell the life stories of others, or as Latina scholar Mariana Ortega puts it, Anzaldúa's "lived-theory" is the method used to advance the "intersecting, intermeshed nature of her multiple oppressions" (17). For example, in *Borderlands*, autohistoria functions as a process to present a theoretical framework for experiencing and analyzing border consciousness. In the preface of Anzaldúa's *Light in the Dark/ Luz en lo Oscuro*, she explains that the act of fusing personal narrative with theoretical discourse involves the process of "[c]onectando experiencias personales con realidades sociales [which] results in autohistoria, and theorizing about this activity results in auto-historia-teoría"[3]

[3] This is an instance where Anzaldúa uses autohistoria to tell her own story by writing it in a language that is familiar to her. The translation of this sentence reads something like "In the preface of *Light in the Dark*, she explains that the act of fusing personal narrative with theoretical discourse involves the process of connecting

(6). In other words, autohistoria is the lens Anzaldúa uses to understand and create meaning of her experiences from living and existing in border spaces. Auto-historia-teoría is the theorizing that emerges from this process.

This project examines Anzaldúa's process of framing her lived experiences and those of her community as a paradigm and proposes that the paradigm serves as an interpretive framework for literary texts and media. This project argues that Anzaldúa's theoretical paradigm also serves as an interpretive framework for understanding marginalized communities as depicted by writers, filmmakers, and artists. While this project analyzes works developed by Chicana/o/x[4] writers and artists, I contend that Anzaldúa's theoretical framework can be applied to works by non-Chicanas/os/xs. Inspired by Chela Sandoval's approach in laying out her methodology of the oppressed, which she defines as a set of technologies with the power of interpreting meaning and achieving alternative modes of understanding, this project offers a framework as an interpretive tool to examine representations in literary, filmic, and visual texts (*Methodology of the Oppressed* 181). Sandoval's methodology of the oppressed offers a praxis to achieve resistance and social change through discourses of love. Similarly, Anzaldúa frames her theories through discourses of love and compassion, but Anzaldúa concerns herself more with the self, specifically through a form of self-love that achieves transformation and healing. Discourses of self-love carried out by characters in literary and filmic representations extend to

personal experiences with social realities, which "results in autohistoria, and theorizing about this activity results in auto-historia-teoría" (6). Henceforth, any Spanish translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

[4] Throughout this project, I acknowledge all three terms Chicana, Chicano, and Chicanx because of the significance all three have in Chicana/o/x history. Chicano scholar Francisco Lomelí's conference session in 2018 helped me recognize that substituting Chicanx for all three terms potentially erases the activists' struggle during the Chicano movement who fought so hard to be recognized as Chicanos. I also wish to recognize the Chicanas who fought just as hard alongside their Chicano brothers demanding civil rights. The more recent use of the term Chicanx promotes inclusivity by recognizing those who are gender-nonconforming and are of Mexican descent. This is an important term to add to the category. This project maintains that the distinction is made clear between Chicana/o/x identities. Therefore, I will use all three when making broad references to Chicana/o/x identity.

works outside of Chicana/o/x representations. Exploring these character traits through the lens of Anzaldua's theoretical framework represents the inclusive reach of Anzaldúa's theory. This project, for example, explores how Anzaldúan theory describes a filmmaking strategy that addresses issues of representation in the Rarámuri community in Mexico in the short documentary "La Palabra de la Cueva" in chapter four.

Like Sandoval, Anzaldúa explores modes of resistance. Resistance is a significant theme that runs through Anzaldúa's theoretical framework because of the agency that develops from the forms of resistance Anzaldúa describes. In *Borderlands,* Anzaldúa traces the impact of the Spanish conquest on the people living in the Américas, the permanent effects on the communities directly impacted by the establishment of the US-Mexico border in 1848, and the rights denied to Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the U.S. during the civil rights movement. These historical moments establish the constant stream of injustices facing Mexicans and Mexican Americans living in the U.S. Rooted in her vision of alliance-building through the process of achieving self-acceptance and self-love, Anzaldúa theorizes ways to speak to and against not only the repressive treatment of Mexican Americans in the U.S. but other marginalized groups.

Anzaldúa's identification as a Chicana and her attention to issues concerning Mexican Americans and immigrants during the Chicano movement intersect with Chicana/o/x constructions of indigeneity popularized during the movement in the 1960s and 1970s. This project closely examines the indigenous ties associated with Chicano nationalism and Anzaldúa's engagement with and expansion of these indigenous themes. Anzaldúa is one of the first scholars to introduce a process of "re-Indianization" in her scholarship as a method of resistance against the oppressions facing Chicanas/os/xs (Gutiérrez Nájera, Castellanos, Aldama

2). Embracing the indigenous components of Chicana/o/x identity offered insights to questions of belonging that concerned Chicanas/os/xs and questions that Anzaldúa takes up in her theoretical framework. This first part of this chapter provides historical contextualization of how Mexican indigenismo (indigenism) contributes to Chicana/o/x identity. This section also defines key concepts and symbols from the movement that connects with Anzaldúa's theoretical framework. The second part of this chapter introduces the major concepts involved in Anzaldúa's theoretical framework, drawing attention to the non-linear design of her model as indicative of a decolonial approach[5] to her theoretical development. This project ultimately presents a lens to deconstruct Anzaldúa's theoretical framework and apply it as an analytic for literary, filmic, and artistic interpretations. Through these analytical examinations, I propose that Anzaldúa's theoretical framework is a map not only for understanding texts but also for understanding the self, each other, and how these interactions are central in developing alliance-building strategies. For Anzaldúa, alliance-building is essential to working towards individual and community healing and transformation.

Chicano Mestizaje

During the 1960s civil rights era in the U.S., Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. conceived of a Chicano nationalism to contend with questions of belonging and legitimacy. The term Chicano originates from the word Mexica, the way Aztecs identified themselves in their Náhuatl language. The Náhuatl pronunciation of Mexica

[5] I recognize that in some academic discussions about indigenous identity, the idea of decolonialization is contested because some view the concept as one that has been taken over by scholars. Consequently, their use of the term has resulted in the institutionalization of decolonization processes (See Linda Tuhiwai Smith). However, I am using Walter Mignolo's interpretation of epistemic decolonization, where via Moroccan philosopher Abdelhebir Khatibi's ideas on the construction of the modern world system, Mignolo asserts that decolonizing knowledge occurs at the intersection of local histories and global designs (or knowledge which is at the center). In other words, global designs are impacted by the local as the local is by the global. There is a two-way movement between the two (*Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* 65-71).

("mechica") transformed to Mexicano and eventually evolved into the term Chicano. The impetus to identify as Chicanos during the civil rights era was a political and cultural choice to bring attention to the social, economic, and political injustices Mexican Americans and Mexicans living in the U.S. were facing. Chicanos used the identifier as a term of empowerment. Adopting the name meant embracing the group's indigenous ancestry. Hence, the early members of the movement inspired the movement's cultural identity through major Mesoamerican concepts like Aztlán and indigenous iconography.

Mexican indigenismo (indigenism), an ideological movement that started in the 1920s, significantly inspired the Chicano movment. Mexican indigenismo follows a Latin American movement, starting in the late nineteenth after countries started to gain their independence and establish their national identities (Belausteguigoitia 26-27). Primarily, indigenismo promoted a nationalistic agenda to modernize indigenous and peasant communities and incorporate them into the mainstream. Through a glorification of an indigenous history, indigenismo was about "justifying modernity at the expense of the past" (Arellano). As a result, assimilation efforts through education and colonial practices sought the erasure of indigeneity.

Related to indigenismo is mestizaje, the mixing of races and intercultural exchanges that resulted from miscegenation between Europeans, including peninsulares and criollos with indigenous peoples. In Mexico, similar to other Latin American and Caribbean nations, cultural discourse frames mestizaje, in conjunction with indigenismo, as a shared national indigeneity. Through the discourse of belonging and an assimilationist agenda, mestizaje represented "modernization and social equality" for indigenous people (Taylor 3). Mexican intellectual and public official José Vasconcelos pushed nationalistic objectives of mestizaje further in his

seminal essay *La Raza Cosmica: Misión de la Raza Ibero-Americana.*[6] Along with celebrating the notion of multiculturalism, specifically the joining of Latin American indigenous peoples with the Spanish, *La Raza Cósmica* promotes racial harmony by eliminating indigenous differences. While Vasconcelos's proposal is problematic in arguing that a modernization of indigenous communities requires letting go of indigenous ways, Chicano nationalism adopted Vasconcelos's theory of la raza cósmica and repurposed its assimilationist message to one of reclamation and validation of indigenous heritage. The authorization of legally deeming subjects as "transgressive" or "partially transgressive" is a part of a mestizo nationalism promoted by thinkers like Vasconcelos, according to Estelle Tarica (22). She concludes that the redemption of Indians meant the redemption of those who identified with the transgressive label inflicted on indigenous populations (22). In the Chicano context, the result was an empowering ideology of what Marisa Belausteguigoitia terms "Chicano indigenismo," which reframed understandings of indigenismo to address questions of belonging that arose from the alienation and hostility facing Chicanas/os/xs in the U.S. (28). Important, Robert Con Undiano-Davis points out that the "recovery of a mestizo identity on several fronts […] is an instance of Mexican Americans relearning from Latin American writers [including prominent thinkers like Vasconcelos] *how* to be mestizos as they joined the hemisphere's mestizo communities" (63). A significant part of embracing a mestizo identity included an understanding of the indigenous ancestry integral to the construction of the mestizo category.

U.S. American Indian Elisabeth Lynn-Cook eschews the practice of recognizing mestizos as indigenous because of the elimination of indigenous difference of the mestizaje model. In her defense for "sovereign nationalism" and her call for "respect for the past," her suggestion is that

[6] This title translates to *The Cosmic Race: The Mission of the Iberian-American Race*.

borders are necessary to maintain demarcations between indigenous people (34-35). Lynn-Cook positions herself from a U.S. Native American perspective where tribes establish their standards for citizenship and tribal belonging. Although some Mexican municipalities follow a practice known as "usos y costumbres,"[7] which offers legal recognition to traditional procedures carried out by indigenous communities, the notion of sovereignty is distinct in the U.S. context. The "sovereign nationalism" by which some tribes govern affords them varying degrees of self-governance separate from U.S. federal laws and policies. Related to sovereign nationalism are definitions of tribal membership. Some U.S. Native American tribes base citizenship on ties to kinship, others use blood quantum measures, and some use a combination of these or other measures following tribal traditions. Positioning herself in these terms means that the political and cultural risks of legitimizing an indigenous identity for mestizos are too high for Lynn-Cook.

Borders are necessary for Lynn-Cook's notion of present-day cultural sovereignty because they engage in the resistance of cultural encroachment, appropriation, and, to an extent, land ownership. I argue that repositioning the perspective from a hemispheric lens[8] rather than a U.S. centered one, such as the one advanced by Lynn-Cook, offers a nuanced understanding of the constructions of indigeneity across the Américas. Through a hemispheric lens, the limits of Lynn-Cook's positionality are more pronounced. Her interpretation of mestizaje's role in building a Chicana/o/x identity fails to recognize how indigenous communities practice membership south of the U.S. border. Moreover, Lynn-Cook does not account for the artificial constructions of borders or the displacement of indigenous communities and others living on

[7] Even though the concept literally translates in English to "uses and customs," the Spanish term is usually honored instead of the English translation.

[8] I am indebted to the edited collection *Comparative Indigeneities of the Américas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach*, edited by M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo Aldama, for helping me reframe my approach to thinking about indigeneity across the Américas through an international and comparative lens.

lands ceded to the U.S. with the enactment of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. The treaty established the U.S.-Mexico border that is recognized today. The agreement marked what was once Mexico with an international border that crossed people living there. Chicanas/os/xs embrace of Aztlán and their indigenous history reminds us that this history needs to be accounted for when considering particular constructions of indigenous identities. Ironically, Lynn-Cook's call to "respect the past" seems to reify the erasure that Mexican indigenismo and mestizaje promoted, more than the preservation of cultural difference, which she is suggesting in her assessment. Evaluating indigeneity through a hemispheric lens recognizes the nuances of constructing indigenous identity and sovereignty across the Américas. Additionally, a hemispheric approach broadens a perspective, such as the Native American centric one that Lynn-Cook upholds, by considering the differences between the U.S. and Latin America while acknowledging the profound racialization of both. Such a framework considers a more inclusive recognition of the indigenous peoples of the Américas. It repositions the forms of mestizaje and indigenismo as reminders of the colonializing impact people endured in this part of the hemisphere.

Drawing on the empowering aspect of Chicano indigenismo, Anzaldúa posits her concept of the new mestiza. She builds on Vasconcelos, noting that "la raza cósmica [is] a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world" (*Borderlands* 99). Significant in this quote is the idea that the joining together of races creates something new, a fifth race. In an endnote, she adds that her definition is her "take off" on Vasconcelos's idea (*Borderlands* 119). This note is an important consideration because Anzaldúa is explicit in her engagement with Vasconcelos. She points out that she is building from his idea of la raza cósmica. Her objective is not to

critique his support of mestizaje; instead, she follows the Chicano trajectory of repositioning mestizaje as an idea of resistance in her concept of the new mestiza.

Anzaldúa takes a decolonial approach in her repositioning of mestizaje, as have other noted Chicana scholars like Norma Alarcón in her discussion of the controversial aspects of the indigenous slave Malintzin Tenepal or better known as La Malinche and Cherríe Moraga in her autobiographical piece where she identifies as a XicanaDyke. In his exploration of mestizaje, Rafael Pérez-Torres points out that Chicana/o/x mestizaje becomes a "critical category" that carries a doubleness to it. Mestizaje reflects both the colonial struggles of Chicana/o/x identity and culture and the resistance that results from its entanglements with a colonial legacy (Pérez-Torres 49). Anzaldúa's conceptualization of the new mestiza focuses on self-identification, or what Mariana Ortega describes as Anzaldua's notions of "selfhood," and how it builds and interacts with her environment, including her community (17). The new mestiza is a process of self-exploration that leads to developing more resistant and transformative identities.

The Self and The New Mestiza

The new mestiza introduces Anzaldúa's formative ideas of selfhood and identity. It is essential to recognize that Anzaldúa's process does not solely focus on "personal identity." Anzaldúa's discussions of the self and identity incorporate a more robust definition of identity that includes personal and social identities. Anzaldúa recognizes that within the self are multiple facets, so Anzaldúa's theoretical framework reflects the malleability of the self. The new mestiza is defined by an openness to change:

> *La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and

> goals toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (*Borderlands* 101)

Being in a constant state of becoming is a process that allows for transformative possibilities. For Anzaldúa, this includes a more inclusionary mindset, rather than an exclusionary one. The new mestiza is aware of the oppressive ideologies that surround her. Anzaldúa explains:

> The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (*Borderlands* 101)

The acknowledgment of the pluralism embedded in the new mestiza recognizes its contact with both good and bad character traits and how these traits shape personal identity. The deconstruction of these pluralisms allows the new mestiza to engage with them actively. Koegeler-Abdi points out that the "mestiza actively turns multiplicity into a new subjectivity" conscious of her multiple positionalities (72). The shifting nature of the new mestiza's positionality and situatedness is a primary reason Anzaldúa's iterations of selfhood in her other concepts, including El Mundo Zurdo, the Coatlicue state, mestiza consciousness, Coyolxauhqui imperative, nepantla, and the path of conocimiento, are defined in nuanced ways. A later section in this chapter defines these concepts, but, for now, it important to note that when considering these concepts in relation to each other, the continually evolving nature of Anzaldúa's framework is more pronounced.

Problems with Anzaldúa's Mestizaje

Before delving further into Anzaldúa's concepts like the new mestiza and mestiza consciousness, both anchored in the notion of Chicano mestizaje, it is important to address the concerns that come up when considering mestizaje as one of Anzaldúa's central metaphors. As noted before, indigenismo promotes a nationalistic ideology that celebrates particular outcomes of miscegenation at the expense of indigenous, black, and Asian groups. Belausteguigoitia points out that Latin American identity denied its African and Asian origins until very recently due to the influence of mestizaje ideology (27). The erasure of these groups and the many indigenous groups not included in Latin America's racial imaginary is clearly problematic. As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo argues, Anzaldúa's reinterpretation of mestizaje leaves itself open to its racist agenda. Saldaña-Portillo explains that Anzaldúa's representation of Chicanas/os/xs indigenous past traces a particular history that continues to promote the exclusion of dozens of living indigenous cultures. By advancing the same trope of embracing a "dead indigenous ancestry" used during the Chicano movement, Saldaña-Portillo maintains that Anzaldúa "does so to the exclusions, and, indeed, erasure of contemporary indigenous subjectivity and practices on both sides of the border" (*Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* 282). While Saldaña-Portillo's concerns about Anzaldúa's failure to acknowledge existing indigenous groups are important to consider, I agree with Ortega's opinion on the matter. Ortega posits that "taking seriously Anzaldúa's view of the new *mestiza* does not preclude the possibility of understanding present indigenous populations or of the activism denouncing the numerous problems and afflictions of these populations" (33). Although I share a similar view as Ortega, she also asserts that her initial readings of Anzaldúa left her wondering about Anzaldúa's predilection for Aztec deities. Ortega offers some valid considerations by questioning "how [Anzaldúa's] appeal to Aztec goddesses connected to me

[Ortega], to present-day Chicanas/os, and to indigenous peoples in the United States and Latin America" (33). While the Mesoamerican deities and symbols might not resonate with all of Anzaldúa's readers, I contend that considering her indigenous references through the lens of autohistoria alters their significance.

As discussed in the opening section of this chapter, autohistoria is the process of theorizing lived experience. One major aspect of autohistoria is incorporating the racial and cultural history that directly influences the writer. In Anzaldúa's autohistorias, indigeneity is significant to her identity as a Chicana who grew up in the U.S.-Mexico border. Anzaldúa asserts in an interview she gave after the publication of *Borderlands*, "I am from Texas, formerly part of Spain and part of Mexico, I'm three-quarters Indian but belong to a culture that has negated its indigenous past" ("Writing: A Way of Life: An Interview with María Henríquez Betancor (1995)" 248). I find that in this post-*Borderlands* interview, Anzaldúa makes clear that she understands the problematic nature of mestizaje, despite not highlighting them in *Borderlands* to the expected degree by some of her readers. However, she adds another layer of context to her interpretation of mestizaje in her interview by asserting the importance of her local and even familial history to thinking about her identity. In the same interview, she shares that the formation of the U.S.-Mexico border split her family (248). These seemingly minor details give insight into Anzaldúa's process of theorizing. Even though Saldaña-Portillo rightly points out that Anzaldúa upholds the Mexican statist ideology of mestizaje and indigenismo, I argue that Anzaldúa's treatment of mestizaje both in and beyond *Borderlands* reveals the way mestizaje operates in some communities in the U.S.-Mexico border *and* reveals Anzaldúa's attempt to reclaim mestizaje as an ideology that embraces inclusivity (282). Anzaldúa aims to move beyond the racist motivation of mestizaje and indigenismo by looking past racial

dimensions in her version of mestizaje. Since Anzaldúa's process of theorizing involves her use of autohistoria, this means that Anzaldúa situates her ideas in ways that reflect both her own mestiza identity and the local history of the communities and groups to which she belongs.

Related to the problems with the metaphorical use of mestizaje is the criticism that Anzaldúa privileges a "first-world" perspective in *Borderlands* as argued by Latina scholars Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba. Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba address the dangerous ground Anzaldúa treads by writing about the U.S.-Mexico borderlands with a tendency to focus primarily on experiences that happen on the U.S. side but omits a point of view that comes from the Mexican side of the border. These scholars stress that the metaphors Anzaldúa creates to represent the border potentially ignore the realities of the geopolitical situation that Mexicans face (Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba 16). Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba identify that Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* does not narrativize a transnational experience, rather an intranational one (Castillo 263). While Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba are correct in noting that a Mexican perspective is lacking and a disconnect exists between Mexican scholars and their reception of Anzaldúan philosophy, their assessment ignores the presence of autohistoria in Anzaldúa's theoretical project. The transnational perspective Anzaldúa offers in *Borderlands* is limited and *should be* constrained precisely because she positions herself as a Chicana living on the U.S. side of the border.

Furthermore, Ortega reminds us that coming from the "first world" does not "unquestionably" equate to privilege (31). Although Ortega concludes that Anzaldúa must include a perspective from the Mexican side, I argue that Anzaldúa would expect this view to come from her fellow nepantleras, those whom Anzaldúa identifies in her post-*Borderlands* writings as mediators who operate from the nepantla space. Nepantla is the Náhuatl word

meaning “in-between place,” and Anzaldúa conceptually frames nepantla as the achievement of a mental state where a person reaches deeper understandings and transformative experiences for themselves, others, and their communities (“Now Let Us Shift…” 569). Important outcomes that Anzaldúa stresses in her theoretical process are coalition-building and alliance-forming practices, particularly in her concepts of nepantla and path of conocimiento, so I question Castillo’s assertion that academics like to forget that Anzaldúa rejects most of them, most of the time (263). Castillo seems to imply that the embodied and situated experiences that Anzaldúa’s theoretical process is grounded in is much more exclusive than inclusive. Anzaldúa’s theoretical process operates as an entire process rather than concepts divorced from each other.

Anzaldúa’s Spherical Framework

Scholarship dedicated to Anzaldúa’s theoretical concepts usually disconnect them from each other, but I am particularly interested in examining the theoretical framework formed when considering the relationships shared between concepts. In other words, I contend that understanding the linkage between each concept uncovers a nuanced understanding of Anzaldúan philosophy. By looking at Anzaldúa’s work in terms of a process, rather than disconnected theoretical ideas, I suggest that the more transformative aspects of Anzaldúa’s theory provide constructive approaches to understanding the personal and social experiences of the characters in the literary, filmic, and visual texts introduced in this project.

In order to define Anzaldúa’s spherical thought, I situate this project in the fields of Chicana/o/x studies, Latinx studies, Indigenous studies including Native American studies, and women of color feminisms. I define Anzaldúa’s framework as a philosophical approach that is rooted in an indigenous ontology or an indigenous way of being. The interconnectedness of the universe and elemental nature of the earth are central in indigenous philosophy. In other words,

the relationship between the cosmos and the earth, the cyclical nature of the earth's seasons, and the unification of the earth's elements with all living species are significant concepts in indigenous thought. Finding balance and unification with the cosmos, earth, and its species means that "wholeness" is achieved. Paula Gunn Allen explains the nature of "wholeness" in American Indian thought. She notes that "every story, every song, every ceremony tells the Indian that each creature is part of a living whole and that all parts of that whole are related to one another by virtue of their participation in the whole of being" (60). In Allen's explanation, the interrelatedness between parts that belong to the same whole is central in indigenous thought. That is to say, an indigenous worldview considers life as the living whole with many parts contributing to its formation. Anzaldúa's philosophical approach is born from this ontological perspective. Thus, to fully understand Anzaldúa's theoretical framework, her work's holistic nature must be examined.

Primarily working from Aztec and Mayan philosophy, I suggest that Anzaldúa's framework follows a process that reflects concepts advanced by these Mesoamerican philosophies while bringing in American Indian scholars to the conversation to emphasize the shared philosophical ideas between indigenous groups in the Américas. In such manner, I turn to Kimberly G. Wieser's notion of "intertribalism" when considering the interrelatedness of Native ways of knowing and ways of being (xii). Following the concept of intertribalism, I consider the Mesoamerican influences that Anzaldúa takes up in her work as a philosophy rooted in an indigenous perspective. Noted scholars in Aztec and Mayan histories like Miguel León-Portilla and Domingo Martínez Paredez agree that Aztec and Mayan influences are extensive in Latin America because these are two of the best documented across the Américas. Although Chicano culture is widely criticized for adopting Aztec and Mayan influences, as I discussed in my

previous section, the continual indigena presence in Chicana/o/x identity is an integral component of Anzaldúa's theory. I identify threads of Mesoamerican concepts running through Anzaldúa's framework like "yolteótl," which means deifying one's heart" and "moyolnonotzani," which means "being in dialogue with one's own heart" in Náhuatl (León-Portilla 175). Aztec reverence to the serpent also plays a major role in Anzaldúa's theory, particularly in her notion of the Coatlicue state, defined in the following section. In chapter three, I closely examine how the Aztec deity Coatlicue, the two-headed serpent, shapes Anzaldúa's treatment of the self in her definition of the Coatlicue state. The application of these Mesoamerican influences follows a tradition from the Chicano movement of self-defining and self-constructing Chicana/o/x identity.

The symbolism of the sphere is significant when considering the indigena, or native, presence in Anzaldúan philosophy. The sphere represents a relational system that works towards the achievement of wholeness. My interpretation of a spherical representation for Anzaldúa's framework relies heavily on the ideology espoused by the theater group El Teatro Campesino that comes out of the Chicano movement. Associated initially with the United Farm Workers in their plight for better working conditions and higher wages in the 1960s, El Teatro Campesino consisted of a collective ensemble who performed plays that underscored the deplorable living and working conditions for farm laborers and their families, which helped organize and unionize farm workers. El Teatro Campesino parted ways from the United Farm Workers in 1967, and the company expanded its focus on broader issues facing Chicanas/os/xs. El Teatro Campesino committed itself to improvisational memory-based performances. The company promoted an oral culture, so writing and textual documentation of performances was firmly avoided (Broyles-González 84). El Teatro Campesino, inspired by the practices of the Chicano movement,

endeavored to ground their company's mission in the indigenous traditions embraced by Chicanas/os/xs. Consequently, El Teatro Campesino developed an ideology known as Theater of the Sphere, which functioned as both "a method of performance and life training" (Broyles-González 80). In this project, I borrow El Teatro Campesino's notion of the sphere to illustrate how the concepts in Anzaldúa's framework intersect and how these intersections develop an interconnectedness to form a wholeness (or sphere).

In the context of El Teatro Campesino, actors followed a pedagogy where the body, heart, mind, and soul are united to reach a totality or sphericality (Broyles-González 113). Actors in the Theater of the Sphere followed the Viente Pasos training,[9] a twenty-step program where actors learned about the cosmos and their place in the cosmos. The program sought to help actors reach a balance within themselves and their environment. Viente Pasos offered actors the physical, mental, and spiritual balance needed to perform on stage and find harmony offstage. The oral teachings of Andrés Segura and Domingo Martínez Paredez, both trained in Aztec and Mayan philosophies, formed the basis of the Viente Pasos program (Broyles-González 93). Paredez's Mayan ancestry influenced the Mesoamerican philosophy that guided the ideological development of the Theater of the Sphere (86). Attaining sphericality for actors in the Theater of the Sphere meant achieving a body-mind-heart balance that interacted with the energy of others and their environment. These outward interactions led to a soul-making process to complete the sphere's rotation (Broyles-González 108).

My intention of drawing from the spherical concept developed from Mesoamerican philosophy, primarily Mayan teachings, and adopted by El Teatro Campesino, highlights a similar process that reflects Anzaldúa's spherical framework that constructs a life praxis for

[9] Spanish for twenty steps.

development of both the self and community. In Anzaldúa's framework, the inner reflection and development of the self can achieve balance with forces outside the self, including community, society, and nature. The spherical component of Anzaldúa's theoretical framework embraces a symbolism like the one adopted in the Theater of the Sphere. Yolanda Broyles-González explains that the sphere "suggests a completed totality and, as such, the potential for a new beginning" and "parallels the circularity of all cycles" (108). Using the symbolism associated with the sphere, I trace Anzaldúa's concepts of El Mundo Zurdo, the Coatlicue state, mestiza consciousness, nepantla, and the path of conocimiento as components of Anzaldúa's spherical framework that are connected to each other. Their intersections achieve a process where an individual goes through a process of self-development that is in constant exchange with other components of the sphere, including community, society, and nature. Outlined below are the definitions of the individual components of Anzaldúa's theoretical framework, and the chapters of the dissertation further analyze these concepts.

El Mundo Zurdo

El Mundo Zurdo acts as both concept and process. El Mundo Zurdo serves as an ethical concept that promotes constant self-reflection for an individual. Achievement for both the self and communal healing and transformation is integral in this space. As a process, El Mundo Zurdo is about alliance-building between diverse people, groups, and communities. Together they strive to work towards a shared purpose. Anzaldúa introduces a broad vision of El Mundo Zurdo in her early poem "The Coming of El Mundo Surdo,"[10] which draws focus on bringing together diverse groups of people and groups, essentially undergoing the process of building

[10] Initially, Anzaldúa spelled zurdo with an *s* to honor a south Texas pronunciation. Copyediting changes made without Anzaldúa's consent to her piece titled "El Mundo Zurdo" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color*, changed the s to a z following the Spanish spelling of the word. Eventually, Anzaldúa used the z as well.

community. Initiating the process of El Mundo Zurdo requires engaged attention and constant self-reflection. These thoughtful acts require a recognition of the multiple pieces, sometimes fragments, contained within the self. These pieces and fragments are later referred to as the Coyolxauhqui imperative by Anzaldúa ("Now Let Us Shift…"559-560). The idea of the "self" constantly evolves throughout Anzaldúa's theoretical progression, and the process of "putting Coyolxauhqui together" indicates the shifting nature of the self as a result of the constant self-reflection that works at accepting past traumas in order to achieve spiritual achieve healing ("Now Let Us Shift…" 558). Although El Mundo Zurdo connects with other components of Anzaldúa's sphere, I detail the relationship between El Mundo Zurdo and the Coyolxauhqui imperative to underscore the way one component acts in relationship with another.

Coatlicue State

In Anzaldúa's spherical framework, the Coatlicue state is the concept where careful and constant self-reflection achieves knowledge, empowerment, and the potential for transformation. The Mesoamerican deity Coatlicue inspires the concept. Imagery depicts the deity with two serpent heads. The two heads represent both the "contradictory" and a "synthesis of duality," according to Anzaldúa (*Borderlands* 68). Achieved in this sphere is the synthesis of duality. This synthesis is activated through knowledge and empowerment. The Coatlicue state develops from Anzaldúa's conception of El Mundo Zurdo, which, as described above, is the center of the sphere where diverse groups and people form alliances. In order to enter into El Mundo Zurdo, the Coatlicue state is the component of the sphere that compels an individual to explore all aspects of the self, including the neglected ones such fears, apprehensions, and other dark elements. Anzaldúa describes the process as an act of symbolically looking at one's self in the mirror as a form of the intense self-reflection required in the careful building of self-identity.

According to Anzaldúa, exploring every aspect of our identity can reveal and cultivate relationships with our communities.

Mestiza Consciousness

The mestiza consciousness centers on the idea of tolerance. According to Anzaldúa, self-understanding and self-healing achieves tolerance. The personal and cultural identity reached through the Coatlicue state defines this concept. In *Borderlands,* Anzaldúa defines mestiza consciousness using autohistoria. Employing this approach means that practicing tolerance allows people to reach deeper levels of consciousness and discernment for others and themselves. The mestiza consciousness also seeks a theoretical framework to explore identity, language, sexuality, culture, religion, and education. Anzaldúa provides a comprehensive view of mestiza consciousness, a stage in her theoretical framework that moves past the dualisms explored in the sphere of the Coatlicue state. Arturo J. Aldama identifies the significance of the process of conscious making that Anzaldúa charts throughout *Borderlands* and interprets Anzaldúa's examination of her experiences in marginalized spaces as places where new forms of understanding and transformation emerge (*Disrupting Savagism* 98). I agree with the focus Aldama brings to the process that motivates a mestiza consciousness. I further contend that understanding the component of the mestiza consciousness requires recognizing Anzaldúa's interpretation of consciousness in its totality and an understanding of how the various stages of Anzaldúa's work converge as forms of self-awareness, acceptance, and inclusivity.

Nepantla

As I previously stated in this chapter, nepantla is a Náhuatl word that means "in-between space,"[11] and Anzaldúa theorizes that "transformations occur in this […] always-in-transition

[11] In Spanish, nepantla translates to "tierra entre medio" (("(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces 243"). The Spanish phrase means in-between earth.

space" ("(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces 1"). Anzaldúa explains that she uses the word nepantla to "theorize liminality" and associates the concept with "states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another" ("(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces 1"). Being in a state of nepantla is important in reaching conocimiento, the next component in Anzaldúa's theoretical framework, because the experience of living between worlds renders a critical awareness that moves beyond the tolerance of a mestiza consciousness. Moving beyond a stage where difference is tolerated guides a person to reach a deeper level of understanding for the differences that exist between people and communities. The shift from tolerance to discernment is crucial because nepantleras, those who are in the state of nepantla, recognize that differences exist. In communities where differences are important to recognize, these differences do not get erased. For example, all indigenous communities have individual cultural distinctions. Recognizing these distinctions safeguards the cultural differences that are specific to each community. Nepantleras work to understand these differences and create alliances despite the differences. In fact, alliance-building happens in nepantla because these differences create opportunities to bridge differences through shared commonalities and affiliations.

Path of Conocimiento

The path of conocimiento[12] is the process of reaching a deep understanding of the self while at the same time relating to others perhaps even cultivating both compassion and empathy. The development of these qualities, according to Anzaldúa, contributes towards the achievement of transformative outcomes. Anzaldúa explains that reaching conocimiento happens "in the place between worldviews" or in the nepantla state ("Now let us shift…" 569).

[12]Anzaldúa interprets conocimiento as understanding ("(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces 4").

While all concepts in Anzaldúa's theoretical framework work in relationship with each other, I visually conceptualize nepantla and conocimiento creating movement in the spherical framework or putting the spin to the sphere, so to speak. In other words, the various concepts work in relationship with each other. The careful introspection from the Coatlicue state and the tolerance of the mestiza consciousness eventually reaches the state of nepantla, where commonalities with others are shared and alliances start to form. Eventually, these actions lead to the path of conocimiento, the space where transformation and healing occurs. Harkening back to the Náhuatl influences in Anzaldúa's framework like "yóllotl," which means heart and "yoltéotl," which means "one with a heart rooted in God," going through the Coatlicue state and mestiza consciousness means "moyolnonotzani" or conversing with one's heart as the Nahuas believed (León-Portilla 172). In doing so, the nepantlera prepares herself to build bridges, metaphorically speaking, and reach transformational healing in the path of conocimiento.

Conclusion

This dissertation takes up Anzalduán scholar AnaLouise Keating's invitation to explore and discuss the "most provocative" work by women of color theorists whose ideas are in danger of "theoretical erasure" (25). Keating identifies Anzaldúa as one of these theorists because her pre- and post-*Borderlands* works receive minimal attention. Scholarship on Anzaldúa typically tends to privilege her dualistic approach to the theorizing she does in *Borderlands,* such as her ideas on the binaries she seems to construct in her border theory. However, these interpretations fail to account for the evolving nature of her framework. I suggest that Anzaldúa's spherical framework is one of the most provocative features of her theoretical model, and the holistic spirit of the model depends on concepts that fall outside of *Borderlands.* A comprehensive understanding of Anzaldúa's theoretical framework is fundamental to thoroughly examine all the

elements Anzaldúa incorporated in her theories, including her early idea of El Mundo Zurdo, autohistoria, the Coatlicue state, mestiza consciousness, and her later ideas of nepantla, and conocimiento. Anzaldúa's spherical framework advances models for self-reflection and self-reconstruction that achieve outcomes that improve relationality and serves as a praxis for self-improvement and coalition-building.

Joining other literary scholars who have taken up Keating's invitation to explore Anzaldúa's less theorized ideas like Elizabeth Anne Dahms, who draws focus to Anzaldúa's less recognized writings, and Patricia Lobo, who explores the various facets of Chicana feminism involved in Anzaldúa's theory, this project contributes to their conversations. I also join scholars like Alicia Gaspar de Alba whose ideas in *[Un]framing the 'Bad Woman': Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui, and Other Rebels With a Cause* are grounded in Anzaldúan thought; Ricardo F. Vivancos Pérez's look at Anzaldúa's rewriting of culture in *Radical Chicana Poetics*; Damián Baca's examination of Anzaldúa's rhetorics in his book *Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations, and the Territories of Writing*; and Mariana Ortega's focus on the philosophical dimensions of Anzaldúa's theory in *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology*. These scholars add to the committed efforts of Anzaldúa's long-time comadres[13] AnaLouise Keating and Norma Cantú to promote Anzaldúan scholarship.

Much of the scholarship advanced about Anzaldúa brings attention to the radical spirit of her ideas. Their focus on her radicalism stems from the contradictions Anzaldúa lived, wrote about, and overcame. For Anzaldúa, radicalism enables action. In their 1981 groundbreaking work *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Cherríe Moraga and

[13] In this context, the Spanish term comadre means friend, although the term connotes a more sister-like relationship. In Spanish, comadres also indicate the relationship between a child's mother and godmother, suggesting the shared bond and reverence between the two.

Gloria Anzaldúa recognize the collection as a product of such radicalism. Identifying the collection as a "revolutionary tool" means radicalizing its readers into "action" similar to the editors' radical act of putting the book together (*This Bridge Called My Back* xlvi). Examining Anzaldúa's early writing, such as "El Mundo Zurdo" and "La Prieta," both included in *This Bridge*, results in a more thorough understanding of Anzaldúa's theoretical framework. Influenced by Anzaldúa, Moraga, and Keating's call for action, this dissertation follows in the path paved by other Anzaldúan scholars by arguing for a (re)consideration of Anzaldúa's more provocative[14] works.

Chicana/o/x scholarship, Latinx scholarship, border studies, rhetoric and writing studies, decolonial studies, women and gender studies often reference Anzaldúa's theoretical concepts. However, an extensive study has yet to bring focus to her work in its entirety, particularly a thorough examination of the evolution of her theoretical framework. Her theoretical framework starts with her ideas on El Mundo Zurdo, expands to her theory of mestiza consciousness in *Borderlands*, and, in her post-*Borderlands* work, her ideas of nepantla and nepantleras as steps on the path of conocimiento, which she proposes in her posthumous published work *Light in the Dark/ Luz en lo Oscuro*. Anzaldúa's nuanced theory is often disregarded in favor of her broader notion of the metaphorical borderlands as they relate to identity formation.

Borderlands and border culture are reminders that these are spaces of change and regeneration. The continued scholarship on metaphorical borders and mestiza consciousness acknowledges the transformative qualities of border thought, though this lens is limited. Considering Anzaldúa's theoretical framework as spherical where concepts are intimately

[14] Here I adopt the language used by Keating in her section in *Transformation Now!: Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change*, where she zeros in on the academy's tendency to deliberately neglect Anzaldúa's and Paula Gunn Allen's more provocative ideas because some in the academy deems them too controversial (24-25).

connected helps reach a nuanced understanding of Anzaldúa's notions of the self and their impact on individual identity and community building. Notably, featured in this project are Chicana/o/x and immigrant perspectives because of the attention Anzaldúa places on these marginalized groups. These perspectives are significant because of current geo-political concerns with U.S.-Mexican border politics. Re-examining the socio-political and cultural concerns Anzaldúa shares in her experiences as a queer Spanglish-speaking Chicana who grew up on the border provides a more nuanced understanding of the individual, cultural, and collective identities shaping present-day border communities. The inclusive and relational framework Anzaldúa develops offers a lens to help us form better relationships with ourselves and each other.

CHAPTER 2

EL MUNDO ZURDO:[15]

Building Community in Jesús Salvador Treviño's *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories*

In the forward to the third edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, Gloria Anzaldúa shares the origins of her concept of El Mundo Zurdo or the left-handed world. Feeling frustrated and alienated from her experience at the "gringo" institution at the University of Texas at Austin, Anzaldúa wrote an essay titled "Growing Up Xicana" ("Counsels to the Firing…Past, Present, Future" 262). She describes using an "autobiographical politically engaged voice," which, to her surprise, her white professor encouraged. While teaching a Chicano studies course entitled "La Mujer Chicana," she realizes the limited amount of material that reflects the Chicana experience. She starts thinking about compiling a book that will highlight the experiences of Chicanas and other women of color.

During this time, a white gay male friend of hers asks her to guest lecture in his class. During the lecture, she has a "vision of a blood/spirit connection/alliance in which the colored, queer, poor, female, and physically challenged struggle together and form an international feminism" ("Counsels to the Firing…Past, Present, Future" 262). That set of alliances, what she calls El Mundo Zurdo, brings together diverse and marginalized groups. Reflecting on the notion of difference and ways to make connections across differences leads her to this concept. According to Anzaldúan scholar AnaLouise Keating, this interconnectivity forms relational differences that carve out spaces for these groups to work together, cultivating a space for the marginalized to build community, a metaphorical home for displaced groups (*Transformation Now!*: *Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change* 46).

[15] El Mundo Zurdo means the Left-handed World.

Given the central role that community and belonging play in Anzaldúa's theoretical framework, I propose that El Mundo Zurdo initiates the process for the interconnectedness that Anzaldúa finds between an individual and the connections the individual makes with the world. According to Anzaldúan philosophy, inner reflection and external discovery produce ways of knowing (epistemologies) and ways of being (ontologies). These developments mean that turning inward involves thoughtful and constant self-reflection. When turned outward, this practice of self-reflection *impacts* and *is impacted* by the world or things outside the self. The idea of turning outward is an important consideration because, in these moments, enacted are the processes of cultivating relationships and spaces of understanding.

Although scholarship concerned with El Mundo Zurdo is limited, AnaLouise Keating underscores El Mundo Zurdo in her theoretical work on interconnectivity. Keating sees El Mundo Zurdo within oppositional frameworks commonly used to manage difference. These frameworks offer alternative approaches for thinking about difference as advanced by women of color (*Transformation Now!: Toward a Post-Oppositional Politics of Change* 46-48). Robyn Henderson-Espinoza considers El Mundo Zurdo in her investigation of new forms of the knowledge production through embodied experience advanced in feminist theology ("Gloria Anzaldúa: Exploring a Relational Feminist Theology of Interconnectedness" 109). Like Keating, Henderson-Espinoza concentrates on El Mundo's Zurdo's focus on relationality. Both Keating and Henderson-Espinoza demonstrate the productive nature of El Mundo Zurdo. The foundational nature of El Mundo Zurdo in Anzaldúan theory is explained in the following section.

In this chapter, I consider the core principles of the process of establishing El Mundo Zurdo and build on the project's broader scope by introducing Anzaldúa's theoretical framework

as a tool to analyze Chicana/o/x texts and media. An exploration of Anzaldúa's poem "The coming of el mundo surdo"[16] and her essay "La Prieta" will help to define El Mundo Zurdo. In these texts, she introduces the practice of constant self-reflection as a way to enter into El Mundo Zurdo. Understanding Anzaldúa's theoretical framework as a connected process means that each concept is bound to another, and entering into El Mundo Zurdo entails activating other Anzaldúan concepts— Coyolxauhqui imperative, Coatlicue state, mestiza consciousness, nepantla, and concocimiento—as a process for a person to (re)connect to themselves, his/her/their community, and the environment.

I suggest that Anzaldúa's Chicana sensibility influences her focus on the notion of belonging by foregrounding ways that the practice of constant self-reflection leads to community building. In this chapter, I draw connections between Anzaldúa's ideas on belonging with Aztlán, the Aztec homeland that Chicanos embrace and claim as their ancestral home, as part of reaffirming their history and culture. In the final section of this chapter, I analyze Chicano writer and filmmaker Jesús Salvador Treviño's short story collection *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories* through the lens of El Mundo Zurdo. Treviño's collection closes with a short story that offers a vision of a community empowering itself by building its own version of Aztlán. I contend that the characters in *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories* enter into their personal forms of El Mundo Zurdo, and they find that creating a separate community in the Sonoran Desert offers a solution to help them address the socio-economic problems they face in Arroyo Grande, the fictional border town in Treviño's collection.

[16] Initially, Anzaldúa spelled zurdo with an *s* to honor a south Texas pronunciation. Copyediting changes made without Anzaldúa's consent to her piece, "El Mundo Zurdo" in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color*, changed the s to a z following the Spanish spelling of the word. Eventually, Anzaldúa used the z, as well. This chapter will use El Mundo Zurdo to refer to the concept of the Left-handed World and El Mundo Surdo to refer to her poem and workshop series organized by Anzaldúa.

Pain and Healing:

Anzaldúa's "La Prieta," Friends from the Other Side/Amigos Del Otro Lado, Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona, and "The Coming of El Mundo Surdo"

El Mundo Zurdo functions as both a concept and a process. As a process, El Mundo Zurdo is about alliance building between diverse people, groups, and communities. Together they strive to work towards a shared purpose. Anzaldúa introduces a broad vision of El Mundo Zurdo because her focus is bringing together diverse groups of people. El Mundo Zurdo also serves as an ethical concept, essentially a strategy centered on constant self-reflection intended for personal and communal healing and transformation. Anzaldúa engages in self-reflection through autohistoria, her method of sharing testimonio that also contributes towards building a collective narrative. Anzaldúa's use of autohistoria includes sharing her experiences as a Spanglish-speaking, Chicana, patlache[17] scholar who grew up in a border community. Through autohistoria, Anzaldúa focuses on the pain and violence experienced by marginalized groups. She sheds light on the importance of locating spaces of belonging through community building practices.

In the essay entitled "La Prieta," Anzaldúa shares her family's anxiety about her brown skin color, yet they give her the nickname La Prieta. The Spanish word prieta means dark. In Spanish-speaking communities, prieta is usually used in a derogatory way towards people with dark skin-tones or directed towards mestizos with brown skin. Additionally, Anzaldúa recounts her struggle with early menstruation as a three-month-old baby and enduring precocious puberty at age seven. Seeing her mother's reaction to her conditions made Anzaldúa feel "'strange,' 'abnormal,' 'QUEER'" ("La Prieta" 199). Anzaldúa's queer positionality places her in the

[17] Náhuatl term for queer.

margins. Early in her life, markers like skin tone and health issues mark her as an outsider. She carries the idea of being on the outside throughout the essay. She describes her experiences of growing up in poverty, enduring the machismo that runs through her family and community, and in her relationships with people who are white and non-Chicano. Being relegated to the margins, she lists all the labels that position her there. To some, she is a Chicana. To others, she is a member of the Third World, and some consider her a feminist. Her queer identity also gives her another label, along with her socialist views, her spiritual interests, and her artistic endeavors ("La Prieta" 205). Anzaldúa explains that it is the labels that are divisive, and she resolves "*to be the bridge, to be the fucking crossroads*" that can help these marginalized groups unite to form alliances and community ("La Prieta" 206).

The pain and trauma she contends with are explicit in the essay's descriptions of Anzaldúa's childhood experiences and her membership in marginalized groups. She associates pain to memories like her grandmother telling her she is "*muy prieta*," too dark and different from her grandmother's own fair skin ("La Prieta" 198). The retelling of this memory exposes an internalized tension Anzaldúa feels between herself and her family. She is shamed for being dark, and she recognizes that healing from this pain is a process of self-acceptance. Her method of learning from her pain also means sharing her pain with others.

She shares these experiences in writings such as "La Prieta," but she also reinvents her pain in constructive ways for herself and others. For example, she takes her memories of being labeled La Prieta and writes two children's books entitled *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos Del Otro Lado* and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona*. The protagonist in both stories is a brown-skin young girl who helps her family and community. In *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos Del Otro Lado,* Prietita rescues her undocumented friend Joaquín and his

mother by helping them hide from Border Patrol officers. Prietita finds the local herb woman who is willing to provide Joaquín and his mother refuge. *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona* details Prietita as being guided by La Llorona, or the Ghost Woman, to find the herbs Prietita needs to help cure her mother's illness. Both stories end with Prietita being mentored by a curandera, or the herb woman, to learn more about healing others.

These texts offer a space for Anzaldúa to reinvent the connotative degradation associated with La Prieta. She reappropriates the name to Prietita, adding the *-ita* to the end of the word to create a more endearing Spanish nickname. Through this form of storytelling, Anzaldúa develops a brave protagonist who exhibits sensitivity and compassion for her family and friends. In one story, Prietita represents the "dignity and generosity of the spirit that the Mexican Americans and the Mexican immigrants share" (*Friends from the Other Side/Amigos Del Otro Lado).* Both stories leave open the probability that Prietita will learn how to heal from the curandera. Anzaldúa states, "I want to convey my respect for las curanderas, the traditional healers of my people. They know many things about healing that Western doctors are just beginning to learn" (*Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona).* The possibility that Prietita might become a healer for her community is an important detail. Healing is a vital objective in Anzaldúa's theoretical framework. Helping a community achieve some form of healing is an essential step in the path of conocimiento.

"La Prieta" details schisms that exist within and between marginalized groups. In particular, Anzaldúa shares the experiences of her neighbors Randy and David. She describes the insults directed towards Randy for being gay by a Black man, and Randy retaliates by hurling a racial slur. She also narrates Randy and David's experience of being chased by three Latino men who insult them and throw a beer bottle at them. Anzaldúa also describes the domestic

abuse between Randy and David in their relationship ("La Prieta" 205). Anzaldúa's narrative suggests that deep divisions between groups of people can escalate to violent outcomes. She firmly believes that entering El Mundo Zurdo mediates the pain and violence that terrorize these groups.

The idea of bringing people together is the central theme of Anzaldúa's early poem "The Coming of El Mundo Surdo," which she wrote in 1977 and was published posthumously in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader.* She proclaims:

> Together we will walk
> through walls by the lunar [sic]
> light see our
> left-handedness
> with our third eye ("The Coming of El Mundo Surdo" 36)

The metaphors here suggest that developed through the "third eye" of the group are practices of knowing, and the "lunar light" illuminates new understandings. The poem proclaims that a "collective of wo/men/and androgynes will proclaim *me* [emphasis added] ("The Coming of El Mundo Surdo" 37). She emphasizes the pronoun "me," because as a person is empowered, then the collective or the group becomes empowered, as well. The emphasis on "me" highlights the fundamental role the "self" plays in Anzaldúa's definition of El Mundo Zurdo. She describes the path of El Mundo Zurdo as "a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society" ("La Prieta" 208). The focus on the self and the relationship the self shares with the community is a critical part of the process.

Entering the state of El Mundo Zurdo is initiated through Anzaldúa's notion of "self" or what I refer to as constant self-reflection. This process recognizes that there are multiple pieces, sometimes fragments contained within the self. Anzaldúa later refers to these pieces and fragments as the Coyolxauhqui imperative ("Now Let Us Shift…" 559-560). Because of the pieces' fluid nature, critical introspection guides the process of constant self-reflection as a means to embrace the fluid, shifting quality of the pieces. The notion of "self" is nuanced and continuously evolves through Anzaldúa's theorizing process. Her notion of "putting Coyolxauhqui together" means shifting perceptions as a way to work through past traumas and achieve healing ("Now Let Us Shift…" 558). For Anzaldúa, healing requires both personal effort and community support. The link between the self and community is significant for Anzaldúa because of their shared reciprocal relationship. The reciprocity involves people building community, while community offers a sense of belonging. Those who are displaced people or searching for a sense of belonging turn to community to locate spaces of belonging. Anzaldúa reflects on questions of belonging in her discussion of Aztlán in *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

El Mundo Zurdo and Aztlán

The role belonging plays in Anzaldúa's retelling of the origins of the Aztec homeland Aztlán is significant. Her detailed timeline legitimizes Chicanas/os/xs ancestral past and collected history. My reason for drawing a connection between Anzaldúa's notion of El Mundo Zurdo and Aztlán comes from her focus on the impact this boundary has on the people who live in the region, particularly on the U.S. side. When describing the "unnatural boundary" that is the U.S.-Mexico border, Anzaldúa identifies "los atravesados," or the border crossers, who are the outsiders from the rest of society (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 25). She describes border

inhabitants as "prohibited" and "forbidden," marking them as illegitimate (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 25). Their illegitimacy fills the region with a tension between those who are legitimate and los atravesados. Cultivating a sense of belonging becomes important for los atravesados who feel displaced, neglected, and marginalized. Anzaldúa describes a physical border that relegates people to the margins. For Anzaldúa, who identifies as a Chicana, Aztlán symbolizes a homeland that offers a place of ancestral origins and legitimizes her cultural roots in the Southwest United States.

The story of Aztlán is symbolic on two levels. Before the Aztecs migrated to Mexico and Central America, the historical account of Aztlán explains that the Conchise people inhabited the Southwest United States, encompassing our present-day border region. The Conchise preceded the Aztecs before their migration in 1000 B.C. In her first chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa describes the region as "Aztlán—land of the herons, land of whiteness, the Edenic place of origin of the Azteca" (26). The Aztlán story recognizes the Conchise as the original inhabitants of the southwestern area of the U.S. The location is significant because most of this territory was ceded to the U.S. from Mexico after the Mexican American War with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which marked a pivotal point in Mexican, as well as in American, history. The treaty recognized the Mexicans living in the region as foreigners, outsiders, as they witnessed the shifting of the border between the two countries. The end of the Mexican American War reshaped borders and impacted the nationalities of the people living in this area. The treaty allotted the U.S. over half a million square miles of land covering parts of Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and the entire territories of lands that form present-day California, Nevada, and Utah. Texas was already a part of the United States in 1845. The treaty established the Rio Grande River as the official division between the United States and Mexico (Mermann-

Jozwiak and Sullivan vii). This dramatic shift in borders explains the connection between the two countries and the impact that border disputes had on the people living in the region. After the signing of the treaty, Mexican communities became marginalized. Anzaldúa connects her discussion of the border with the notion of belonging. In borderlands, spaces of belonging intersect with issues concerning place and identity. The intersection of these issues brings up questions of home and legitimized forms of belonging. Aztlán takes up some of these questions.

Symbolically, Aztlán represents the spiritual homeland that unites those who identify as Chicana/o/x. The term Chicano comes from the word Mexica, the Náhuatl word for Aztec. Although Chicanos conceived of the term as a recognition of their indigenous past, critics of the term point out the problem of privileging an Aztec ancestry. Chicano writer Francisco Lomelí makes the case that Chicano ancestry is traced to various ethnic roots:

> including Yoheme (Yaqui), O'odam (Pápago), Diné (Navajo), Indé (Apache), Rarámuri (Tarahumara), Wawárika (Huichol), and Purépecha (Tarascan); plus mixed Native American groups from distinct pueblos and *rancherías* (communities originally affiliated with haciendas and ranchos); combined with African and, yes, European (mostly Spanish but also French, Italian, and other nationalities), and sometimes Anglo-American roots. (8)

Lomelí recognizes the racial and ethnic complexities of the Chicano heritage gives significant recognition to Mexica roots. A major attribute of this indigenous past is the identification with Aztlán, particularly the belief that Aztlán can be geographically traced to the Southwest area of the U.S. as described by Joseph P. Sánchez, offering Chicanos a homeland with a rich ancestral and cultural past (77-80).

I will offer a brief historical account of the Aztec migration from Aztlán to draw a connection between Aztlán and El Mundo Zurdo. In 1168,[18] the Aztecs were divinely guided by Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec God of War, to Tenochtitlán where the people from Aztlán had a vision of an eagle with a serpent in its beak sitting on a nopal, the site of their promised land. The Mexican flag pays homage to this vision by incorporating an eagle's image with the serpent in its beak perched on the nopal in the flag's center. The Aztecs settled in Tenochtitlán, present-day Mexico City, and quickly grew nostalgic for their place of origin. The Aztecs began a search for their "Edenic" homeland, and in the fifteenth century, the Aztec ruler Moctezuma Ilhuicamina began a quest in search of the land of his ancestors (Pina 52-56).

This origin's story is significant for Anzaldúa's theoretical framework because she recognizes that locating a space of belonging is an essential part of cultural identity. Lomelí notes that for some Aztlán is an "elixir of recovery, healing, and belonging" (2). In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa describes the present-day U.S.-Mexico border as a place that is still grappling with the dislocation left from the loss of Aztlán and the shifting of borders.

Anzaldúa's earlier notion of El Mundo Zurdo offers an intervention for those who find themselves in the margins, including physical and metaphorical borderlands. She takes up psychological borderlands, sexual borderlands, and spiritual borderlands in addition to the physical borderland of the Southwest (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 19). Much like the process of recognizing El Mundo Zurdo, Anzaldúa presents Aztlán as a foundational concept that offers an awareness of a Chicano past, legitimizes Chicano identity, and unifies Chicanos by offering them a sense of belonging. El Mundo Zurdo functions as a similar process that is more inclusive of

[18] Undoubtedly, there will be conflicting dates for the migration of the Conchise. I am using Anzaldúa's historical timeline, but the collection of writers in *Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* give differing dates and accounts. Luis Leal's "In Search of Aztlán" (p. 151-158) explains a different timeline than the one described by Anzaldúa, but both describe similar events.

marginalized people and groups, not limited to Chicanos. Those who enter El Mundo Zurdo learn more about themselves through constant self-reflection as they navigate the struggle of being marginalized by building community and contribute to building a community founded on inclusivity.

The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories

Chicano filmmaker and writer Jesús Salvador Treviño's collection *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories* (1995) is the first of the trilogy that includes *The Skyscraper That Flew* (2005) and *Return to Arroyo Grande* (2015). *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories* explore the lives of characters living in a barrio nestled in the fictional border town of Arroyo Grande, Texas. Barrio is the Spanish word for neighborhood, and in the U.S., a barrio commonly signifies an impoverished neighborhood with a majority of Spanish-speaking residents. The idea of place is central in the collection. Treviño weaves supernatural occurrences into the plot with zombies and revived historical figures like Pancho Villa. These over the top situations fit the text's comedic genre but underlying tensions infiltrate the supernatural events. The narrative emphasizes the importance of place, and the idea of belonging becomes a central theme in the collection. Tied to the idea of belonging are the characters' economic and social conditions. The characters show resilience by leaving the barrio in Arroyo Grande to build a community in the Sonoran Desert.

Treviño's short story collection exemplifies a movement in Chicana/o/x literature that uses the American Southwest border as a trope for exploring the social, cultural, and political issues that arise from this binational zone. Treviño's work also falls under the genre proposed by Claudia Sadowski-Smith that she labels "U.S. fronteriza fiction" (*Border Fictions* 718). Sadowski-Smith's reclassification of these particular texts centers on the geographical loci of the

fictional Chicana/o/x texts that she examines from writers like Ito Romos, Richard Yañez, and Lucretia Guerrero. Their literature highlights U.S. border cities populated by a Mexican-descended majority tightly linked with the Mexican sister cities with which they share a border ("Twenty-First Century Chicano/a Border Writing" 719). Sadowski-Smith's concern these texts' geography provides a critical point of inquiry to examine Treviño's fictional border community. The focus on place in U.S. fronteriza fiction intersects with Anzaldúa's concern of finding a homeland. As explained by Anzaldúa, finding a homeland means entering El Mundo Zurdo by cultivating a space of belonging.

In the opening story, "The Fabulous Sinkhole," the reader immediately learns of the eruption of "the hole in Mrs. Romero's front yard" (11). This eruption is the first of several events that will disrupt the lives of the barrio's residents, including Mrs. Romero. Rusty Gómez, an employee of the Department of Water and Power, identifies the hole as a sinkhole. He explains that the ground collapsed because of an underground water source running through Mrs. Romero's yard. He attributes the unknown water source to an arroyo that used to run through the barrio, and when it rained, the enlarged stream "used to run down to the Rio Grande" (21). While these details serve to frame the unusual event that is taking place in Mrs. Romero's yard, the failure of city management that Gomez exposes quickly leads to the startling events that ensue. Questions about building a barrio on top of a water source remain unanswered, and the issue is complicated even further with the appearance of city employee Sam Bedford. Showing up to assess the severity of the situation, he is characterized as "grumpy because his afternoon game of golf had been disrupted by an emergency call to see about the potholes on Fourth Street," or Calle Cuarto, as the street is known to its residents (26). Treviño takes a lighthearted approach in describing the ineffectiveness of city management to help its residents. He tells Mrs.

Romero, "[d]on't know what to tell you, lady" and "Sorry, I can't help you" (27). His professional advice is to "just keep people away so no one falls in" (27). Despite Treviño's playful tone, we can find subtleties of the situation as detailed in Bedford's incompetence. The potholes that Bedford assumes he will be looking at during his inspection indicate the city government's inability to address the needs of its residents. Bedford's failure to take immediate action is symptomatic of systematic mismanagement by the city. As Bedford walks away, he asks Mrs. Romero, "[d]o you mind if I take some of these golf balls lying over there?" (27). The message in Bedford's question suggests his disregard for the safety of those who live in the area.

Random objects sprouting from the sinkhole like a silver dollar, fly swatter, a Smith Corona typewriter, and even a 1949 Chevy Fleetline follow its precipitous appearance. The objects that appear are both disturbing and eerie. These suspicious objects expose a more realistic social reality of a barrio community that survives the struggles of their economic situation. Initially, these social and economic realities are suppressed in the narrative by the characters' comedic experiences.

The sinkhole disturbs the barrio, and its residents speculate on the sinkhole's origins and its artifacts. Mrs. Ybarra, one of the barrio residents, claims that the event is a miracle, while the barrio priest disagrees but does assert that God must have willed the event. One resident describes the event as "un cuerno de abundancia," or a cornucopia of abundance (29). Frank Del Roble, the university-educated journalist, concludes that the "stuff's probably been dragged here by some underground current of the Rio Grande. There is a scientific explanation for everything" (29). But, the event's inexplicable nature creates a phenomenon linked to the Rio Grande, which symbolically represents a U.S.-Mexico border space. The proximity of the Rio Grande to Mrs. Romero's yard, "half a mile away," establishes the close connection between the

town of Arroyo Grande and Mexico (22). Moreover, the town's name of Arroyo Grande is reminiscent of the Rio Grande River, which has served as a marker of division between the state of Texas and the Mexican states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Treviño's Arroyo Grande is representative of many border spaces found alongside these states.

Frank's interpretation of the phenomenon implies that the objects sprouting from the sinkhole each originate from the Rio Grande and possess historical, cultural, and social value. Their mysterious appearance also suggests that the artifacts picked up by each of the residents of Calle Cuatro will help them to gain greater insights about themselves. Treviño observes that it would take some time for each resident to "associate an item they had carried off from the sinkhole on that peculiar Saturday with a specific influence in their lives" (26). These events signal the characters entering into El Mundo Zurdo, and each artifact thrusts them into a state of constant self-reflection. While Frank's pseudoscientific hypothesis for the source of the sinkhole might be the most cogent, there is a supernatural element to the situation. Critic Alex Avila defines these strange occurrences as a type of "Latino magical realism," that offers Treviño a method for his characters to understand the reality of their social, economic, and personal circumstances (72).

Treviño fictionalizes barrio life in his tragi-comic approach by incorporating elements of magical realism where the characters must face their socio-economic situations. Early in the story, Treviño's description of the dismantling of Mrs. Romero's white picket fence projects a coded message about the appeal of American capitalism, especially as it plays out in border communities. Treviño writes that the "sinkhole had undermined the earth on which Mrs. Romero's white picket fence had stood…[and] the fence, pickets and all plopped into the water"

(26). A familiar narrative in border communities is achieving the "American dream" and escaping the oppressive economic conditions of the barrio. While the white picket fence is suggestive of a drive for homeownership and private property rights, the presence of a white picket fence in a barrio is atypical. Economically disadvantaged residents tend to live in barrios, and the sinkhole's suction of the fence symbolizes an unveiling of a more realistic picture of the characters' socio-economic circumstances.

Despite the disruption the sinkhole causes, it is a socializing force for the community. Mrs. Romero is delighted that she gets to spend time with her neighbors since she seldom gets visitors after her husband's death. During an afternoon of interacting with her neighbors, she resolves to "make it a point to visit her neighbors on a regular basis and would demand that her children and grandchildren visit more often" (19). Although the story is brief in describing Mrs. Romero's resolve to change her circumstances, the reader discerns the character's self-reflection. In the story "The Return of Pancho Villa," the reader learns that the protagonist of the story, Yoli, befriends Mrs. Romero. After the sinkhole incident, Yoli visits Mrs. Romero weekly, and they help each other better navigate their social realities. Yoli offers Mrs. Romero the companionship she needs after her husband's passing, and Mrs. Romero offers the guidance Yoli needs to survive her middle-school problems.

Self-Reflection in Treviño's Collection

In the story of "Last Night of the Mariachi," the mariachi band who has played in the same venue for thirty-two years is being let go for a new younger band. The story chronicles the band's last five performances and takes up issues of aging and change. During their last performance, no one shows up, but they play their hearts out for themselves. Their visceral connection to the songs resurrects an audience filled with the great Mexican musicians from the

past like Jorge Negrete, Guty Cárdenas, and Miguel Aceves. After their final show, the band gains a sense of closure, and they leave a silver dollar one of them retrieved from the sinkhole as a gesture of luck to the new group taking their place.

The story "An Unusual Malady" details a strong friendship between a young boy Choo Choo Torres and the elderly widow Don Sabastiano Diamante. They encourage each other to make the best out of their circumstances by guiding one another to be more reflective about their choices. The most bizarre story of the collection, "Attack of the Lowrider Zombies," focuses on Rudy Vargas, the Calle Cuatro resident who restores the 1949 Chevy Fleetliner that emerges from the sinkhole. Rudy takes a road trip in the Chevy to visit family and ends up saving the city of Los Angeles from a group of zombies who represent a Hollywood stereotypes of Mexicans in film. He teams up with María López, a local investigative reporter, and together they begin to understand the damaging impact Hollywood's representation of Mexicans have had for Chicano communities. The collection *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories* presents major characters whom all learn more about themselves through their social interactions, a type of self-reflection representative of the work that Anzaldúa associates with El Mundo Zurdo.

Carnalismo in El Mundo Zurdo

The final story in Treviño's collection entitled "The Great Pyramid of Aztlán" is didactic in its satirical representations of the social, economic, and political realities for Chicanas/os/xs and Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. Eight years after the sinkhole event, the journalist Frank Del Roble writes a piece for the *LA Times* about a pyramid being built in Arizona. The story opens with Frank's memory of picking up the Parker fountain pen from Mrs. Romero's yard, which is now his talisman in his professional life.

In Arizona, Frank meets Manuel Zapata, a direct allusion to the Mexican revolutionary figure Emiliano Zapata, who has commenced the utopian project of building a pyramid in the middle of the Sonoran Desert that will serve as a co-op for the Hispanic community. The allusion to Zapata is significant because of his activism on behalf of agrarian land rights. In Mexican history, Zapata's Plan de Ayala, written during the Mexican Revolution, demanded land redistribution that favored economically disadvantaged farmers and peasants. The Great Pyramid of Aztlán project hints at a similar agenda for the erstwhile residents of Arroyo Grande. Most of the residents from Calle Cuatro relocate from Arroyo Grande to Arizona. Frank is surprised to learn of their relocation to the pirámide, and after spending a few days at the co-op, Frank joins his former neighbors in symbolically making a return to their ancestral origins. In reality, Calle Cuatro residents construct their version of Aztlán, and Zapata reveals that the project is in fact a motel. The project kicked off as a result from an error in spelling submitted in paperwork for federal funding. Treviño then pokes fun at bureaucratic inefficiency by developing a storyline wherein the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funds the pyramid motel project. Zapata's initially applies for a grant from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations for an educational project on the Teotihuacán pirámide, but it gets turned into a business venture instead.

Treviño addresses concerns dealing with immigration and social programs that benefit characters like the ones from Calle Cuatro. A satiric veneer masks the underlying sense of darkness that pervades "The Great Pyramid of Aztlán." The first impressions that Frank has of the project are the pyramid's resemblance to Teotihuacán and the barbed-wire fence that surrounds the structure (161). The actual Teotihuacán is the Mesoamerican city located in Mexico outside of Mexico City. The site contains numerous Mesoamerican pyramids built in the

pre-Columbian period around 100 B.C. Frank learns that the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service donated the fence. The irony of the donation is that the federal agency responsible for keeping undocumented people out of the country is donating the material necessary to keep " 'illegal' Mexicans" in the country. Solomón, Frank's tour guide and former resident of Arroyo Grande, informs Frank that "*ílegales*" (illegals) worked on the "*pirámide*" (pyramid) when the constructions started (161). He tells Frank:

> […]this led to I.N.S. raids on the *pirámide*. Of course, all that meant was that the *ilegales* would be deported to Nogales one day and they'd be back to work on the *pirámide* the very next day. Finally, someone wised up. The I.N.S. officials decided to look the other way. They let the *ilegales*, or as we say here "undocumented workers," work on the *pirámide* as long as they stayed on the grounds during the weekends. (161)

Solomón's articulation of a more neutral label like "undocumented worker" emphasizes the dehumanizing and degrading labels describing immigrant labor. An added irony that Solomón points out is that "for us, the fence also works to keeps tourists and other undesirables out. It works both ways" (161). This blissful place exercises a politics of egalitarianism. Federal agents, small business owners, and undocumented workers negotiate with each other. Pragmatic, albeit absurd, agreements are reached by people directly impacted by the pyramid's construction. There is also a disquieting message communicated when Solomón states that the fence serves a dual purpose—to keep people both inside and outside the fence. Treviño suggests that the Chicanos and immigrants living in Great Aztlán are just as suspicious of outsiders as non-Chicanos are. The current reality in some border regions of the U.S. is its inefficiency. A border fence, or the more current term "border wall," serves mostly to create the illusion of a separation. U.S. fronteriza fictions like *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories* show the

complexity and artificial nature of international borders, especially man-made constructions like fences and walls.

For some readers, Treviño might seem accepting of separatist policies because of his farcical tone in "The Great Pyramid of Aztlán." Although humor codes Treviño's commentary, he challenges issues that are concerned with the social and economic conditions of his characters. The project of el pirámide subverts institutionalized regulation by working within the system. However, Frank acknowledges that the only recourse for successfully implementing the project is recognizing and collaborating with institutional power. He wonders, "Are we assimilating into the system, despite the Chicano nationalism that inspired the *pirámide*? Perhaps. It may be we never really had much of a choice" (175).

Frank's follow-up to these concerns is that the co-op project is a promising start since "[w]e can't ignore the country we live in" (173). The paradox Frank articulates is the promise of having a vision and compromising it to achieve an outcome. Frank reveals an anxiety about working within an American business model that has proved problematic for many Chicanos. He worries about the consequences of implementing a model that has mostly worked against Chicanos. Manuel lets him know that the pyramid is about self-determination and making the best of the opportunity.

In this final story in Treviño's collection, there is a precariousness associated with the Great Pyramid of Aztlán. Frank's concern that the project might be too rooted in American capitalism is valid because, as the story collection shows, other efforts to achieve economic success have not been promising for Calle Cuatro residents. However, Manuel Zapata offers an alternative view of the project. He frames it as a way for Chicanos to help each other with "dignity and *carnalismo*" (173). Carnalismo, or the bond of brotherhood, has brought this group

together to improve their circumstances for themselves and future generations. Zapata motivates the construction workers with the mantra, " 'for our children in 2025!'" (171). The reader learns that the project is not limited to Chicanos since people from various geographical locales express an interest in wanting to be part of the project, or as Zapata tells it, "looking for a dream to believe in" (170). People outside of the Chicano community are allowed to be involved and buy into the dream, too. At this point, the story offers an example of community building that extends to all people interested in the project. Thus, the concept of El Mundo Zurdo is enacted in "The Great Pyramid of Aztlán" in the form of a community where everyone in the community has a voice and benefits from the co-op. Treviño presents a utopian version of El Mundo Zurdo.

Conclusion

In *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa describes the visión that Aztlán offers for people living in the Borderlands. Her concept of El Mundo Zurdo directly relates to Aztlán as she defines the process of enacting El Mundo Zurdo. Entering into El Mundo Zurdo means learning more about the self, discerning why belonging matters intensely for the self, and locating spaces to belong. Anzaldúa demonstrates how entering El Mundo Zurdo allows her to reappropriate the pain she associates with being called La Prieta to a more empowering idea in her children's books *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos Del Otro Lado* and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona*. For Treviño, using a comedic approach to describe a barrio community means exploring the notion of belonging. This idea weighs heavily in the circumstances his characters face. In *The Fabulous Sinkhole and Other Stories,* Treviño constructs a vision of El Mundo Zurdo where the relationships the residents of Arroyo Grande form help them learn more about themselves and, eventually, lead them to develop a utopic version of Aztlán.

Both Anzaldúa and Treviño take up the idea of belonging to a community in their works. Anzaldúa shows the complex reality of delving into the self to navigate questions about belonging, while Treviño's use of Latino magical realism explores similar questions in more outrageous situations. Nevertheless, both writers offer a vision of how building community empowers people in their relationships with others in their communities. Likewise, chapter three of this project discusses how the deliberate introspection Anzaldúa associates with El Mundo Zurdo is foundational to her concepts of the Coatlicue state and mestiza consciousness. The following chapter reviews both concepts and discusses their literary significance in the short story collection *flesh to bone* by Chicana writer ire'ne lara silva.

CHAPTER 3

THE COATLICUE STATE:

Exploring Gloria Anzaldúa's Coatlicue State and Mestiza Consciousness in ire'ne lara silva's *flesh to bone*

Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Anzaldúa uses a snake metaphor to illustrate the presence of an internal force she struggles to understand. For example, in the chapter "La Herencia de Coatlicue/The Coatlicue State," she states, "Let the wound caused by the snake be cured by the snake" (68). The wound refers to conflicts she thinks she should purge. In this example, the snake represents the soul since the sentence that follows discusses the soul using "everything to follow its own making" (68). Instead of entirely rejecting conflict, Anzaldúa proposes "mak[ing] meaning" out of it or what she calls to "make soul" (68). Choosing this perspective allows for a new level of self-awareness to be achieved. However, the act of making soul is a complex process that requires profound and constant introspection. As such, Anzaldúa associates the snake to Coatlicue, the Mexica deity with two serpent heads. Through Coatlicue, Anzaldúa illustrates the potential torment inner-conflict might pose for a person. The two serpent heads represent dueling forces with which a person might have to contend. For Anzaldúa, contending with oppositional forces is likely the result of unresolved trauma or pain. Anzaldúa describes these painful or traumatic sources to wounds. As I mention in the first chapter of this project, Anzaldúa evokes wound imagery throughout her theoretical framework.

Anzaldúa's reflection on her personal wounds consists of digging through her cultural history. Through her identification with various Mesoamerican symbols and concepts, Anzaldúa achieves a greater understanding of the wounds she must work to heal. These symbols and concepts form the basis for her theoretical framework and offer direction to guide her work

through difficult times. Beyond their link to Mesoamerican cultural influences, Anzaldúa's adoption of Mesoamerican concepts establishes her connection to her ancestral past. Employing this form of autohistoria, an approach to autobiographical writing practiced by Anzaldúa that weaves together personal, collective, and ancestral histories, creates a coping mechanism based on self-understanding and self-healing.

As I mentioned in chapter one, this dissertation project seeks to cultivate a more robust understanding of the spherical framework Anzaldúa develops. I propose that the concepts she advances are components of a theoretical paradigm that I refer to as Anzaldúa's spherical thought. Although each component is individually significant, they form an interpretive framework when seen in relationship to each other. This chapter explores how Anzaldúa is influenced by the Mexica deity Coatlicue to develop one component of her theoretical reasoning as a way for her to understand Mesoamerican culture and her place in it. This exploration includes a review of Coatlicue's significance in Mesoamerican history. By paying close attention to the dualities Coatlicue represents in Mesoamerican philosophy and Anzaldúa's (re)interpretation of these dualisms through her use of autohistoria, I argue that an understanding of Anzaldúa's theoretical development of the Coatlicue state is necessary for reaching a fuller sense of El Mundo Zurdo and the mestiza consciousness. El Mundo Zurdo offers a space for tolerance and healing, as explored in the previous chapter. As discussed later in this chapter, a mestiza consciousness is a form of tolerance achieved through self-understanding and self-healing, or as Anzaldúa might frame it, achieving mestiza consciousness requires going through the Coatlicue state.

One primary objective of this dissertation is offering a framework, one based on Anzaldúan thought, to analyze Chicana/o/x[19] texts and media. As such, this chapter analyzes ire'ne lara silva's short story cycle *flesh to bone* through the lens of the Coatlicue state by examining the racial, nationalistic, cultural, and linguistic circumstances silva describes in various stories. Anzaldúa's notion of the Coatlicue state as a feature of the mestiza consciousness intersects with silva's representation of her character's sociopolitical circumstances. Specifically, I will show how silva's practice of autohistoria elucidates the connections between the Coatlicue state and mestiza consciousness. By offering particular aspects of Anzaldúa's theoretical framework, silva demonstrates a healing method through her creative storytelling as her characters navigate through the Coatlicue state to reach a mestiza consciousness.

La Diosa Coatlicue[20]

Through autohistoria storytelling, Anzaldúa interprets Coatlicue's role in Aztec[21] history. La diosa Coatlicue is a major figure in Aztlán, the Mexica homeland, before their migration to Tenochtitlán, present-day Mexico City. Coatlicue is the creatix and mother to Huitzilopochtli and his sister Coyolxauhqui. According to Anzaldúa, the reverence the Aztecs pay to Coatlicue's son Huitzilopochtli[22] tends to overshadow her role in Mexica history. Writer Ana Castillo explains that the Aztec quest for power shifts the focus of Coatlicue's identity as earth goddess or mother earth to her dualistic powers associated with fertility and death. She wears a necklace

[19] As I stated in chapter one, I will use all three identity categories, Chicana/o/x, to recognize the important distinction between the three. (See chapter one, footnote 4, for a more detailed explanation.)
[20] La Diosa Coatlicue means the goddess Coatlicue
[21] Anzaldúa refers to the Aztecs in her historical accounts, but the specifics in her examples point to the stories of the Mexica, a community that comprises part of the Aztec civilization.
[22] Huitzilopochtli is the sun god who leads the people out of Aztlán to Tenochtitlán, where the migrants following Huitzilopochtli's prophecy settled in the region because they saw a vision of the eagle with a serpent in its beak perched on a cactus. The Mexican flag depicts the image of the eagle with a serpent in its beak perched on a cactus.

of human hearts, which symbolize her desire for human sacrifice (*Massacre of the Dreamers* 11). Anzaldúa depicts a similar rendering of Mexica history by acknowledging the phallocracy embedded in the society. She chronicles the Aztec-Mexica patriarchal spirituality, which privileged male deities over their more powerful female gods (*Borderlands* 49). Coatlicue's visual representations depict her with two serpent heads, which symbolize her connection with fertility and death, snakes forming her arms and hands, and a snake also winds between her two feathered legs (Read and González 151). As Castillo notes, the militant Mexica of the sixteenth century stressed Coatlicue's association with death instead of acknowledging both the goddess's regenerative powers and destructive abilities. In contrast to Mexica thought, Anzaldúa explores the way both forces work together to generate transformative possibilities. Anzaldúa observes that "Coatlicue gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of the cosmic processes […] Coatlicue depicts the contradictory" (*Borderlands* 68-69). The idea of contradiction is central to Anzaldúa's concept of the Coatlicue state in that contradictions represent a transitory state where the possibility of self-transformation impacts the way a person interacts with her community. She writes, "[Coatlicue] represents: duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective—something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality" (*Borderlands* 68). Anzaldúa underscores this third perspective by pointing to the promise of change and transformation.

Anzaldúa chronicles Coatlicue's role in Mesoamerican history by detailing her evolution from Tonantzin [23] to Coatlicue and, eventually, to the syncretic figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In *Borderland*s, Anzaldúa refers to certain aspects of Tonantzin, including Coatlicue, Tlazolteotl, and Cihuacoatl, who I interpret as the various maternal figures who

[23] In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa refers to Tonantzin as Tonantsi, which some Náhuatl dialects use.

Mesoamerican societies venerated. Castillo explains that most early societies worshipped female creators who were considered forms of Mother Earth (*Massacre of Dreamers* 11). Tonantzin is a complicated figure but generally represents Mother Earth, while specific aspects originally attributed to Tonantzin became revered as separate deities. For example, Coatlicue represents the generative aspect of Tonanztin, while Tlazotleotl and Cihuacoatl embody her more "sinister" aspects (*Borderlands* 49). According to Fray Diego Durán's account of Aztlán, Coatlicue bore the warrior who eventually leads the Mexica, one of the seven groups who lived in the Valley of Mexico, to Lake Texcoco where they eventually build Tenochtitlán, present-day Mexico City (Read and González 108-109). In Tenochtitlán, the Mexica prayed to Tonanztin for good health and plentiful crops.

In 1531, in Tenochtitlán, on the hill where worshippers frequently gathered to pay homage to Tonantzin, a woman appeared to Cuautlaohuac[24] and identified herself as María Coatlalopeuh. She requested a church built in her honor on Tepeyác Hill. Cuautlaohuac convinced the bishop to fulfill Coatlalopeuh's request when he presented the bishop with a set of roses that Coatlalopeuh instructed him to deliver. After the roses tumbled out from the cloak he used to carry them, the image of the woman is imprinted on the cloak. Hereafter, the image of the woman on the cloak is known as la Virgen de Guadalupe or the Virgin of Guadalupe. As Anzaldúa explains, the Spanish identify Coatlalpeuh with the "dark Virgin," Guadalupe, patroness of West Central Spain (*Borderland*s 51). Eventually, Coatlalpeuh becomes widely known as Guadalupe and is regarded as one of the most recognized Marian apparitions. Chicano writer Rudolfo Anaya notes that "[t]he clearest symbol of this process of syncretism was the merging of the Virgin Mary with the Indian Goddess (Tonantzin) to give form to the brown

[24] Cuautlaohuac is usually referred to by Spanish name Juan Diego.

madonna of Mexico, la Virgen de Guadalupe" (40). The Catholic Church found syncretism to be an effective strategy for mass conversion. Consequently, signs, symbols, and stories that were part of indigenous history were hybridized with Christianity, although the hybridization occurred under the Spanish and church clergy's careful watch. In *Our Sacred Maíz Is Our Mother*, Roberto Cintli Rodríguez explains, "It was not until 1531 and the purported appearance of the Virgen de Guadalupe, on the same hill where Tonantzin (Earth Mother) was venerated, that the peoples of Mexico purportedly adopted a new religion en masse" (38).[25] The history Anzaldúa carefully outlines for la Virgen de Guadalupe is essential because of her prominence in Mexican history and the reverence she is paid across Latin America. Moreover, Anzaldúa frames Guadalupe as part of a complicated history that traces back to Tonantzin.

A fuller understanding of the beginnings of la Virgen de Guadalupe offers insight concerning the connections between Tonantzin, Coatlicue, and la Virgen de Guadalupe, but more pointedly, shows transformative qualities that are valuable for Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa notes that coatl translates to serpent in Náhuatl and lopeuh as one who dominates serpents (*Borderlands* 51). In Anzaldúa's retelling of la Virgen of Guadalupe apparition, the snake or serpent influence can be traced back to Tonantzin. Anzaldúa recognizes that the serpent's representation of indigenous ways connects to the definition of lopeuh. Symbolically, Guadalupe is crushing out the past and replacing it with Catholicism. Anzaldúa, however, offers a different consideration of Coatlalopeuh. She is "the one who is with the beasts" (*Borderlands* 51). This interpretation is suggestive of the agency Anzaldúa associates with Coatlicue. In Anzaldúa's theoretical

[25] Rodríguez adds an interesting detail regarding this history. He notes that artist Alma López presents the theory that *indigenous people* conjured up the image of Guadalupe in order to preserve their beliefs. The more widespread belief is that *the church* advanced the account of the Virgen of Guadalupe in order to convert the masses to Catholicism (p. 205n19).

framework, entering the Coatlicue state means using careful self-reflection as a source of building knowledge and empowerment.

The Coatlicue State in Anzaldúa's Spherical Framework

In chapter four of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa opens with a poem illustrating the torment she identifies in the Mesoamerican figure Coatlicue. Anzaldúa's poem projects a dark tone with reoccurring descriptions of "smoking" and "obsidian," interspersed with images of the "nightsky," "midnight," and "mirrors" as the subject of the poem struggles with the discomfort that her reflection brings (63). According to Anzaldúa, indigenous peoples in the Américas used obsidian, the dark volcanic glass, to reveal visions about the tribes' future and gain greater insight about their gods (*Borderlands* 64). Mesoamerican tradition links precious minerals, rocks, and objects like obsidian to the landscape, deities, the oral tradition, and daily life (Saunders 221). As one of these valuable rocks, obsidian was a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds for the Mexica. Anzaldúa's metaphoric use of obsidian, along with its dark, mirror-like qualities, expresses Anzaldúa's soul-searching poetic exercise to understand herself and her place in society. Such meditative practices symbolize the introspective and reflective work of Anzaldúa's concept of the Coatlicue state.

Borderlands introduces the Coatlicue state as a mindset to explore all aspects of oneself, including the dark recesses, fears, and apprehensions that we may neglect. Anzaldúa explains that the mirror is an "ambivalent symbol" because of its ability to "contai[n] and absor[b]" images (42). The act of looking at oneself in the mirror can be a revelatory exercise, according to Anzaldúa. The act of self-reflection represents the introspection Anzaldúa values in building self-identity. Exploring every aspect of our identity can reveal ways to build relationships with our communities.

In generating a relationship between the self and community, each continually influences the other. Anzaldúa's use of autohistoria in much of her writing, including *Borderlands,* highlights the interwoven relationship between the self and the community. Autohistoria is a form of theorizing that blends autobiographical writing with cultural experiences along with memoir, history, storytelling, and other literary forms to establish an individual identity that becomes woven in the fabric of the collective (Keating, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 9). Through autohistoria, Anzaldúa creates a theory influenced by her experiences and those of her community. For Anzaldúa, the experiences of her community connect with her personal experiences. By sharing her experiences through creative efforts, she becomes part of her community just as the experiences of her community become part of her. Thus, an integral component of Anzaldúa's theoretical framework is the labor of self-reflection, which, according to Anzaldúa, happens more profoundly when the self is going through the Coatlicue state.

The Coatlicue state develops from Anzaldúa's notion of El Mundo Zurdo,[26] which is a concept that petitions for the development of spaces where reflection and creativity serve as methods to interrogate cultural and social practices. In these spaces, diverse people come together and work towards a common goal. Anzaldúa explains that "[w]e need *Coatlicue* to slow us up so that the psyche can assimilate previous experiences and process the changes" (*Borderlands* 68). This process includes experiences and changes that come from the space of El Mundo Zurdo. Anzaldúa recognizes "[t]hose activities or *Coatlicue* states" as challenging, almost painful, because they "disrupt the smooth flow (complacency) of life" (*Borderlands* 68). The work achieved in the Coatlicue state is challenging and slow because of the complexity of

[26] As I described in chapter two of this dissertation, Anzaldúa's conceptualization of El Mundo Zurdo serves as an ethical framework, essentially an epistemology, centered on constant self-reflection intended for both self and communal transformation.

the process. This process involves mental labor, that is at times painful, and offers up the challenge of "making soul." Anzaldúa's notion of making soul entails the constant self-reflection needed to achieve mestiza consciousness, the stage in her theoretical development where a committed effort to tolerate differences and ambivalences through mindful practices occurs. Achieving tolerance is important for Anzaldúa because she identifies it as a necessary step towards bridging differences. Eventually, this bridge leads to the path of conocimiento, the stage in her framework that highlights a deepened self-awareness that facilitates the potential for transformative and inclusionary possibilities. Anzaldúa discusses the path of conocimiento in her contributions to *This Bridge We Call Home*.

Ultimately, Anzaldúa's theoretical framework endeavors to achieve alliances as an intervention for bridging differences between people and communities.[27] Bridging differences is critical for Anzaldúa because of the potential she identifies in bringing disparate people, thinkers, and communities together. Although her theoretical writings do not focus on specific outcomes she expects from bridging differences, she underscores the transformations that result from inner-reflection and the value that come with these transformations. These changes impact the self and the community in positive ways. In this chapter, I seek to introduce the work of ire'ne lara silva because her creative interventions explore, expose, and achieve the type of alliance-building that Anzaldúa's theoretical framework cultivates.

La Madre Indígena[28]:
From Coatlicue to Tonantzin (La Virgen de Guadalupe) in "hunger/hambre/mayantli" and "desembocada/the mouth of the river"

[27] AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López edited a volume of collected essays titled *Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa's Life and Work Transformed Our Own*, which focuses heavily on the Anzaldúan concept of bridging differences and describes individualized experiences and results that come from doing this work.
[28] La Madre Indigena translates to Indigenous Mother.

Ire'ne lara silva's *flesh to bone* collection opens with the short story "hunger/*hambre*/ mayantli." The story's title aptly describes the characters' circumstances. All the characters experience a metaphorical hunger to feel alive except for Adrian, who, ironically, is deceased but connects with the story's protagonist Luisa. The other characters—Luisa, her brother Luis, and her mother Bertha—find themselves searching for something that will appease their "hunger." Luis fixates on shadows, shapes, and motions because sight is the only sense not deadened for him. Darkness consumes Bertha, which symbolizes her loneliness as a single-parent and concern for her children's eccentric behaviors. Luisa mostly isolates herself from everyone by only speaking strings of Spanish words. Luisa, the story's protagonist, is in the Coatlicue state. Her relentless attempt to search for one word "that would unlock all the other words" carries her through the Coatlicue state (3). She desperately tries to find the word "that would name the earth she stood on and the body she breathed in" (3).

Frustrated by her daughter's behavior of speaking in only strings of words, Bertha slaps her to the point where Luisa's mouth is bleeding. Surprised by this violent episode, Luis accidentally knocks down a candle and a picture frame. As Bertha collects the hot wax pouring all over the floor, more candles in their glass holders get broken. Seeing the glass shreds on the floor makes Luisa think of the word *vidrio*, the Spanish word for glass. She feels the urge to *taste* the word. As she puts the glass in her mouth, she "tasted *glass*, tasted *pain*, tasted *blood*" (22). Up to this point, Luisa struggled in a liminal space—a linguistic borderland. The strings of Spanish words she constantly repeated were confining because she could not speak in a language that she connected with on a metaphysical level.

Her relationship with Adrian helps her move beyond the confines of this linguistic borderland. A significant moment in this story is when Luisa encounters Adrian. Her

positionality in the Coatlicue state pushes Luisa to move past the linguistic borderland where she finds herself. The "[d]usty serpents coiled along the floor" of her room mark Adrian's ghostly presence (14). The serpents symbolize Luisa's imminent transformation. She sees "leaf shadows transformed into winding lines of patterned scales. She names them: "*víbora serpiente sierpe escalas cascabel colmillo veneo"* [29] (14). In the Coatlicue state, Luisa is about to move from a state of not understanding her hunger to embracing the vitality that her mayantli gives her. Luisa finds herself in a transitional state before her regeneration, although not quite in a state of mestiza consciousness when the character is interpreted through the lens of Coatlicue's symbolism.

Luisa's inclination for speaking only strings of Spanish words reflects the way she sees the world. Her speech patterns are her way of searching for the one word that will unlock the reason why Luisa finds herself in a constant state of hunger. Luisa's connection to the earth and her burning search for that one word intensifies when she meets Adrian. Adrian is depicted as a spiritual entity who roams within cemetery walls. He represents the various dimensions of the earth, including life and death, the physical and spiritual, and past and present. Although described as physical, Adrian and Luisa's connection transcends the physical and enters a spiritual realm. Through this transformative connection, Luisa becomes more rooted within the multiple dimensions that exist within the earth. Through her encounter with Adrian, Luisa can discover her ancestors' Náhuatl language, the language that offers Luisa the words she needs to fully express herself.

Silva's representation of Luisa's linguistic borderland shows the inner struggle of the Coatlicue state. The inexplicable force that drives Luisa to find self-acceptance resonates with

[29] The English translations for this string of Spanish words are snake, serpent, serpent [sic], scales, rattlesnake, fang, poison.

the struggle that Anzaldúa associates to Coatlicue. By the end of the story, Luisa renames herself as Mayantli, the Náhuatl term for hunger, which symbolizes self-acceptance and liberation as she recognizes from where her hunger stems. The words of Luisa's ancestors pour through her, "*cuicatl miquiztli choquiztli mimilica cahuantia mayantli*." (23). Luisa finds a visceral connection to these words—song, death, weeping, releasing, hunger. As she stumbles and falls to her knees, Luisa faces the north as "she [feels] the new language and the old words pound through her" (23). She finds herself disoriented in her utterances of this new language, and as she steadies herself, "[h]er hands [seek] something to hold and [find] nothing but earth and her own body" (23). Once Luisa connects with the earth, she is able to understand the significance of the words pulsating through her. Luisa symbolically returns to her place of origin once she (re)connects to the land. Luisa reaches a place of self-awareness by reconnecting to her ancestral past, her collective past. Recovering this past entails reclaiming her indigeneity through the Náhuatl language.

Silva describes Luisa's hunger as empowering and a state that should not be feared nor rejected. She writes, "[t]he word [mayantli] singing inside her—what she was and what made her alive. She hungered to be, she hungered to live, to feel, to speak, to run. She hungered to be free" (23). Through her mayantli, Luisa realizes that she can embark on a journey of self-discovery, and as long as her mayantli remains, her restlessness will empower her to fulfill her journey. Luisa finds herself in a place of the constant self-reflection that Anzaldúa identifies as a necessary component to reach a mestiza consciousness.

In "desembocada/the mouth of the river," a series of vignettes that include flashbacks and meditative reflections offer clues to the narrator's attempt come to terms with the tragic deaths of her father and brothers. By the end of the story, the narrator reaches a state of mestiza

consciousness by piecing together the series of challenges she has faced and the sorrow that she is struggling to tolerate. The narrator describes the death of her father and brothers by suffocation in the back of a trailer box in their attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexico border.

The narrator reaches a state of mestiza consciousness or the tolerance to cope with her family's tragic past by awakening her spirituality. The first vignette describes the narrator's god physically overtaking her. The possession is sensual as the narrator feels a "thundering need to touch her, to fill my [the narrator's] body with the sight and feel and taste of her" (137). The narrator establishes a strong, almost overwhelming, attraction to her god. The corporeality of the attraction symbolizes the narrator's intense desire to allow her god to overtake her body as well as her soul.

She describes her god coming to her in a dream and associates her with the color blue. She says, "Blue. In her truest flesh, her skin is blue and casts violent shadows. Blue for sweetness. Blue for touch. Blue for blessings born softly in the night. Petal soft blue skin" (138). This description evokes two images: the earth and the Virgin of Guadalupe. In Mexica spirituality, Tonantzin represents Mother Earth and, as previously discussed, is the Mexica deity who eventually evolves to la Virgen de Guadalupe (Castillo 11). Images of the Virgin of Guadalupe depict her wearing a brown tunic covered with a blue mantle decorated with stars. The icon abounds with symbolism, including the brown tunic representing the earth's soil and the blue mantle represents the earth's sky. Thus, silva immediately establishes a connection between the narrator's god and Tonantzin/la Virgen de Guadalupe. The motif of the earth extends further when the narrator describes her serenity when connecting to the earth. She states:

> I fall to my knees, collapsing belly, face, palms against the earth. Only the warmth of the earth soothes the shivers that overtake me in her absence. Earth receiving me. Embracing me. Earthen arms holding me against earthen breasts. I can rest here. Utterly cherished. Utterly safe. (143)

The visual imagery silva weaves into this passage emphasizes the link between the narrator's god and the earth. However, in a later passage, the narrator describes the division that exists on earth by "a river, a border, a line on a map, another life" (143). The narrator is the only member of her family that "can freely walk the earth north of the river" (144). The details of the narrator's family and citizenship are scattered throughout the story, sporadically weaving the narrator's past.

Evoking present-day immigration issues that affect people across the Américas are the descriptions of a family torn apart by a river that creates a division between two nations, two nationalities, but separates one family. Although the narrator was not with her family when they died, she describes seeing their anguish:

> The metal doors were silvery and jagged where the locks had been forced. Nothing moved. No one moved. Fifteen bodies, some collapsed by the door as if they'd been trying to claw their way out. Mothers holding their children. A young couple with agonized faces. No blood. No shattered bodies. But their gasps and screams filled the walls, echoing and rebounding. Louder. Louder. (155)

The narrator's brothers and father died in a train car, suffocating as they were abandoned and left to die along with others, who like them, were attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border but were undocumented. Their deaths are painful yet bloodless. The circumstances under which the narrator's family dies reminds readers of current issues surrounding U.S. immigration policies.

The United Nations Migration Agency reports devastating figures that "[t]he number of migrants who died who died near the U.S.-Mexico border rose in 2017 even as the number of attempted border crossings fell dramatically" (France-Presse). Some border crossers become vulnerable to the smugglers who guide them across the border. The narrator's family, locked and left to die in the back of a trailer, are like other border crossers forced into perilous situations. Other border crossers are subject to harsh elements such as extreme heat and overflowing banks along the Río Bravo/Rio Grande,[30] making illegal border crossings dangerous and even life-threatening. Silva gestures towards these realities by giving this short story the title *"*desembocada/the mouth of the river," where many border crossers find themselves in precarious situations around the Rio Bravo/Rio Grande. The victims of these deaths become the "shadow presences" or those who fill "shallow unmarked graves" (154) that torment the narrator. Through the constant self-reflection that Anzaldúa proposes, the narrator acquires the power to save those who endured a similar fate as her family.

Silva recreates the Tonantzin/la Virgen de Guadalupe story even further when the narrator builds an altar for her god. The narrator says that one evening she heard the command that she "should build her an altar," where the narrator could worship her (141). The experience of building the altar is "[m]arked by the flashing moments her[31] flesh was made spirit, her spirit made flesh" (141). The building of the altar marks a critical point in the story because the narrator and her god become one. Embodying her god indicates a transformation has occurred. Although painful, this transformation demands the critical self-reflection of the Coatlicue state. However, as the narrator continues to be tormented by her family's death, she struggles to feel

[30] On the Mexican side of the division, the Río Bravo is the name given to the river that runs between the U.S.-Mexico border.
[31] I interpret "her" as referring to the narrator's god.

her god's presence and wonders, "What am I without her in me?" (151). The question is significant because, up to this point, the narrator does not embody her god's teachings even though her god's spirit is within her. Eventually, through constant prayer and meditation, the narrator can recapture her god's spirit within her and learn from her. Once the narrator transforms herself into Tonantzin/la Virgen de Guadalupe, she acquires the ability to release the border crossers, including her family who have died attempting to make the northern journey, from their torment.

In this story, time is nonlinear, so the narrator is allowed to visit the site where the bodies were trapped, and she releases them from their suffering. She realizes that she holds power to cleanse the earth of this tragedy. She states that the earth "would always weep, but it would not have to be so monstrous" (156). She "could keep their souls whole" (156). By releasing her family's tormented souls, she fully embodies her god's teachings and becomes her god incarnate. The narrator says, "The teaching of my god: to embrace without limbs, to release without relinquishing memory. I tasted the wind in my mouth. Singed and sweet and blue" (156). At this moment, the narrator becomes Tontanztin/ la Virgen de Guadalupe, essentially Coatlicue, through transcendence and salvation. Both transcendence and salvation are symbols associated with the Virgin of Guadalupe. Furthermore, the narrator moves from a Coatlicue state to a mestiza consciousness. She moves from a transitory state to one where she becomes aware of the possibilities her god offers her. After careful and constant meditation, she embraces the possibilities through her transformation into her god incarnate.

La Chingada[32]:

Malintzin/La Malinche in "the thorn forest"

Similar to Coatlicue's role as the creatix of the Mexica, the creator of the mestizos, which is the label given to people of mixed race in the Américas, is la Malinche. In Mexico and the rest of Latin America, mestizo is the racial category for descendants of mixed European and indigenous ancestry. La Malinche's historical role is controversial because her supposed betrayal enabled Hernán Cortés to successfully complete the Spanish conquest in Mexico. Malintzin[33] carries the burden of the fall of Tenochtitlán the pre-Cuauhtémoc[34] or pre-Columbian empire of present-day central and southern Mexico. Malintzin's role in this creation myth casts her as the Mexica traitor and Cortés's whore who bore his illegitimate children and mothered a bastard race. Some versions of the Malintzin contend that she bore Cortés a son who was educated in Spain. In Shannon Wilson's essay, "The Chicano Treaty: Maternal Mestiza Consciousness in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*," she explains that "[t]his mother child relationship is symbolic of the gap between the indigenous culture of precolonized Mexico and the mixed culture of postcolonial Mexico" (41). Wilson's essay highlights the racial hierarchy created between indigenous groups and the new mestizo race that emerged post-colonization. In her essay "Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin/or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object," Norma Alarcón identifies the story as "the male myth of Malintzin" (182). The myth highlights betrayal through Malintzin's sexuality, "which makes it impossible at any given moment to go beyond the vagina as the supreme sight of evil until proven innocent by way of virginity or virtue" (183). Through a patriarchal lens,

[32] Chingada translates to fucked.

[33] Manlintzin is the Náhuatl woman who becomes Cortes's lover, translator, and advisor and is regarded by some as la Malinche.

[34] Roberto Cintli Rodríguez uses the phrase pre-Cuauhtémoc as opposed to pre-Columbian to distinguish between a Mesoamerican-centric perspective to a Eurocentric one.

Malintzin's intentions prevail as tainted with impurity. Unlike la Virgen de Guadalupe's virtuous role in Chicano history, la Malinche is castigated as the traitor/whore thus creating the virgin/whore dichotomy that dictates the two polarized roles that women must choose in modern society (Castillo 116). Castillo makes the case that Chicanas are limited to identify between these two categories. Both Wilson and Alarcón suggest that the myth of Malintzin shapes the perceptions of the roles designated to mothers and women. However, Chicana writers like Anzaldúa and silva have reframed representations of Malintzin-like figures by highlighting these women's agencies. They have managed to disrupt the Malinche narrative firmly established by Mexican writer Octavio Paz.

In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz describes La Malinche's unforgivable betrayal. He writes, "And as a small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven La Malinche for her betrayal. She embodies the open, the *chingado*,[35] to our closed stoic impassive Indians" (83). Paz's description of la Malinche characterizes her lack of devotion to her children, and this idea lies at the core of the story. La Malinche's betrayal, essentially the abandonment of her children, is unforgivable. The idea of her betrayal and her devotion to Cortés plays a central role in her mythical construction. However, Chicana scholars point out that the consideration of la Malinche's role in Mexican history needs an update. Alarcón emphasizes Malintzin's involuntary attachment to Cortés and recognizes that a distinction between obedience and devotion is important (186). More than likely, la Malinche's subjugation was the major influence for her "betrayal," and more significantly, she represents colonization's violent history and its effects on women's bodies. Alarcón suggests that Malinche is a symbol of women exiled from home by subjugation

[35] Paz gives an etymological account of the word Chingada and concludes that it means "to do violence to another" (77). As previously noted, la Chingada translates to "the fucked one."

("Traduttora, Traditora: A Pragmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism" 130). This interpretation underlies the helplessness and disparity of Malintzin's circumstances. These limitations offer a new perspective on Malintzin's choices because of the sorrow and despair that dominate her life. Although her choices are constrained, Malintzin's historical significance follows a historical pattern, including the disregard for Coatlicue's historical role in Mesoamerican cosmology. Similarly, Malintzin's relationship with Cortés vitiates her reputation. She represents the complexities, consequences, and sacrifices that resulted from the Conquest. Essentially, the figure of Malintzin symbolizes the consequential outcomes of Spanish colonialism in the Américas. While sorrow and despair dominate Spanish colonization, locating the Coatlicue state in this narrative initiates the healing process necessary for cultural survival and continuance. Importantly in Anzaldúa's framework, this process will lead to transformative opportunities for current and future generations.

In "thorn forest," silva recreates la Malinche story through two different characters while weaving in numerous social as well as personal issues that impact these characters' identities. Amá[36] and Lourdes, mother and daughter, are the central characters in the story. Their relationships with each other and their children are complicated. Lourdes learns that her daughter Conception (Connie), whom she has not seen or spoken to in twelve years, is dying of breast cancer. Amá is close to Connie and has been caring for her granddaughter. When Connie sees her mother Lourdes, for the first time in twelve years, she is on her deathbed. Almost immediately, she demands to know why her mother did not love her. Connie equates her mother's absence with apathy. Connie's accusations suggest that she begrudges her mother for being absent from her life, and Amá supports her granddaughter. After Connie dies, Amá tells

[36] I will refer to Lourdes's mother and Conception's grandmother as Amá since that is the way Lourdes refers to her. However, in Spanish, Amá is synonymous with mother and is not a proper noun.

Lourdes that she could have "tried harder" because Connie was her only child (120). According to Amá, "good" mothers show complete devotion to their children and families by being present no matter the circumstances. In Amá's interpretation of a "good mother," Lourdes has failed because she accepted the distancing that Connie initiated.

Before Connie dies, Lourdes attempts to explain why she was could not devote more time to her. She tells her:

> I was working! After your dad left, I worked day and night so that you could grow up in your own house, so you could go to school in new clothes—so you could become educated and apply to those faraway colleges you wanted to go to! I cleaned houses, I scrubbed floors on my hands and knees, I took care of old people, I took in laundry, I sold tacos, I even worked in the fields when there wasn't anything else! (103)

Lourdes reveals circumstances that echo situations faced by many working-class single mothers. Economic circumstances impact the time many of these mothers have to spend with their children, even the quality of time shared with them. These are the struggles these mothers face when meeting the basic needs of their families. On this level, the narrative reveals a different side to motherly devotion. Lourdes's maternal support meant being away from home. Lourdes symbolizes la Malinche figure because her limited resources kept her away from Connie resulting in their strained relationship. The story suggests that Lourdes is considered a traitor by her daughter and mother because she betrays traditional motherhood with her unconventional choices. Amá lets her know that the choice Lourdes had to make was to ignore her husband's philandering so that "Connie could have grown up with a father" (120). Amá refers to her as an "unnatural mother" (119). Although Amá seems to be more of a dutiful mother to Connie than

Lourdes, the story complicates the relationship between mothers and children even further with Amá's maternal role.

The relationship that Lourdes and Connie share mirrors the strained relationship Amá has with her own children. Amá expresses her resentment of Lourdes's treatment of her daughter by pointing out that she has not seen her cry since Connie's death. Lourdes reminds her mother of her treatment of her own children. She tells her, "Your face was stone when your babies died. You said nothing when Leticia died! You wouldn't even go see her when she called for you, nothing until the funeral, and then there was Octavio. You said nothing when he left, never helped us look for him" (120). We learn that Lourdes's brother, Octavio, has chosen to live in a nearby monte or hill after witnessing his lover's beating and horrific murder. Amá responds to Lourdes by saying, "He chose the monte. It was out of my hands…*Mejor muerto que joto.*[37] He was dead to me when he started seeing that boy" (120). Amá's rejection of her children is symbolic in two ways. The relationships this pair of mothers have with their children indicate the learned behaviors that pass from one generation to the next. Amá did not bond with her children, just like Lourdes did not form a strong bond with her daughter. Nevertheless, Amá had a loving relationship with her granddaughter, and the story's ending points toward the same fate for Lourdes and her granddaughter Lluvia. The narrative indicates that Amá and Lourdes might never heal from their broken mother-daughter relationship; however, the relationships both protagonists cultivate with their granddaughters or, in Lourdes's case, will start cultivating brings them to a place of healing. Both characters find themselves in the Coatlicue state, and the limitations they face are evident. But, the emphasis placed on the constant meditative practice that is an essential characteristic of this process is a major part of the process of working through

[37] This phrase translates to "better off dead than gay."

divisions and differences that Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands*. Silva reminds her readers that pain is part of the work of making soul and might span generations before any healing or transformation can take place.

Amá's rejection of Octavio also symbolizes the homophobic attitudes found in society. Anzaldúa admits in *Borderlands* that Mexicans and Mexican American communities have struggled in their treatment of members who identify as LGBTQ+. She writes, "Chicanos need to acknowledge the political and artistic contributions of their queer" (107). She demands a call for action: "People, listen to what your *jotería*[38] is saying" (107). Amá represents the intolerance that Anzaldúa uncovers in *Borderlands*. Amá is extreme in her rejection of her son's sexuality and wishes him death instead. During Connie's final hours, Lourdes is at her bedside. Silva writes, "*Connie opens her eyes and Lourdes touches her face. Says nothing. Words are blades and wounds and scars. Silence is not always emptiness*" (118). Absence, according to this story, is not always indifference. Silva suggests that despite the pain generated from divisions and differences, operating from the Coatlicue state shapes an understanding, even if it might be a burgeoning one, for others.

Nuestra Madre[39]:
La Llorona[40] in "cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses"

La Llorona's origins are similar to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Diana Tey Rebolledo's work *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicano Literature* explains that the myth finds its origins in indigenous and Spanish folklore (62). She points out that Spanish folktales use "the medieval notion of *animas en pena,* spirits in purgatory expiating their sins"

[38] Jotería means queer folk.
[39] Nuestra Madre translates to Our Mother.
[40] La Llorona means weeping woman.

(63). In the pre-Columbian context, the story finds its root with "the *Mocihuaquetyque*, valiant women who die in childbirth (and who were the only Aztec women to achieve afterlife in the place of warriors)" (Rebolledo 63). Anzaldúa, however, explains that la Llorona traces historically back to the Aztec goddess Cihuacoatl. According to Anzaldúa, Cihuacoatl is an aspect of Coatlicue or a rendering of Coatlicue with an emphasis that draws out characteristics other than her serpent-like ones. By framing la Llorona through Cihuacoatl, Coatlicue has transformed once again and embodies a different cultural figure. Depictions of Cihuacoatl show her wearing a white dress, carrying a cradle on her back, and holding a knife of sacrifice, which she swaddles, giving the illusion that she is carrying her baby. The belief is that Cihuacoatl howls and weeps at night, probably because she is a prognosticator and is the first to know when something important will happen (Anzaldúa 57-58). Cihuacoatl's markers of identification are closely related to la Llorona. Although there are various versions of the story, the tale's basic premise is that la Llorona is a mother whose children have died in a body of water, and her wailing cries signal her lament. Rebolledo maintains that the myth is "tied up in some vague way with sexuality and the death or loss of children: the negative mother image" (48).

Anzaldúa's notion of autohistoria-teoría informs the value of la Llorona's story by many Mexican or Mexican American communities. Autohistoria-teoría highlights the cultural, autobiographical, or local histories through storytelling. Embedded in the figure of la Llorona are the Mesoamerican deities Coatlicue and Cihuacoatl, who inspire accounts of a strong-willed woman from the community where the (re)telling of the story takes place. Localizing la Llorona creates familiarity with the tragic circumstances that la Llorona cannot overcome. For example,

versions popularized in the El Paso, Texas[41] depict la Llorona as drowning her children to be with the man she loves. Usually the man she loves is not the children's father. Other versions depict her as drowning her children out of desperation for not providing for them. Some versions depict her as drowning children who reminded her of the ones she left behind in Mexico. These different retellings reflect many community members' social circumstances, including the challenges of parenting, postpartum depression, economic distress, and immigrating to a new country while leaving loved ones behind. As autohistoria-teoría explains, these experiences become woven in the stories told by a community. However, various accounts of the story by Wilson describe a version where la Llorona disguises herself as a beautiful temptress to lure young men but reveals herself as a monstrous figure or a hag to those duped by her charms (47-48). All these versions evoke the sense of abandonment that is central to la Malinche myth. As seen with la Malinche, similar possibilities are offered to la Llorona since grief and sorrow permeate the story, and la Llorona must find a way to endure.

In "cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses," silva reconfigures la Llorona by casting her in a more sympathetic role. Silva employs a form of autohistoria by titling her story "cortando las nubes," a saying her mother used to use when silva was a girl.[42] According to silva, during rainstorms, her mother would bring out a knife to help cut the severity of the storms. In "cortando las nubes, or, death came on horses, the narrative encompasses all the motifs—nonlinear time, the cosmic forces of the earth, abandonment, and sustainability—presented throughout silva's short story cycle. Throughout the story, the reader follows the narrator, a young girl, Mari, who is narrating her experiences of taking care of her brother while

[41] These three versions of la Llorona are the ones I heard from my elders, playmates, and neighbors while growing up in El Paso, Texas. Rumor was that la Llorona would walk by the canals that used to run alongside the southside of the city where I grew up. I share these versions of la Llorona stories as examples of autohistoria.
[42] Silva shared this detail during a poetry reading at the University of Oklahoma on April 19, 2018.

following their mother, Mami, as she roams throughout different places. The story's setting is unclear until the reader learns that the girl's mother is la Llorona. The opening paragraph of silva's story reads:

> We cling to our mother, wanting only the touch of her breath. She holds us tight against her, but then she sighs, her arms fall to her sides, and she begins to scream. I want to say, Mami, please sit, rest. I'll pat your back. I'll wipe your tears. I'll bring you water. Drink. It will soothe your throat. Please, Mami, I'll take care of you. I'd say anything to keep her from screaming. Her screams echo along all rivers and deep into the deserts. (31)

The connection to la Llorona is ascertained when the narrator conveys her desperation as she listens to the screams of her wailing mother, but readers not familiar with the story of la Llorona might not pick up on these details. The sense of helplessness that Mari describes is a dominant tone for the story. The children yearn to connect to their mother, and as the opening indicates, their physical connections are short-lived. Although the division between the mother and her children is clear, their sense of displacement indicates a strong bond between them.

Established further is a stronger connection between la Llorona and Mami when Mami is described as "singing to that machete" always murmuring "*mi vida mi amor mi vida*" (33). These phrases suggest the phallicism Mami associates with the machete, signifying that Mami might be singing to lover and not her children. This interpretation alludes to versions of la Llorona myth that castigates the mother for choosing her lover over her children. However, Mari's descriptions of her mother do not support this interpretation. She sees her mother as "the hero" and "the fighter" (38). In a passage written virtually in a stream of consciousness, Mari describes what her mother has done through the course of one night. She states:

> Tonight she's breaking lights along the river, deepening the shadows, distracting the men in white vans, with rustling sounds that seem to come from everywhere and nowhere. Afterwards, she'll take her sharp machete and gut train cars, leading the suffocated to a safe clearing. She'll run to lock the doors and gates against the rioting Navy men with Mexican blood and skin and zootsuit under their nails. She'll lend her voice to the protests and the marches and whisper in the ears of poets. She'll save the children of the Adelitas who armed themselves and fell in battle. She'll swim along the rivers and pull the ones returning to the land of their ancestors away from the strong currents and the lights and the traps. She'll lead the Rangers' horses into falling over the cliff's edge rather than letting them carry death to the Indio villages. She'll fight with the campesinos to hold their land, their homes, their ties to the earth. She'll spend the night with the Yaquis fighting the pale ones. Running alone, she'll cover miles and miles, decades and centuries before dawn. (39)

The sublimity of this passage depicts the strife that Chicanas/os have faced since colonization. This passage exemplifies the nonlinear way time is constructed in this story. Silva compounds events to emphasize how history has transcended time and has become rooted in Chicana/o/x identity. Like the other historical narratives of la Llorona, Mami faces great sorrow and extreme torment, but she faces adversity with a resilient spirit. Mari remarks that mother's face does not change; instead, her mother's "legs change" (34). She says that "they look scaled in the moonlight" (34). The association with the snake connects Mami to Coatlicue, a meaningful connection on two levels. First, Mami seems to be rooted in the Coatlicue state. She seems caught in limbo, in a state between life and death. However, by the story's end, Mami transcends life and death and has entered a new realm—an entirely spiritual one.

Anzaldúa's Coatlicue state aims towards achieving a new consciousness—the mestiza consciousness and following the path of conocimiento. Mami has fully embraced the role of the Aztec creatix, and in doing so, she embodies the pain endured by the mother of a conquered people. Those who have entered the state of mestiza consciousness use their pain as a source of energy and resilience. From their pain, creative possibilities are born. Mami has developed the mestiza consciousness. Silva writes, "The land knows who belongs to it, Mami says. Though Mami also says the land prefers enduring to fighting, and she always says it weeping" (33). Mami is, in fact, the land, and in her role as Earth goddess, she must endure. Despite all her pain and suffering, she finds the strength to kill her children to save them from a more painful fate.

This story fully captures the essence of Anzaldúa's philosophical thought. Linking Mami to multiple aspects of human, natural, and historical elements reveal the relationship between cosmic and earthly forces. Central to understanding the relationship between these elements is recognizing the interconnectedness of these cosmic, natural, and historical forces. These forces impact each other in powerful ways and reflect the cyclical process of examining the self, the role of the self in the community, all strengthened by the continuous interaction with outside elements to create a type of constant engagement where each element connects with and impacts the other.

Mari continually states that her Mami is known by the wrong name. She laments, "They don't know to hold her, as hard as they can, singing quietly under their breaths. They don't know her name, the name they need to awaken her to comfort her to keep her from breaking things and harming people" (33). The story suggests that the Earth's children do not know how to protect their mother; like la Malinche, her children have abandoned her, even though Mami's rooted mestiza consciousness will continually bind her to her children.

Conclusion:

Las Tres Madres[43]

In *Borderlands,* Anzaldúa concludes that "[*l*]*a gente Chicana tiene tres madres"* (52). These three figures—la Virgen de Guadalupe, la Malinche, and la Llorona—find their roots in Mexica history and play a significant role in the formation of Chicana/o/x identity. Anzaldúa further describes their role by stating that "[a]ll three are mediators: *Guadalupe*, the virgin mother who has not abandoned us, *la Chingada* (Malinche), the raped mother whom we have abandoned, and *la Llorona*, the mother who seeks her lost children and is a combination of the other two" (*Borderlands* 52). Moreover, Anzaldúa's focus on this trinity illustrates an example of the philosophical nature of her reasoning. For Anzaldúa, cosmic, natural, and historical elements connect to inform each other in telling ways. In "hunger/*hambre*/mayantli" Mayantli's (re)connection to the earth unites her with her ancestral past and awakens her spirit, giving her the "hunger" she needs for fulfillment. "Desembocada/the mouth of the river" reveals how the narrator becomes her god incarnate and can find salvation for herself and those who made the dangerous border crossing that so many currently make but are unable to survive. These two stories transfigure the Tonantzin/la Virgen de Guadalupe myth to show how this maternal entity exercises great power. Lourdes and Amá reshape Malintzin/La Malinche by emphasizing the complexities of motherhood and showing the contentious relationships some mothers have with their daughters. "Thorn forest" depicts the complicated relationships some mothers have with their children and the consequential effects these complications bring. Although Lourdes and Amá find themselves in a constant Coatlicue state, they manage to find new possibilities in their relationships with their granddaughters. The lyricism of "cortando las nubes, or, death came on

[43] Las Tres Madres means the Three Mothers.

horses" highlights the agony of enduring loss, especially the loss of one's children. Silva's retelling of la Llorona story gives a new perspective on the woman who laments the loss of her children while fully capturing the duality associated with the Aztec creatix, Coatlicue.

In *flesh to bone*, the retelling of these myths reconnects Chicanas/os/xs to the spirit of our ancestors who came from Aztlán and rooted their way of being into our indigenous consciousness. The characters in silva's story raise awareness about the cultural and collective past for Chicanas/os/xs and speak to the experiences of their present condition. Fulfilled is the promise of a return to Aztlán every time these myths are remembered and retold. Realized is a symbolic return to the ancestral land of Aztlán. The resiliency of these myths symbolizes the nature of our unyielding spirit and remind us of our collective past, help heal the wounds of colonialism, and fill us with the courage to (re)envision our collective Chicana/o/x identities while validating individual Chicana/o/x experiences.[44] Roberto Cintli Rodríguez describes the life-changing advice that an Apache elder gave to him about researching origins and migrations. Grandma Emma Ortega told him that he needed to become a storyteller:

> The primary thing that storytellers do is share stories. And in return, people share their own stories with them. Becoming a storyteller requires first and foremost respect: respect for the story, for the other storytellers, and most of all, for those who listen to one's stories. It entails understanding the power of words and its relationship to memory. (xxii)

Through her storytelling in *flesh to bone*, silva's lyrical (re)envisioning of these historical narratives through a consciousness rooted in humanism marks her respect for the human condition. Silva moves from her own Coatlicue state and embraces the mestiza way through her

[44] I shift to plural first-person pronouns at this point because I am part of the Chicana/o/x community.

profound understanding of the power of words while helping us pave a way towards a mestiza consciousness.

I examine ire'ne lara silva's short story collection to illustrate how Anzaldúa's theories can create frameworks of transformation and healing, specifically Anzaldúa's focus on Coatlicue's regenerative traits and the tolerance the mestiza consciousness embraces. Silva takes Anzaldúa's revisionist approach by retelling historical narratives through the blending of a Mesoamerican past, themes involving Chicana/o/x identity, and contemporary border issues. As silva moves through her own Coatlicue state and embraces the mestiza way through her profound understanding of the power of storytelling, she engages with Anzaldúa's theoretical framework by constructing a short story cycle where each story connects with each other. Moreover, the characters in silva's collection are reminders of an ancestral past and speak to present-day experiences. Although the Anzaldúan concepts of the Coatlicue state and mestiza consciousness center on the self, this form of critical self-reflection paves a path for building community. In the next chapter, the idea of building community is explored through a nepantla filmmaking process. The chapter defines Anzaldúa's concept of nepantla and discusses how the process is carried out in the production of the short documentary *La Palabra de la Cueva/The Word of the Cave*.

CHAPTER 4

NEPANTLA FILMMAKING:

Gloria Anzaldúa's Nepantla and *La Palabra de la Cueva*

Identity and representation are critical considerations in indigenous cinema. These considerations, both on camera and behind the screen, give insights to the attention paid to a film's cultural and social production. These issues usually involve questions about production teams and their filmmaking strategies. Creative control is a primary concern when considering these significant questions: What story is being told? Who gets to tell the story? Who is behind the camera? One way to consider these concerns is through Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of nepantla to recognize efforts by Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers who use collaborative approaches in producing films about communities outside of their own.

Anzaldúa's concept of nepantla is a Náhuatl word meaning "tierra entre media"[45] and "tierra desconocida"[46] ("(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces" 243). The idea of an in-between space or a liminal space is important for Anzaldúa because of the transformative aspects of this concept. Although nepantla occurs in liminal spaces, in other words, in unknown territories, Anzaldúa emphasizes the positive potential of transformations. Anzaldúan scholar AnaLouise Keating explains that nepantla is a concept used to "theorize individual and collective identity formation, epistemological shifts, meditational identities, and aesthetic inspiration" ("Mesoamerican Mythmaking as Queer(ed) Visionary Hermeneutics" 533). Individuals who position themselves from a space of nepantla attempt to achieve individual or collective

[45] Tierra entre medio translates directly to land in-between.
[46] Tierra desconocida means unknown land.

transformations. These individuals are known as nepantleras. Although the term nepantlera connotes a feminine identity, nepantleras also identify as male or non-binary.

Nepantleras are those who attempt to cultivate relationships through collaboration. Anzaldúa refers to this work as "bridging," which is the act of working within borders or liminal spaces, that is to say, working from unfamiliar spaces and reaching out to others to create community ("(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces" 246). Nepantleras develop a "specialized set of skills" that result from "surviving the violence of being caught between, translating, and hybridizing multiple systems of gendered, sexual, cultural, linguistic, and economic power" (Blackwell 14). Anzaldúa describes the work nepantleras do as "risky" because of the intimate nature of the process ("(Un)natural Bridges, (Un)safe Spaces" 246). Bridging requires that the nepantlera expose certain parts of her identity, including personal, political, and spiritual views, to advance collaborative efforts and community-building. The risk, explains Anzaldúa, is potentially being hurt or wounded because of the vulnerability tied to exposing such personal views. An added risk may also involve a type of epistemic violence found in borderlands, sites where diverse ways of knowing potentially collide with each other.

This chapter explores Anzaldúa's concept of nepantla and its relationship with her ideas of the Coatlicue state and mestiza consciousness. The chapter closes with an analysis of the short film *La Palabra de la Cueva*,[47] directed by María Sosa, Jorge Scobell, and Noé Martinez. This chapter's film discussion focuses on the collaboration between the production team and the Rarámuri[48] community they present in their film. The collaborative efforts between the production team and the indigenous community is an example of nepantla. Important to disclose

[47] *The Word of the Cave*

[48] The Rarámuri are an Indigenous community that has come to be known as Tarahumara. Tarahumara is an exonym, and Rarámuri is the endonym. Rarámuri are also known as Ralámuli, which is how the community is identified in *La Palabra de la Cueva*. Rarámuri communities are located in the Mexican state of Chihuahua.

is the background of the filmmakers because of this chapter's central discussion. The production team consists of one Calmecayo[49] and two Mexican filmmakers. Through a non-linear narrative approach, which I discuss in detail later in the chapter, the film offers a glimpse of the cultural traditions and ceremonies of a Rarámuri community in northern Mexico. Considering the filmmakers' positionality through a nepantla lens offers a framework for understanding and interpreting the collaborative efforts between this Indigenous community and the production team's filmic decisions.

Nepantla in Anzaldúa's Spherical Framework

This dissertation project defines Anzaldúa's spherical framework as a life praxis for developing both the self and community. The symbolism of the sphere in Anzaldúa's theoretical framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of her theoretical concepts, including El Mundo Zurdo, Coatlicue state, mestiza consciousness, the path of conocimiento, and nepantla. Specifically, this chapter focuses on nepantla and how it evolved from Anzaldua's previous notion of mestiza consciousness. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa describes the new mestiza as one who crosses physical and metaphorical borders. The new mestiza can develop a new consciousness, what Anzaldúa identifies as the mestiza consciousness. Since the new mestiza operates in a "pluralistic mode," frequently encountering strife, collision, or ambivalence from the border crossings she regularly makes, the tolerance and ambivalence she develops from inhabiting these contradictory spaces potentially cause a shift in consciousness (*Borderlands* 101). The new mestiza is inclined to generate collaboration and cultivate relationships, and her mestiza consciousness is no longer satisfied with tolerating difference.

[49] The Calmecayo are an Indigenous community that originate from the Mexican state of San Luis Potosí.

Instead, as the new mestiza cultivates a mestiza consciousness, she is interested in deconstructing differences to reach deeper understandings about the contradictions within herself and the differences between people. In this stage of Anzaldúa's theoretical process, the process involves reflexivity, introspection, reflection. Educator Thomas Ryan explains that reflection, coupled with social interaction, activates reflexivity. Reflexivity involves personal reflection and the reflecting that happens within a community of people (Ryan). The practice of reflection happening in community is central to reach a state of nepantla. Anzaldúa writes:

> En este lugar entre medio,[50] nepantla, two or more forces clash and are held teetering on the verge of chaos, a state of entreguerras.[51] These tensions between extremes create cracks or tears in the membrane, surrounding, protecting, and containing the different cultures and their perspectives. Nepantla is the place where at one we are detached (separated) and attached (connected) to each of our several cultures. Here the watcher on the bridge (nepantla) can "see through" the larger symbolic process that's trying to become conscious through a particular life situation or event. Nepantla is the midway point between the conscious and the unconscious, the place where transformations are enacted. ("Border Arte" 56)

Important to Anzaldúa's explanation is that there exists both a detachment and attachment of cultures. That is to say, those who are on the path of nepantla recognize that differences exist, and these differences are not erased. Instead, understanding these differences is essential because this is when the "attachment" or a type of connectedness occurs. During this process of understanding, "transformations are enacted" because the connection process facilitates new forms of understanding. In post-*Borderlands* writings, those who find themselves on the bridge

[50] This phrase translates to in this middle place.
[51] Entreguerras translates to in-between wars.

are nepantleras or those trying to achieve a sort of discernment of the differences between people and communities.

As I explain in chapter one of this project, Anzaldúan philosophy is rooted in a Mesoamerican epistemology. Essential to her theoretical methods are the Náhuatl elements of "yóllotl" (the Mesoamerican concept of heart) and "yoltéotl" (being in dialogue with one's heart) (León-Portilla 172). These concepts rely heavily on constant and continual introspective and reflective practices that Anzaldúa maps out in her ideas advanced by the Coatlicue state and the new mestiza. As the new mestiza gains greater discernment of the divisions created in border spaces, nepantla serves as the bridge that creates the connection between differences.

Chapter one describes nepantla as the concept in Anzaldúa's theoretical framework that sets the sphere in motion. In other words, the new mestiza has enacted other elements of the theoretical process, including El Mundo Zurdo, Coatlicue State, the mestiza consciousness, and the path of conocimiento to reach a state of nepantla. All the concepts in the framework activate Anzaldúa's theoretical sphere. In an interview with Karin Rosa Ikas, Anzaldúa explains that nepantla is "a way of creating knowledge and writing a philosophy, a system that explains the world" (14). Anzaldúa provides a method for individuals to create meaning of contradictory and varied experiences and, concomitantly, to devise ways for these individuals to construct their realities. Maylei Blackwell considers how individuals who find themselves in border spaces develop what she calls nepantla strategies to understand and navigate through restricting power structures (15). In this chapter, I adopt Blackwell's notion of nepantla strategies to consider identity and representation in film. I refer to these strategies as a *nepantla filmmaking process* emphasizing the pre-production and post-production processes rather than the film per se.

Since nepantla strategies are specific to individual communities and their collaborators, this chapter does not provide an exhaustive list of strategies used by filmmakers who collaborate with Indigenous communities. Instead, I identify key strategies used in the production of *La Palabra de la Cueva* that demonstrate how the filmmakers and the Rarámuri community practice a nepantla filmmaking process. The process promotes various modes of collaboration to help the filmmakers, the community, and the film's audience reach varying degrees of cultural understanding. In *La Palabra de la Cueva*, the strategies used in the nepantla filmmaking process include indigenizing efforts that promote thoughtful representations of the Rarámuri community, the involvement of the members of the community in their own representation, and the cultivation of an alliance between the filmmakers and the community.

I incorporate film in this project because of Anzaldúa's interest in crossing genres. In one interview, she describes her tendency to share her theories and ideas through various media. She recognizes that crossing genres serves to inform and enrich each other (qtd. in Ikas 12). Influenced by Anzaldúa's approach of crossing borders between genres, I find it valuable to show how Anzaldúa's spherical framework operates an interpretive tool for other media in addition to literary texts. In taking up discussions of film in this chapter and mural making practices in chapter five, this project looks at ways that the theoretical devices advanced by Anzaldúa can encourage deep critical reflection about Borderland communities and the artists who depict these spaces.

La Palabra de la Cueva/The Word of the Cave

The 2017 short documentary film *La Palabra de la Cueva* provides an example of a film project that draws focus to issues of identity and representation of a Rarámuri community in Mexico. The documentary opens with a shot of the painted figures in La Cueva de las Monas

(The Cave of the Figures), which is known for its pictographs of "monitos" or (cave) figures. The sound of scraping rocks accompanies the opening shot, and this sound will be heard intermittently throughout the twenty-nine-minute documentary. The filmmakers take the viewer on their journey of visiting the cave and realizing that the two-thousand-year-old cave paintings represent a living culture of present-day Rarámuri people, one of the most marginalized Indigenous groups of northern Mexico. The filmmakers make clear in the documentary the resilience of Rarámuri culture. Despite the passing of decades when the caves were first painted, the Rarámuri continue to carry out their traditions and are still closely connected to their ancestral land. The film highlights a curacin ritual, a healing ceremony, that the filmmakers were invited to observe, and, by extension, the viewer also becomes a spectator of the event. The curacin ritual takes place to honor the jíkuri[52] plant, which is sacred for the Rarámuri and to help heal the illnesses and afflictions of the community. The film introduces the viewer to a meaningful ceremony for Rarámuri culture while drawing connections between the early cave art and the traditions that the Rarámuri continue to honor.

Although *La Palabra de la Cueva* departs from the rest of the Chicana/o/x texts and media that have been the focus of this project, this film is the chapter's primary text for a few reasons. First, I consider the selection of a Latin American documentary similar to my decision to select non-literary texts and media for two chapters of this project. Anzaldúa's move of crossing genres when theorizing is influential and inspires me to look at how her spherical framework functions in genres outside of literature. Second, selecting a piece produced south of the U.S.-Mexico border highlights the attention artists give to issues of representation and indigeneity in Mexico. Drawing focus to a film project that narrativizes the intranational

[52] Jíkuri is the Rarámuri word for peyote.

experience of crossing borders within Mexico by these three filmmakers and the Rarámuri community is one way to address the concerns expressed by Latina scholars Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba. They point out Anzaldúa's tendency to privilege the first-world perspective by taking a U.S.-centric approach in writing about the borderlands. For Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba, the geopolitical differences alongside the border, i.e., the northern U.S. side and the southern Mexican side, must be accounted for in border studies. The borderlands theory proposed by Anzaldúa, according to Castillo and Tabuenca Córdoba, tends to erase the differences in power, access, and experience when considering the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as a monolith (*Border Women: Writing from La Frontera* 15-18). I maintain that Anzaldúa's notion of autohistoria, the process of using a personal story or experience to explore a group's social reality, must be considered when thinking about Anzaldúa's theoretical framework. As a result, Anzaldúa's primarily focuses on her identity and experiences as a Chicana living north of the U.S.-Mexico border. Even so, the role autohistoria plays in Anzaldúa's process means that her framework can also serve as both theory and practice for others, including those who might not identify as border subjects. I argue that the filmmakers of *La Palabra de la Cueva* demonstrate how Anzaldúa's framework can be adopted as praxis through their collaborative filmmaking approach. An analysis of this film draws attention to the ways nepantla strategies are enacted and offers a lens through which to consider Indigenous representation south of the U.S.-Mexico border.

It is important to note that this film is not set right on the U.S.-Mexican border, but its focus on a Rarámuri community makes the subject matter relevant to border studies. Environmental destruction and lack of economic opportunities have displaced the Rarámuri from their homelands in the Sierra Madre. Approximately half of their population or thirty-five

thousand people have settled in Chihuahua City and Ciudad Juárez (Blanco). *La Palabra de la Cueva* serves as a reminder that the Rarámuris have ancestral ties to the lands that make up part of the Chihuahua Desert. Their increased migration to the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso (Texas) borderlands demonstrate their own form of intrastate border crossings and their ways of impacting the culture in this transnational place.

Although *La Palabra de la Cueva* centers on an Indigenous community in Mexico, I do not consider this film an example of cine indígena[53] or video indígena.[54] For over thirty-five years, cine indígena or video indígena movements in Latin American have shaped media projects focused on self-representation and the process of "making culture visible" (Salazar and Córdova 40). By making culture visible, Indigenous filmmakers share perspectives that reflect the realities of their communities. Critical to video indígena is self-representation by an Indigenous filmmaker or the representation of an Indigenous filmmaker's community. Representation is critical in cine or video indígena because media created *about* Indigenous communities are created *by* Indigenous filmmakers. In other words, Indigenous filmmakers tell their own stories, and oftentimes, their filmmaking process and film productions reflect cultural practices specific to their communities.

Based on these distinct features of Indigenous media production in Latin America, as the rubric outlines, *La Palabra de la Cueva* is not considered video indígena. However, it is worth keeping in mind that one of the filmmakers, Noé Martínez, is Calmecayo. Martínez's art and media exhibitions are motivated by his personal and familial history to explore themes such as language, the European conquest of the Américas, and current recovery and reclamation efforts in Indigenous communities in Mexico, including those of his family ("Noe Martinez"). The

[53] Cine indígena translates to Indigenous cinema
[54] Video indígena means Indigenous video.

focus Martínez draws to these themes in his projects surely impacts the attention *La Palabra de la Cueva* pays to similar themes in the Rarámuri context. Erica Wortham's points out that "[Indigenous authors] make visible narratives and realities that have long and systematically been made invisible by dominant society" (6). Through a nepantla filmmaking process, Martínez brings with him his practices as an Indigenous media maker. Martínez's contributions to the project are notable in the way the film treats themes and issues that travel across Indigenous communities and, simultaneously, tells a story rooted in the Rarámuri community.

Interestingly, the film project did not begin as an exploration of Rarámuris. The filmmakers were intent on making a short documentary about the Cueva de las Monas,[55] located in the municipality of Chihuahua in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. The Cueva de las Monas is known for its rock art of "monitos" or (cave) figures. The first documented archaeological investigation was carried out in 1980, which determined that the Concho Indians painted the graphics. The overlays in the artwork range from two-thousand years old to nine-hundred and seven-hundred years old ("La Cueva de las Monas"). This finding was later confirmed in the 1990s, but more recent research suggests that the Rarámuri probably painted most of the art (Chacón Soria). Researchers maintain that the cave was used for ceremonial practices by the Indigenous communities[56] who painted them, particularly the Rarámuri. The filmmakers of *La Palabra de la Cueva* were informed of the cave's historical background when they traveled to Chihuahua from Mexico City to start filming their project, but what they did not expect was the extent of the Rarámuri involvement in their filmmaking process.

[55] A guest lecture presented by the filmmakers in a digital geo-humanities graduate seminar at The University of Oklahoma on April 5, 2018, included sharing details about this project's formation.
[56] Archaeologist Enrique Chacón Soria is leading the investigation of the site to determine whether the Concho Indians and some groups of Apache were responsible for some of the pictorials ("Cueva de las Monas").

Disrupting Western Epistemology

The filmmakers describe the process as a journey that developed in three phases: the first phase was making the short documentary, the second was an art exhibition that involved the Rarámuri community who participated in the film, and the third phase is a digital platform that contains source material about the project and updates on historical findings of the cave ("La Palabra de la Cueva"). Their filmmaking process initiates an endeavor to build a relationship with the Rarámuri by bringing attention to their myths, ceremonies, and storytelling to a broader audience. I argue that they enact the form of bridging that is part of the nepantla state. In doing so, the filmmakers become nepantleras who share their realization that the paintings in the Cueva de las Monas connect to the daily life and ceremonial traditions of the Rarámuri group with whom they spent some time. The film's digital platform shares the script the filmmakers developed for *La Palabra de La Cueva*. The third phase of this film project involved the development of the digital platform. The one-page script titled "Universo conceptual"[57] offers a framework of the filmmakers' observations of the Rarámuri's conception of the universe both in the cave's pictographs and in their conversations and observations with the Rarámuri (See Figure 1). The center of the script depicts a circle with five categories. The categories include "misiones" (missions), "vida cotidiana" (day-to-day life), "paisaje" (landscape), "camino" (path), and "cueva" (cave). Around the circle are attributes associated with each category. These attributes frame the scenes in the documentary. The drawings along the edges of the page represent some of the cave art in La Cueva de las Monas. The script is an example of an indigenizing process and project. In Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work *Decolonizing Methodologies:*

[57] Universo conceptual refers to a Rarámuri conceptual understanding of the universe.

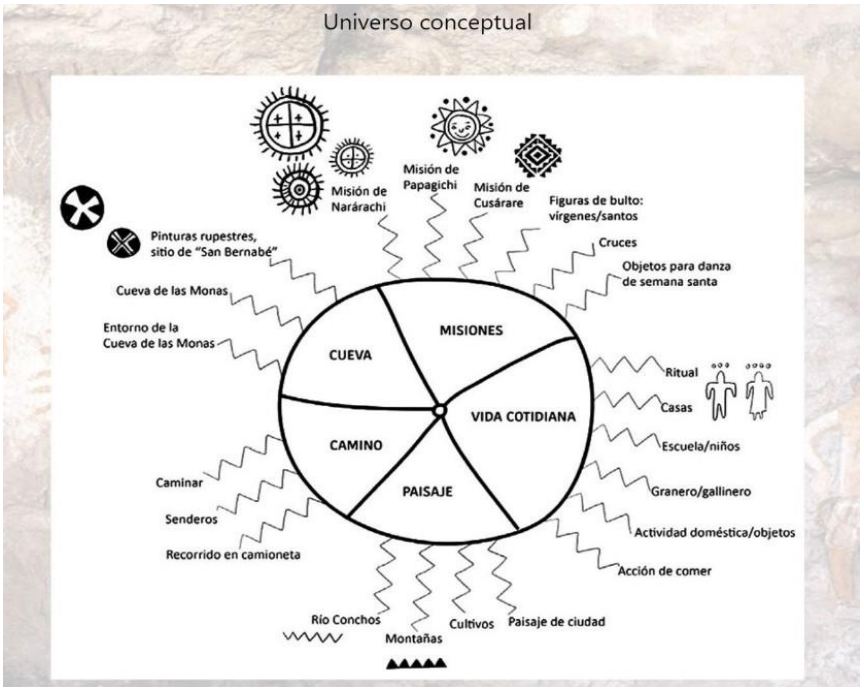


Figure 1 The one-page script for *La Palabra de la Cueva*. The script is posted on the project's digital platform "La Palabra de La Cueva."

Research and Indigenous Peoples, she defines an indigenizing process as the "centering of a politics of indigenous identity and indigenous cultural action." The script for *La Palabra de La Cueva* centers on an Indigenous identity by reflecting a Rarámuri worldview. The circular figure in the center of the script represents a jíkuri. The relationship between Rarámuri cosmology and jíkuri is significant but complex. For this discussion, it is important to understand that a Rarámuri worldview considers jíkuri as a sacred being or deity (Bonfiglioli and Gutiérrez de Ángel 196). Slight differences exist between different groups of Rarámuri, but some believe that Onorúame, "the one who is Father," is the Sun God and twin brother to Jíkuri (Irigoyen-Rascón and Paredes 68-69). The Rarámuri believe that Onorúame left jíkuri to help protect and heal them. The shape of the jíkuri plant takes the sun's shape much in the way that the script's central figure resembles the sun with its rays. The sun is also symbolic because of its life-giving properties. The zig-zag shapes are symbolic of a road or path. The idea of "traveling on a path" is important to the Rarámuri. Following a path with the guidance of jíkuri results in knowledge

and rebirth and leads to a healing path (Bonfiglioli and Gutiérrez de Ángel 197). The script also takes into account the circular shape of the area where the healing ceremony takes place. During the ceremony, the circle becomes a sacred place of worship, offering, singing, dancing, and praying. In the Cueva de la Monas, the cave's principal entrance portrays a depiction of a woman next to a shaman who holds a si' píraka[58] in one hand (Ramírez Llanes). These figures represent the curacin, or healing ceremony, with the si'píraka symbolizing the rasping sound made during parts of the ceremony. Along the entrance is a painting depicting man in the center of a circle made to look like the sun or a fiery circle. The image suggests he is sharing in a spiritual ceremony with a group. This painting stands out from the rest because it is significantly larger than the rest of the art found along the cave's entrance. The symbology found in the cave is evident in the filmmakers' script. The script is suggestive of the iconography the filmmakers found in the caves. The iconography captures the significance of these symbols in a Rarámuri worldview.

The script disrupts a type of linear storytelling found in a conventional narrative. For a viewer accustomed to conventional storytelling, the story that unfolds onscreen might appear too obscure. However, I contend that the film reflects a worldview that is not grounded in Western epistemologies or ways of knowing. I return below to the explicit way this film disrupts a western epistemological reading. On their digital platform, the filmmakers acknowledge that the documentary's artistic expression is an acknowledgment of what they consider to be the heterodox nature of the cave's continued dialogue with the Indigenous communities in the region ("La Palabra de la Cueva"). Viewers might consider the filmmakers' artistic approach as "experimental," but the filmmakers describe their work as involving ethnographic elements ("La

[58] Si' píraka is the Rarámuri word for the wooden musical instrument used during the healing ceremony.

Palabra de la Cueva"). Important in this description is that the filmmakers acknowledge that they have adopted filmic elements grounded in the beliefs of the Rarámuri. Through their development of a nonlinear script, the filmmakers tell a story that is very much influenced by a Rarámuri worldview. The script demonstrates a commitment to an indigenizing process in showing aspects of Rarámuri culture experienced in their daily life, particularly those aspects that reflect the ancestral knowledge revealed in the Cueva de la Monas.

The nonlinear approach the film takes firmly relies on the visual since there are no voice-overs or interviews, which might be unexpected to some viewers since these are expected features of documentary film. Instead, the film intimates that the cave is the storyteller. As an example of this approach, the film's opening shot offers images of the cave's pictorial representations, including some of the figures depicted in the script. The frame that follows the opening shot is a title card with a quote from the work *Epistemologies of the South. Justice Against Epistemicide* by sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos. The quote reads that the understanding of the world is far greater than the Western understanding of the world.[59] Viewers are alerted that the film intends to make social and cultural points about the epistemology or the ways of knowing of the Rarámuri and reminds viewers of their positionality of a Westernized epistemology. Thus, the film initiates what David William Foster calls a "distancing effect" where viewers are presumed to be outside of the social or cultural subjectivity being filmed (28). The cultural distancing between the film's viewers and subjects is logical because viewers outside of Rarámuri culture will not understand all elements of the worldview the film presents.

[59] The quoted material in the film is in Spanish and reads, "La comprension del mundo es mucho más amplia que la comprensión occidental del mundo." In *Epistemologies of the South. Justice Against Epistemicide*, de Sousa Santos posits that transformations may occur in unforeseen and foreign ways by what he calls the global North or Western epistemologies because of movements happening from the global South or those epistemologies that are outside of Western hegemony (4).

Despite the distancing that the film generates, the film provides viewers captions containing brief messages that align with Rarámuri beliefs and are reminders of the viewer's Western gaze on this community. In a scene that takes viewers to a Rarámuri grade school, several girls are shown outside of school, combing each other's hair. In low voices, they are heard speaking amongst themselves. A caption on the bottom of the frame reads, "Ralámuli language: thirty-two sounds, a way to conceive the world." A previous scene depicts a boy chopping wood while others are lingering around watching the wood get cut. An off-screen voice tells the boys to hurry up and gather the firewood. The viewer understands that this voice belongs to their teacher, reminding them to get to work on their assigned chore. The opening shots of the Rarámuri school sequence introduce the viewer to the children being lined up as part of their morning routine as they receive chore assignments. After watching the sequence, a viewer might have a few questions about the children's school day. For instance, why are the boys being asked to perform laborious chores as part of a school activity? Or, why are the girls spending part of the school day grooming themselves? But, the caption describing the Ralámuli language as a way to conceive the world snaps the viewer back into the film. The film is asking the viewer to consider an epistemology outside of the Western world. In other words, the film is offering us a glimpse of an epistemology from the South as identified by de Sousa Santos. The film introduces the viewer to a Rarámuri educational system. As the children gaze back at the camera, their prolonged stares underscore the filmmakers' positionality as outsiders of the community, and this outside status extends to the viewer's positionality (See Figure 2 and Figure 3). The distancing effect created by the children's gaze produces an added layer to the spectatorship in the film. The children's interaction with the camera produces what Daniel Chandler calls an extra-diegetic gaze where the gaze of the person in the film looks "out of the



Figure 2 Rarámuri schoolgirls gazing back at the camera in *La Palabra de la Cueva*.



Figure 3 Rarámuri schoolboys also gazing back at the camera in *La Palabra de la Cueva*.

frame" as if looking directly at the spectator ("Notes on 'The Gaze'"). To use de Sousa Santos's terms, these are moments where the global South meets the global North, and both sides are very much aware of the contact between the two. The film continues to carry out its portrayal of the Rarámuri conceptual understanding of the universe.

The glimpses the film affords viewers into the day-to-day activities of the Rarámuri are not meant to be didactic or instructive. Instead, the film invites viewers on the same journey as the filmmakers to make connections between the cave and the community. Anzaldúa writes that

nepantla "is the place we can accept contradiction and paradox" ("Border Arte" 56). Contradiction and paradox are features a Western spectator observes in the film. As previously mentioned, the film disrupts a linear storyline. Linear stories contain familiar narrative structures that tend to be expected by Western audiences. Instead, *La Palabra de la Cueva* uses a Rarámuri worldview as a form of representation. Smith explains the significance of representation to Indigenous creative projects because these forms of creative expression allow for an "indigenous spirit, experience or worldview" to be shared. From the film's opening scenes, in particular the quote from de Sousa Santos, the filmmakers acknowledge that in order for the messages from the cave to be understood by a non-Rarámuri viewer, a Westernized story will not be told and a Western lens cannot interpret the film. In other words, a nepantla filmmaking process, such as indigenizing and Indigenous representation, must be enacted so that the cave symbology might create meaning.

As a reminder that the cave guides the narrative, shots of pictographs from the cave, including the eye, the mirror, or the eye-hole-mirror combination, are interspersed throughout the film (See Figure 4). The eye, the hole, and the mirror are visually linked because they are all



Figure 4 Shot from *La Palabra de la Cueva* of the eye-hole-mirror symbology that can be found in a former Jesuit mission.

believed to be entities that "summon" ("La Palabra de la Cueva"). For the Rarámuri, these entities are considered cosmic stairwells that facilitate entrances and exits to various universal spheres ("La Palabra de la Cueva"). The eye-hole-mirror triad symbolizes the manifestation of a person being able to journey from one point in life to another. For example, a person might journey from a state of illness to a state of recovery. The movement from one universal sphere to another occurs through communication with Onorúame via the si'páame, the jíkuri shaman. I expand on the si'páame's role in the documentary in the discussion about the curacin ceremony later in this chapter. For now, it is important to note that the attentive viewer must make the connection between shots of the eye-hole-mirror pictograph from the cave as marked transitions from the community's school, to their missions, and to the communal living area where the curacin ceremony takes place. The film provides the viewer with visual markers signaling the exit from one aspect of Rarámuri life and entrance to another.

The film portrays the extensiveness of the eye-hole-mirror symbology in the daily lives of the community. Through a series of close-ups, the film emphasizes the presence of the eye-hole-mirror figure in the former Jesuit missions, suggesting the syncretism between Rarámuri beliefs and Catholicism. The long shots of the mission walls decorated with the triad imply an intervention of the Rarámuri worldview in the ex-Jesuit missions. The camera also captures images of the eye-hole-mirror woven in Rarámuri textiles. Considering the Rarámuri's use of the imagery in their garments signifies the personal connection the Rarámuri cultivate with these symbols. Wearing them indicates that the cosmic stairwells, that is to say the accessibility to enter and exit one universal plane and journey to another, is kept close. In one of the final shots of the communal living space, the film reveals the drawing of the eye etched in the stone of one of the homes. Similar motives for integrating the symbols in woven garments account for the

drawing outside the home of the eye. The various depictions of the eye found throughout the Rarámuri community serve as reminders of their communication with Onorúame and the cosmic entrances and exits they believe will be made throughout their lives.

Another method the film uses to show the disruption of Western epistemology is through cinematographic techniques. At the film's midpoint, the community prepares for the curacin ceremony. Close-up shots show foods such as tortillas being made for the gathering and sacrifices like a goatskin leather hide. A striking shot marks the transition from ceremonial preparations to the ceremony itself and marks the transition from day to night. A close-up shot of a tree stem with several branches as dusk falls in the background fills the screen. For the Rarámuri, the tree stem represents the tree of life (Irigoyen-Rascón and Paredes 144). In the shot, the camera slowly turns and is flipped upside down. This rotation shot, which is not a common cinematic technique, represents a return to the past through the curacin ceremony. Signaling a return to the past by turning the shot upside down offers a visual hint that the scenes that follow reveal the sacred practices that the Rarámuri continue to honor as part of their ancestral traditions.

Before proceeding to a discussion of the representation of the curacin ceremony, it is important to understand how the filmmakers acquired access to film this sacred practice. After visiting the cave and learning more about the relationship between the cave and the Rarámuri, the filmmakers visited the Huisarorare and Chineachi communities. Both are Rarámuri communities in Chihuahua. The filmmakers spent time with the communities and observed the children at the Muraka school in the Huisarorare community. During their stay, the filmmakers were asked a favor. Seeing that the filmmakers were equipped with a vehicle, they were asked to take a community member who needed a ride to the city. The Rarámuri invited the filmmakers

to stay for the upcoming curacin ceremony as a return for the favor. María Sosa, one of the filmmakers, describes the process as "transactional" (Sosa, Scobell, and Martínez). I agree with Sosa that the process is transactional because of the exchange between the filmmakers and the community. However, the Rarámuri's decision to allow the filmmakers and their camera in the ceremony is an important move by the Rarámuri. They initiate agency in their collaboration with the filmmakers.

While the exchange is, in fact, transactional, the Rarámuri initiate a type of collaborative agreement with the filmmakers. The Rarámuri become actively involved in their own representation. They set up their involvement in their story. Allowing the curacin ceremony to be shown in the film underscores the traditions the community wants to share with outsiders. *La Palabra de la Cueva* honors the forms of representation that are appropriate for the Rarámuri. Moreover, the Rarámuri demonstrate an Indigenous form of sharing that Smith identifies as part of an Indigenous research agenda. Smith acknowledges that "sharing contains views about knowledge being a collective benefit and knowledge being a form of resistance." By allowing the filming of the curacin ceremony, the Rarámuri recognize the importance of continuing to practice their ancestral traditions and sharing with wider audiences the significance these traditions hold for the community.

Curacin Ceremony/ Healing Ceremony

Once again, reminding the viewer that the cave guides the story is a shot from the cave. The film presents an image of the eye-hole-mirror triad gesturing to the film's audience that the scenes that follow, those of the curacin ceremony, are part of the Rarámuri worldview. Then the film transitions back to the community with shot of a goat, followed by a shot of a goatskin hide. These shots indicate that proper ceremonial sacrifices have taken place. The film prepares

viewers for the curacin ritual by showing the si' páame[60] and his assistant blessing the ceremonial circle. The frame shows a wooden cross and the blessing of the east side of the circle. The curacin ceremonial circle includes the cross and offerings on the east side of the space. In the center of the circle, a fire burns, and the si' páame and other participants of the ceremony take their places on the west side of the circle (Bonfiglioli and Gutierrez de Ángel 216). The si' páame and his assistant perform ritual circular motions during the blessing of the ceremonial circle and throughout the healing ceremony. During the blessing of the east side of the space, they synchronously move in a counterclockwise direction as they sprinkle holy water. Those familiar with the ceremony will assume that the holy water is the jíkuri mixture administered as the healing communion later in the ceremony. The scene that follows the blessing with the holy water shows the si' páame and his assistant entering the west side of the circle as they take their positions in front of the community members who will partake in the healing ceremony. Two participants kneel at a time before the si' páame, and he offers words of encouragement before administering the jíkuri. He tells participants, "Don't give up, God is with you, life goes on," and "Don't give up, our Lord God doesn't give up, have a good night, tomorrow will be another day" (*La Palabra de La Cueva*). Similar to the ritual motions performed on the east side of the circle, the si' páame and his assistant move counterclockwise in front of the participant. Then, they walk around the participant after he or she drinks the jíkuri mixture.

In one instance, an older community member, perhaps a mother, guides a young girl into the circle. The older participant instructs the young girl to position herself in the circle so she

[60] Si' páame is a Rarámuri word that roughly translates to a spiritual healer. Some might consider the si' páame a shaman, but this term is considered a Western concept that is controversial by some Indigenous communities. The si' páame plays such a significant role within the community that the definition of a shaman does not fully capture the importance of the si' páame to the Rarámuri.

can prepare to receive the healing communion. Watching the young girl participate in the ceremony reminds viewers of film's opening scenes in the school. These scenes speak to the role the children play in the community. Revealing the children's participation in the ceremony shows the efforts of the Rarámuri to continue their ancestral traditions by teaching them to the younger members of the group.

Various frames depicting the curacin ceremony include smoke from the fire that burns in the center of the ceremonial circle, but the fire never appears on-screen. In the previous scene where the community is preparing for the ceremony, tortillas are being heated on top of an open flame. The camera lingers on the fire, and a message on the screen reads, "Alewá: ethereal compound, lightweight, inflated by Onorúame, it constitutes the body and it can become ailment for other beings like Jíkuri and Bakánoa" (*La Palabra de la Cueva*). Bakánoa is another plant that is sacred for the Rarámuri and is also used for ceremonial purposes (Irigoyen-Rascón and Paredes 166). Alewá is the Rarámuri word for fire, which is considered sacred during the ceremony. Cairo Bonfiglioli and Arturo Gutierrez de Ángel explains that in the context of the curacin ceremony, the fire lit in the center of the circle is the force through which the si' páame gains his ability to heal. The fire serves as the generator of light and a healing vision. These transformative powers are passed on to the si' páame and manifest themselves through the si' páame's gaze, song, light, and the peyote (219). In understanding the fire's significance in the curacin celebration, it is striking that the film never shows the ceremonial fire. I insist that the filmmakers do not include shots of the fire because they recognize the sacredness of alewá during the ritual. Signaling to the viewer that the fire is too sacred to be shown on screen, the film turns to the cave as a way to portray this ceremonial element. The depiction of a large figure

in the center of a fiery ring appears on screen (see Figure 5). The cave art also depicts a smaller drawing behind the larger one of a person standing in the center of two other figures. A white background illuminates them. These images are found at La Cueva de Las Monas's entrance, as detailed earlier in the chapter. After watching curacin ceremonial process, the viewer begins to understand that the cave art depicts images of the si' páame. The one in the center of the fiery ring suggests the strong relationship between alewá and the si' páame. The si' páame serves as the intermediary between the cosmic and spiritual forces that direct the curative process for the Rarámuri. The smaller drawing in the back evokes the image of the si' páame guiding the ceremony. The cave drawing depicts two participants with the si' páame, just as shown in the film. The white background represents the light that is an important element in this ceremony. Both the light from the fire and the symbolic light the si' páame carries inside offer healing to the community.

The smaller drawing in the cave shows the si' páame holding an instrument in his left hand. This instrument is a si' píraka, a wooden musical instrument used during the si'pimea or



Figure 5 Cave art shown in *La Palabra de la Cueva* that depicts a large figure in the foreground and smaller figures in the background.

the rasping portion of the ceremony. Playing the si' píraka consists of scraping its carved notches with a wooden cylindrical stick (Irigoyen-Rascón and Paredes 145). A raspa[61] is another name for the ceremony because of the scraping sound the si' píraka makes when it is played. The film also omits this significant component of the ceremony. A lecture where the filmmakers discussed the film revealed that the curacin participants instructed to turn off the camera (Sosa, Scobell, and Martínez). While they did not state where in the ceremony the camera is turned off, those familiar with the ceremony are left to wonder about the si' pimea. However, the film does acknowledge the scrape through its non-diegetic sound. A background sound resembling the noises when something is scraping against a wall accompany the camera shots of the cave interspersed throughout the film. Without knowing the significance of the raspa, the scraping sounds accompanying the shots from the cave seem to offer an aestheticization of scenes that would otherwise be soundless. But, recognizing the significance of the raspa during the curacin offers a different interpretation of the non-diegetic scrapes. The auditory details edited into the long takes and still shots of the cave art emphasize the importance and the sacredness of the si' pimea during the curacin.

Although the film does not visually depict the si' pimea, the si' páame offers prayer-filled songs at one point in the ceremony. Accompanied by his assistant playing the violin, the si' páame sings, "In this land, we thank God with this tradition, each one of us who come from a different family. The healer tells us of a cure from the past. And that will be for the time we are here on earth" (*La Palabra de La Cueva*). The brick wall behind the si' páame and in the right side of the frame shows the flames' reflection from the ceremonial fire. The shot of the flames' fiery reflection behind the si' páame offers a visual representation of the ceremonial fire's

[61] Raspa is the Spanish word for scrape.

significance in the ceremony. The si' páame and the fire are symbolically united and working together to help heal the community. Continuing the emphasis on ancestral knowledge, he continues, "We will continue with this healing as the family grows and we learn the culture of the past, when one goes, it's the successor will [sic] continue the teachings of the past (*La Palabra de La Cueva*). Not only does the song highlight the knowledge and traditions past generations have passed down, but the song emphasizes those who will inherit this knowledge and continue these traditions. The si' páame's song explains why the children play such a prominent role in the community. They will continue to follow and honor the traditions that are significant to a Rarámuri epistemology.

Conclusion

The film ends with the camera panning along the cave wall lingering on the symbols and paintings that have directed the film's storyline. A quote that follows the various shots of the cave art describes the power of La Cueva de Las Monas. The quote by Carlo Bonfigioli, a scholar of the Rarámuri people, reads:

> By itself, a cave painting does not symbolize anything. It evokes, summons or perhaps according to the eyes of the beholder looks at it or the ear of the one who bears "its call" behind the painting. More than a meaning, these paintings make a relationship possible with a group of beings from which we can only sense their presence from what remains, both inside and outside the cave. Of course, it is not a thing of today, it is anayahuari[62] thing…

Bonfigioli is correct in identifying a continued relationship between the cave paintings and Rarámuri communities because, as the film shows, Rarámuri traditions and beliefs are rooted in

[62] The Rarámuri word anayahuari roughly translates to a Western understanding of the past.

anayahuari or in an ancestral past. As an inheritance from the past, the traditions and beliefs depicted in the cave art continue to play a central role in Rarámuri culture. The film's final scene is a point-of-view shot with the camera looking towards the outside of the cave (see Figure 6). This closing shot suggests that the traditions and knowledge held within the cave will continue to survive as long as the Rarámuri continue to practice and venerate their ancestral traditions.

One of the most valuable practices of a nepantla filmmaking process is the filmmakers' practice of building relationships with the Rarámuri community. After completing their project, the filmmakers organized with the community so they could pay a visit to La Cueva de Las Monas. Even though the cave preserves symbology that reflects Rarámuri traditions, the community portrayed in the film had never visited the cave. The filmmakers made the necessary arrangements to take some community members, including the school children and the si' páame to the cave.

During this retreat, the filmmakers also invited the community to screen *La Palabra de La Cueva* at Casa Chihuahua: Centro de Patrimonio Cultural. The film was part of a larger art



Figure 6 The final scene in *La Palabra de la Cueva* is a point-of-view shot that points the camera outside the cave.

exhibition installed by the filmmakers detailing their documentary filmmaking process. The children had the opportunity to see themselves in the film and participate in art and craft projects related to the traditions they saw represented on screen. Making the film available to view by members of the community is a significant gesture by the filmmakers. The filmmakers are enacting the forms of connectedness that Smith writes about in *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Not only do the filmmakers establish a relationship with the community that extends beyond documentary filmmaking, but they facilitate the (re)connection of the Rarámuri community to an ancestral site. The filmmakers' nepantla filmmaking process demonstrates a valuable post-production practice that allowed the film's subjects to participate in meaningful ways in the project. By ensuring that some community members watch the film and visit La Cueva de las Monas, the filmmakers promote an alliance with the film's subjects with both their pre-production and post-production practices.

La Palabra de la Cueva is a project that strategically enacts a nepantla filmmaking process as a way for the filmmakers to tell a story that belongs to the Rarámuri people. Anzaldúa's notion of nepantla offers a valuable lens to identify alliance-building between the community and the filmmakers. As discussed earlier in the chapter, nepantla is about forming relationships through collaborative efforts. The Rarámuri community depicted in the film and the filmmakers achieve nepantla throughout the production of the film. By associating the ancestral traditions contained in La Cueva de las Monas to a living Rarámuri culture, the filmmakers demonstrate the resilience and survival of the Rarámuri. Along with documenting their cultural presence in the cave and former Jesuit missions, the film honors present-day manifestations of Rarámuri culture in the grade school and the curacin. A nepantla filmmaking

process concerns itself with practicing worthy measures of representation of the Rarámuri's daily lives, traditions, and ancestral lands. The alliance that the community forms with the filmmakers offers the participants, both the community and the filmmakers, new ways of understanding the significance of the ancestral traditions of the Rarámuri. In carrying out a nepantla filmmaking process, the participants, together with the filmmakers, develop a meaningful film project that promotes new forms of cultural understanding and recognition. This is the kind of creative alliance building that Anzaldúa finds empowering and transformative. And, as the next chapter shows, enacting alliance building efforts in the path of conocimiento is a process where creative acts can offer spaces of cultural awareness and transformational healing.

CHAPTER 5

CONOCIMIENTO:[63]

Gloria Anzaldúa's Path of Conocimiento and El Paso Muralism

Gloria Anzaldúa's essay "Border Arte: Nepantla, El Lugar de la Frontera" opens with an epigraph describing the work of border artists:

> Border artists inhabit the transitional space of nepantla. The border is the locus of resistance, of rupture, and of putting together the fragments. By disrupting the neat separations between cultures, Chicana artists create a new culture mix, una mestizada. (47)

Adopting the Náhuatl term nepantla, which translates to in-between, to conceptualize the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, Anzaldúa emphasizes how power is processed and practiced in a border space. In "Border Arte," Anzaldúa explores the creative artifacts that emerge from liminal border spaces through a narrative retelling of her trip to the Denver Museum of Natural History. She explains that border art disrupts the power structures set on the U.S. side of the borderlands, especially the normative structures associated with U.S. nationalism, culture, and politics. Anzaldúa's focus on the mestizadas created by border artists offers a distinct approach to examine the work of contemporary Chicana/o/x[64] murals. Anzaldúa documents her experiences of observing Mesoamerican artifacts, Chicana/o/x art, and U.S.-Mexico border art in an art institution using the philosophical concepts she has reappropriated from Mesoamerican cultures

[63] Conocimiento translates to awareness, both personal and social.

[64] As I have described in previous chapters, I acknowledge all three terms Chicana, Chicano, and Chicanx because of the significance all three have in Chicana/o/x history. Using Chicanx as a term that includes Chicana and Chicano potentially erases the activists' struggle during the Chicano movement who fought for recognition as Chicanos. I also wish to recognize the Chicanas who fought just as hard alongside their Chicano brothers, demanding civil rights. The term Chicanx, more recently introduced, has been introduced to promote more inclusivity by recognizing those who are gender-nonconforming and are of Mexican descent. This project maintains that the three identities, Chicana/o/x, remain distinct. Therefore, I will use all three when making broad references to Chicana/o/x identity and Chicana/o/x areas, such as art, where identity is a valued consideration.

such as nepantla, the Coatlicue state, and Coyolxauhqui. The previous chapters explain the role Coatlicue plays in Aztec origin stories. Coatlicue symbolizes in Anzaldúan thought of going through a state of profound introspection. Anzaldúa introduces another Aztec deity in her theory, Coyolxauhqui. In Aztec iconography, a disk depicting Coyolxauhqui's dismembered body parts depicts the goddess. Using Coyolxauhqui as a metaphor for the reshaping of self-identity, Anzaldúa adopts Coyolxauhqui as part of her theoretical process. The epigraph's description of the border as a site of "putting together the fragments" alludes to Anzaldúa's idea of putting Coyloxauhqui together. Interpreting contemporary Chicana/o/x murals through Anzaldúa's theoretical framework demonstrates the analytical value of her theoretical process.

This chapter focuses on the history embedded in two murals from El Paso: "Brown Mother of Exiles" and "Turning the Page." Focusing on two contemporary Chicana/o/x murals shows how these artistic pieces speak to and challenge the power dynamics in the borderlands of El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Likewise, this chapter reviews the participatory processes used to create these specific works, which model mural practices from the Chicano movement. Anzaldúa's concept of the path of conocimiento presents an analytical framework to help identify the themes and symbols depicted in the murals. Moreover, an analysis rooted in the framework of the path of conocimiento highlights the community-based practices used to create these murals. As artifacts that give insight into the cultural heritage, social expression, and political issues facing the local community, learning more about the practices involved in creating these two murals offer a greater understanding of this form of mestizada.

The Path of Conocimiento in Anzaldúa's Spherical Framework

This dissertation project defines Anzaldúa's spherical framework as an analytic and praxis for developing the self and community, and this chapter centers on both the praxis and

analytics that the spherical framework offers. As the introduction of this dissertation project explains, my interpretation of Anzaldúa's spherical framework follows a tradition similar to El Teatro Campesino's ideology of the Theater of the Sphere. The Theater of the Sphere embraced a pedagogy where body, mind, heart, and soul were united to reach wholeness (Broyles-González 113). Achieving a body-mind-heart balance is reached through interaction with the energy of others and the environment. The inner body-mind-heart balance and outward interactions attain a soul-making process that completes the sphere's rotation (Broyles-González 108). I contend that the ideology of the Theater of the Sphere is like Anzaldúa's framework. Its focus on self-development and self-understanding and the relationship of the self to others support a symbolism that is similar to the one adopted in the Theater of the Sphere. The symbolism associated with the sphere as a soul-making process aligns with Anzaldúa's major concepts: El Mundo Zurdo, the Coatlicue state, mestiza consciousness, nepantla, and the path of conocimiento. Each concept builds on the others and working together achieves the potential for alliance-building. For Anzaldúa, forging a path for alliance-building efforts created transformative possibilities.

In the first chapter of this project, I interpret Anzaldúa's concept of the path of conocimiento[65] as part of a soul-making process that involves the achievement of profound introspection and understanding. Anzaldúa's notion of selfhood offers a distinction between personal identity and social identity. In Anzaldúa's spherical framework, the Coatlicue state and mestiza consciousness are both concepts that focus on discerning the self. Both concepts consider the ways culture and history, including personal and collective histories, impact self-understanding. Self-discernment creates spaces for transformative outcomes. Anzaldúa explains

[65] Anzaldúa interprets conocimiento as understanding ("(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces 4").

that the "camino de conocimiento[66] requires that you encounter your shadow side and confront what you've programmed yourself (and have been programmed by your cultures) to avoid (desconocer), to confront the traits and habits distorting how you see reality and inhibiting the full use of your facultades[67]" ("Now Let Us Shift…" 540-541). The "shadow side" is a metaphorical description of any cause pain or discomfort. For many marginalized groups, the shadow side is the shame, anger, trauma, and other negative emotions and experiences that come from the oppression connected to marginalized spaces. Important in the idea of the path of conocimiento is connecting with others and using "social, political action and lived experiences" ("Now Let Us Shift…" 540-541). The path of conocimiento is a process that starts with self-reflection and leads to opportunities for building alliances.

Anzaldúa identifies seven stages in the path of conocimiento. The first three steps focus on the self, and the last steps work towards achieving a state of interconnectedness with others. Anzaldúa acknowledges that interconnectivity requires "a different way of thinking and relating to others" ("Now Let Us Shift…" 570). Interconnectivity means reaching beyond the borders of established groups, including borders of race, culture, gender, and nationality, to cultivate alliances with others. Chicana writer Alicia Gaspar de Alba extends Anzaldúa's idea of conocimiento to "radical politics of re-conocimiento," that is, "recognizing the self in the Other" (*[Un]framing the "Bad Woman": Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui, and Other Rebels With a Cause* 38). Gaspar de Alba's interpretation draws attention to the empathy that helps build alliances. As a framework, conocimiento allows for "mobilizing, organizing, sharing information, knowledge, insights, and resources" ("Now Let Us Shift…" 571). The social activism Anzaldúa hoped her work could achieve is found in the social aspect of conocimiento.

[66] Camino de conocimiento means the road to understanding.
[67] A direct translation of facultades is faculties. However, in this context, facultades also translates to abilities.

Ultimately, the aim of working through the path of conocimiento is bringing people together to enact change.

The first stage of conocimiento is el arrebato, or the earthquake, that jolts a person out of a state of complacency or insouciance. Anzaldúa implies that the reasons for arrebatos are varied; nonetheless, they immediately jolt a person to the nepantla stage, the second stage of the path of conocimiento ("Now Let Us Shift…" 544). As previously noted, nepantla is Náhuatl word meaning "in-between," and in this liminal state, a person is positioned between the "before and after" of el arrebato ("Now Let Us Shift…" 544). In this stage, a person is in a state of heightened awareness, increasing the possibility for change. The nepantla stage is a space filled with learning, and this learning offers a possibility for transformation. However, the nepantla stage is also unsettling because of its liminality. The heightened sense of awareness comes with feeling trapped between two worlds—the before and after. This disquiet causes a shift to the third stage, the Coatlicue state. The Aztec deity Coatlicue inspires Anzaldúa's notion of the Coatlicue state. Being in the Coatlicue state, a person confronts her darkest side or her "shadow side." This is an isolating and intense state where a person wrestles with painful and traumatic experiences from the past. In the first three stages of the path of conocimiento, a person's focus is inward-looking.

The next two stages of the path of conocimiento still center on the self but shift toward an outward-looking perspective, as going through the stages means crossing metaphorical bridges to create alliances with others. The fourth stage is what Anzaldúa refers to as "the call" to overcome the shadow side and cross the metaphorical bridge that leads to change. Anzaldúa explains that crossing this bridge entails giving up "your story of self, tu autohistoria" ("Now Let Us Shift…" 554-557). Autohistoria, as discussed in previous chapters, is the form of

autobiographical writing where a person shares her own story as a way to tell the story of a collective. In this state, a person's autohistoria is altered and takes a new direction. Writing the new autohistoria means that the experiences, details, and ideas from the old autohistoria, that is to say, the identity that was formed before el arrebato is rearranged to reflect the shift that has taken place after going through the first four stages. This fifth stage is where Coyolxauhqui is put together ("Now Let Us Shift…" 558). In Mesoamerican philosophy, Coyolxauhqui encountered a violent death at the hands of her brother Huitzilopochtli. Her dismemberment is considered the first sacrificial death. The act of putting Coyolxauhqui together in the fifth stage of the path of conocimiento represents the complex, at times violent, labor of going through the first four stages of the path of conocimiento. The Coyolxauhqui stage means connecting aspects of a former identity and old pieces of knowledge "from a new perspective" to start a process of healing ("Now Let Us Shift…" 562-563). From this place of healing, a person can move towards creating community.

Stages six and seven of the path of conocimiento focus on the act of reaching out to others. Stage six anticipates the resistance encountered when sharing a newly formed way of being or a revised autohistoria. Despite the resistance, the experience of going through the five stages of the path of conocimiento and the understanding gained through the nepantla stage facilitates renewed tolerance and empathy. This openness to understand others reaches the last stage of the process, the stage of alliance-building. Stage seven of the path of conocimiento focuses on "enacting spiritual activism" ("Now Let Us Shift…" 545). Reaching this state is achieved through constant self-reflection (stages one through five in the path of conocimiento) and reflective dialogue with others. Anzaldúa describes this stage as a transformative one where realities shift, and the development of "an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to

negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others" leads to the formation of "holistic alliances" ("Now Let Us Shift…" 545). In this stage, the work of building community reshapes into an act of healing. Anzaldúa finds the work of coming together to build community as transformative, empowering, and spiritual for the self and the community.

The stages in the path of conocimiento represent a multi-layered concept that is part of Anzaldúa's spherical framework. The framework is a method that offers an analytical tool to interpret Chicana/o/x muralism. In the previous chapters of this project, several stages of the path of conocimiento, including the Coatlicue State and nepantla, are defined and used as analytical methods to interpret Chicana/o/x texts. The previous chapter considers how a nepantla filmmaking process is defined and discussed as a collaborative praxis for film collaboration. This chapter considers how Anzaldúa's spherical framework functions as both praxis and analytic. As an analytic, Anzaldúa's spherical framework uncovers ways that cultural representation is depicted through muralism. Applying Anzaldúa's spherical framework as a praxis for this artistic medium emphasizes mural making practices employed by artists. A discussion of "border arte" offers a discussion focused on murals located in the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez (Cd. Juárez)[68] borderlands. Because of the extent to which scholarly discusses focus on El Paso-Cd. Juárez murals and street art—although texts like *Contemporary Chican@ Art: Color and Culture for a New America* by George Vargas and the collaborative study *Colors on Desert Walls: The Murals of El Paso* by Miguel Juárez and Cynthia Weber have documented the murals in El Paso—this chapter centers on two contemporary Chicana/o/x murals in the city, "Turning the Page" and "Brown Mother of Exiles," and looks at the Chicana/o iconography connected to the El Paso/Juárez borderlands. Following the discussions of the recurring iconography that

[68] Ciudad Juárez is the Mexican border city across from El Paso, Texas. In the area, Ciudad Juárez is usually referred to as Juárez.

comes up in Chicano murals in this chapter, an analysis of the community involvement in mural making highlights Anzaldúa's spherical framework in artistic production. This chapter focuses on the alliance-building component that is a significant part of the last two steps in the path of conocimiento. These are the steps that focus on community outreach, and I contend that mural making is a process, a type of mestizada, made for the community. Interpreting and analyzing "Turning the Page" and "Brown Mother of Exiles" with Anzaldúa's notion of the path of conocimiento allows us to consider both the meaning behind the texts and the processes involved for artists and community members who create these visual texts.

Chicano Muralism

To interpret the meaning behind the iconography in the two murals introduced in this chapter, an awareness of formative events from the Chicano muralist movement is necessary. Chicana/o/x art offers a visual perspective of the Mexican and American histories important in Mexican American communities, as its connection to Mexican identity inspires Chicana/o/x art. The tendency to incorporate both Mexican and American imagery in Chicana/o/x art reveals the influences that national histories and culture have on Chicana/o/x representation. Chicana/o/x artists grapple with historical events such as the impact the Spanish Conquest had on land ownership, language, and culture; the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848, which resulted in a major boundary shift between the two countries; the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1917, during which a large number of refugees immigrated to the U.S. when Mexico instituted major agrarian reforms; and social injustices facing Chicana/o communities during El Movimiento, the Chicano movement of the 1960s. Many Chicana/o/x politicize the representation of the events they choose to depict suggesting the consequential way these events shaped a Chicana/o/x experience. Gaspar de Alba explains that during the Chicano movement, the Chicano Art Movement

embraced "the vernacular, the *rasquache*, and the communal in its artistic production" (*Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House* 10). By focusing on the ostensibly unremarkable in artistic representations, Chicana/o artists challenged the value placed on highbrow aesthetics. For instance, the rasquache aesthetic comes from what scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto calls rasquachismo, a distinct form of art-making that originates from the survivialist attitude of working-class Mexicans and Mexican Americans. The notion of a survivalist attitude involves being resourceful and inventive (Barnet-Sanchez 92). In Chicano art, rasquachismo means creating art from basic or ordinary objects, sometimes even repurposing or adapting conventional items for artistic productions. Gaspar de Alba considers rasquachismo a "militant praxis of resistance to hegemonic standards in the art world" (*Chicano Art Inside/Outside the Master's House* 12). The resistance that exemplifies the rasquache aesthetic is a part of the activist spirit involved in Chicano mural making. Chicano muralism is rooted in representing themes, issues, and events familiar to working-class Mexican Americans and Mexicans living in barrios. The murals created in these barrio communities are made by and for the residents who live there.

Beyond the Chicano movement, art development in Chicana/o/x communities continues to be a medium for the exploration of political and personal expression. Art historian George Vargas explains that more recent Chicana/o/x art "increasingly speaks of the human condition in personal and intimate terms beyond the body politic" (14). Indeed, Chicana/o/x self-expression in art has diverged from the politicized representations that permeated the art created during the Chicano movement. However, the symbols that resonated with Chicanas/os during the Chicano movement continue to be reworked in contemporary murals in the El Paso borderland. The newer paintings bring attention to issues that impact the community. Anzaldúa's notion of the path of conocimiento advances an analytical tool for interpreting how these issues are made

visible in more recent Chicana/o/x art. She recognizes that artists "[connect] to that nepantla state of transition between time periods [and connect] to the border between cultures" ("Border Arte" 55). Although Chicana/o mural paintings are diverse, most are grounded in an aesthetic that reflects a shared history. As Chicana/o/x muralists continue the tradition of the older generation of muralists by making connections between time periods and cultures, their efforts bring them to the fourth stage of the path of conocimiento: the call. In this stage, artists find themselves at a metaphorical bridge, deciding how their works will weave their autohistoria. As they move to the next stage of the path of conocimiento, some of their mural making practices involve reflecting on a shared history and culture as they move towards "putting Coyolxauhqui together." In other words, part of the mural making involves reworking and reshaping historical and cultural symbols and repurposing them for a new audience. Anzaldúa notes that centuries old metaphors and gods, or what I consider cultural iconography, are adopted, modified, and enriched by new cultures. This cultural iconography is passed on but altered and layered with new meaning. Before turning to more recent Chicana/o/x murals, this section gives a brief overview of the emergence of Chicana/o murals during the Chicano movement. The path of conocimiento is particularly useful for interpreting Chicana/o/x muralism because of the collaboration involved in mural making practices. The historical background that follows lays out the historical foundations that continue to influence contemporary Chicana/o/x muralists.

El Movimiento that emerged in the 1960s paved the way for a distinct form of Chicana/o/x representation in the arts. Artistic productions and artifacts delivered messages bringing attention to the labor and civil rights struggles facing Mexican American and Mexican[69]

[69] As I have been doing in the other chapters of this project, I distinguish between Mexican Americans and Mexicans living in the United States to recognize Mexican nationals who work and live alongside Mexican Americans.

communities in the United States. The theater work of El Teatro Campesino was crucial in helping the United Farmworkers (UFW) organize and unite agricultural workers, as described in chapter one of this project. Plays performed by El Teatro Campesino portrayed the injustices farmworkers were facing by the employers the union was fighting. Taking a similar approach to representation as El Teatro Campesino, Chicana/o artists visually depicted the political and social circumstances facing Chicano communities. Various forms of visual media were developed and widely circulated, including poster and mural art. The different forms of visual media that expressed the political and cultural realities of Chicana/o communities directly reached audiences impacted by issues brought to the fore during the civil rights movement (Jackson 25).

Chicana/o artists turned to the public mural as a radical expression of cultural and social representation. Depicted in monumental public murals around Chicana/o communities were issues directly related to identity politics. These murals, as did other Chicana/o art, challenged notions of a hegemonic identity. In other words, Chicana/o artists eschewed the notion of a homogenized Eurocentric American identity. Murals centered on themes of reclamation, citizenship, social and cultural inequality, poverty, and educational disparities. For example, historical figures central in the Mexican Revolution like Pancho Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and las Adelitas, or female soldiers, make regular appearances in Chicana/o/x murals. The imagery of these Mexican revolutionaries represents a Mexican history that ties directly to Chicana/o/x identity. Likewise, these historical symbols represent a struggle for recognition and equity by agrarian and peasant groups during the Mexican Revolution, similar to the struggle Chicanas/os faced in their pursuit of social justice. The themes tied to social and cultural representation in

Chicano muralism were part of an intentional effort to produce art for self-representation and social justice during the Chicano movement.

Thus, the Chicano art movement emerges as a strand of the broader social movement that committed itself to reclaim and express its cultural heritage. The Chicano civil rights organization The Crusade for Justice was established and, in 1969, organized the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference (Jackson 60). The conference afforded attendees, mostly student activists, a space to come together and formally organize the movement. The manifesto titled "El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán" or "The Spiritual Plan of Aztlán" was adopted during the conference and pushed Chicanas/os to embrace nationalism as a path to achieve liberation from oppression, exploitation, and racism (qtd. in Rendón 306). During the second National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference, the manifesto was expanded to include defined goals for the organization. One of the goals outlined the cultural values of Chicanos, which proclaimed that "we must insure that our writers, poets, musicians, and artists produce literature and art that is appealing to our people and relates to our revolutionary culture" ("The Spiritual Plan of Aztlan" 306). The Chicana/o art produced during the movement took up this call to action by creating art that was about and for Chicana/o communities.

In creating art that centered on Chicana/o heritage, artists turned their attention to the traditions of Mexican artists, including Mexican muralism. The Mexican muralist movement that emerged after the Mexican Revolution directly influenced Chicana/o muralism. Chicano studies scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto explains that "Mexican muralism created a vision of a modern and unified nation sustained by the myths, symbols, and heroics of the Mexican revolution and the pre-Columbian indigenous past" (Barnet-Sanchez and Drescher xiv). He compares the themes taken up by Mexican muralists to those depicted in Chicano murals and

notes that "Chicano murals were representations of an imagined mestizo (ethnically mixed) community rooted in a dynamic, hybrid identity and culture" (Barnet-Sanchez and Drescher xiv). The hybrid identity Ybarra-Frausto identifies is the Mexican and American cultures Chicanas/os navigate. Rather than adhere to the notion of a U.S. "melting pot" model of assimilation, Chicanas/os called for their right to honor a collective history intertwined with Mexico. The idea of navigating a hybrid identity continues to be a topic of discussion in current Mexican American, Mexican, Chicana/o/x, and Latinx communities. The parallels between Mexican and Chicano muralism shows the interconnectedness of Mexican and Chicana/o/x identity. Moreover, the public component that is important to both Mexican and Chicana/o muralism requires a process that involves creating, interpreting, and displaying the artifact *within* the community. In other words, not only are Chicana/o murals created for an audience who identifies with the community, but they are also made to tell the hi*stories* rooted within the community.

Mexican Muralism

The Mexican muralist movement significantly shaped Chicana/o muralism. After the revolution in 1920, Mexico sought to separate its national identity from Spanish colonial influence. A significant outcome of this effort was the mural movement, whose primary aim was to promote Mexican nationalism (Jackson 35). The Mexican government turned to the arts to aid in recovery efforts from the revolution and help Mexican citizens locate a sense of cultural and national pride. As the Mexican philosopher and policymaker at the time, José Vasconcelos, put it, finding the "roots of real Mexico" was a national agenda for the country (qtd. in Folgarait 18). The Mexican Education Ministry, under the direction of Vasconcelos, commissioned Mexican artists to paint murals on the walls of some of Mexico's public buildings to cultivate a more

unifying national identity (Jackson 36). The result was a movement that focused on making art more accessible to the public and spreading messages that promoted Mexico's cultural identity and highlighted its historical traditions. The social commitment of this form of public art plays a central role in Chicana/o/x muralism.

The aesthetics associated with Mexican muralism widely included Mexican indigenous imagery. In developing a unifying national identity after the Mexican Revolution, the country promoted its indigenous history and recognized the indigenous cultures that were significant influences in shaping a unique national culture. Mexican muralists incorporated indigenous figures and landscapes to offer commentary on Mexican people's social realities including social injustices and class struggles. Contemporary Chicana/o/x art scholar Guisela Latorre refers to this indigenous influence as the "Indigenist aesthetic" (2-4). Latorre emphasizes the strategic nature of the indigenist position that "often seeks to overturn historical processes in order to exact radical change" (2). Mexican muralism employed an Indigenist aesthetic to support a national identity. As discussed in chapter one of this project, Indigenism assumes an indigenous identity for a specific purpose. Many Mexican muralists who incorporated indigenous themes in their works did not identify as indigenous but employed iconography associated with the country's indigenous groups as representative of Mexico's national identity.

Three Mexican muralists emerged as the most influential artists to impact the movement. Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, often referred to as Los Tres Grandes,[70] were commissioned to produce works that gained national and international attention. The impressive contributions of Los Tres Grandes highlighted their commitment to an artistic process that involved a social mission. In their commitment to public art, Rivera, Orozco,

[70] Los Tres Gigantes translates to the big three.

Siqueiros, and other commissioned muralists featured works whose themes centered on the effects of the revolution, the consequences of colonialism, the nation's cultural landscape including the diverse forms of indigeneity found throughout the country and representations of the working-class, and postrevolutionary political developments. Many of the murals challenged the country's social and political circumstances, which offered the muralists opportunities to make political, social, and cultural statements through their art. The public nature of their creations ensured that their messages reached large audiences.

The style, themes, and processes of Mexican muralism, especially those of Los Tres Grandes, established a close connection to the Chicano muralism movement. During the 1930s, Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros created murals in the United States. Not only were the Mexicans exalted for the content of their works, but they brought with them a collectivist approach to art production. In *The Mexican Muralists in the United States,* Laurance P. Hurlburt explains that the muralists were influential in their "staunch affirmation of a public art of social commitment that could bring the artist into meaningful contact with society at large" (4). Their approach to mural production served as models for later projects like those supported during the Works Progress Administration (WPA), initiated in 1935 during the Great Depression and, later, during the Chicana/o mural movement.

Muralism in El Paso, Texas

El Paso, the West Texas border city, is the focus of this chapter, specifically two of its contemporary murals, because of the significant contributions to Chicano muralism from El Paso. Unfortunately, Chicano muralism tends to overlook the historical impact of El Paso muralism. Discussions of El Paso's contributions to Chicana/o/x art are underrepresented, and the city's murals are seldom the center of discussions about Chicano muralism. Chicano murals

in El Paso are usually mentioned in comparison to other mural projects in larger cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, or New York City. For example, the murals that adorn the support pylons of a freeway interchange in El Paso, referred to as the Spaghetti Bowl, are noted in discussions of Chicano Park in San Diego. A similar cluster of murals was painted in Chicano Park in San Diego in the early 1970s when area residents reclaimed the area and prevented building a sheriff's department substation (Barnet-Sanchez and Drescher 13). This comparison fails to recognize the direct connection between the Chicano Park project to El Paso Chicano artist Felipe Adame. His contributions to the Chicano Park Project influenced his participation in the murals he developed in El Paso. He painted the first mural on the El Paso Spaghetti Bowl pylons in 1981 (Juárez 12). Another El Paso Chicano artist Carlos Callejo, who painted some of the murals in the Estrada Courts in East Los Angeles in the 1970s, coordinated and completed the cluster of murals in the remaining pylons (Mata).[71] The area is now informally known as Chicano Park II. It is important to note here that these El Paso artists brought back their experiences and skills while collaborating with other Chicana/o artists. In addition to the environments and communities that influence Chicana/o/x artists, collaborative practices influenced the Chicano mural artists during the 1970s. The influence was reciprocal; the collectives outside the El Paso borderlands shaped the muralists while extending their own border consciousness in the murals they helped create outside of El Paso.

Although El Paso murals receive some mention in scholarship about Chicana/o/x art, the downplay of the mural paintings' explosion during the Chicano movement continues. In the preface to one of the few texts dedicated to the study of El Paso muralism, *Colors on Desert Walls: The Murals of El Paso*, Miguel Juárez admits that he and the book's photographer

[71] At the time of writing this chapter, the Texas Department of Transportation is in the process of building new freeway ramps and is set to demolish fifteen of the fifty-one murals that are part of this public art collection (Mata).

Cynthia Weber Farah were "amazed that a more comprehensive effort to document the murals had not been undertaken" (ix). Currently, El Paso has more than one hundred murals in the city's predominantly Mexican American and Mexican districts of Lincoln Park and El Segundo Barrio (Ratje). Although mural making in El Paso has slowed significantly in the past decade, the painting of new murals happens alongside existing ones. The Chicana/o murals around the city represent the city's deep-rooted Chicana/o history and culture.

Like other public art projects across the country, early murals in El Paso painted during the WPA are significant because they established this form of public art. In the previous section on Mexican muralism, the discussion focused on how the WPA modeled federal support of public art projects after the Mexican mural movement. Like in other parts of the country, the early murals in El Paso painted during the WPA are significant because they established this form of public art. When describing the presence of mural art in Mexican American neighborhoods around the country, Vargas notes that these paintings are "familiar to many Mexicans and Chicanos, for they frequently find themselves surrounded by public art, whether visiting ancient ruins, the marketplace, or church" (*Contemporary Chicano Art* 68). In El Paso, commissioned murals adorned government buildings like the county courthouse and the public library. Juárez explains that artists like Manuel G. Acosta painted these early murals. Acosta, who would go on to paint murals in El Paso during the Chicano movement, provided "a direct link of experience and knowledge from which more recent painters benefitted" (4). Mural art in El Paso reflects an interconnectedness of artistic practices with the recurring depiction of historical events. This local mural practice repurposes historical events with current and local events to represent the realities of border life in the El Paso-Cd. Juárez borderlands.

More important than the number of murals around El Paso is the city's historical contribution to the cultural figures, themes, and iconography that appear in many Chicana/o murals. For instance, the prominence El Paso played—and by extension to Cd. Juárez—in the Mexican Revolution is often reflected in the murals around the city. Since Cd. Juárez was Mexico's largest northern border town, the binational communities were strategically significant during the Mexican Revolution. However, as historian David Dorado Romo acknowledges, both cities have been "considered marginal and unimportant by the cultural centers in both Mexico and the United States" (11). Familiar figures associated with the revolution like Francisco "Pancho" Villa and Emiliano Zapata are recurring icons in El Paso murals and Chicano murals outside of the border area. When Mexican revolutionary forces including Villa overtook Cd. Juárez from the federal government in 1911, they were able to secure weapons and supplies from El Paso while forming alliances with sympathizers on the U.S. side. Historical accounts note this turning point at the start of the revolution, but Villa's extended time in the area is also striking. Villa had headquarters spread throughout El Paso and Cd. Juárez, and two of his wives had homes in El Paso (Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution* 7-10). In studies of Chicano muralism, seldom are these details recognized, and their absence neglects the influence of the El Paso/Cd. Juárez borderlands in Chicana/o/x iconography. As mentioned in the previous section titled "Chicano Muralism," Chicana/o artists identified with the historical figures like Villa and Zapata because they represent the political resistance and activist spirit of the Chicano movement. Unfortunately, the connections these revolutionary figures have to the El Paso/Cd. Juárez borderlands get erased. This chapter presents the recognition of the historical and cultural value that El Paso murals offer to Chicana/o muralism. Advancing an analysis of two contemporary murals in El Paso, "Turning the Page" and "Brown Mother of Exiles," through the lens of

Anzaldúa's path of conocimiento, layers of historical, cultural, and political details emerge in the stories that these murals offer the community.

"Turning the Page" and "Brown Mother of Exiles"

Issues of immigration are at the fore in border cities like El Paso and Cd. Juárez. These types of border spaces experience constant exchange and passage of people. Porous and fluid are frequent descriptions attributed to borders because of the constant movement, the comings and goings, and the binational way of life that some people experience in these spaces. Many border residents keep dual residencies, have relatives on both sides of the border, work in one country and live in another, regularly visit the neighboring city, and live alongside those migrating from different places. Historically, major events have changed the way the border is shaped, starting with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 that established the present international boundary with Mexico. Other major border shaping events include the Mexican Revolution (lasting between 1910-1920), the Bracero Program (the guest worker program that lasted between 1942-1964), the North American Free Trade Agreement (signed in 1994), changes in visa policies after September 11, 2001, a sharp spike of Central American migrants in 2014, and U.S. President Trump's administration "zero tolerance" border policy (Executive Order 13,841 was signed in 2018). The border's physical presence creates a border consciousness influenced by border politics, identity, and culture. These are recurring themes taken up by several murals around El Paso and are expressed in two contemporary Chicana/o/x murals, "Turning the Page" and "Brown Mother of Exiles." El Paso artist Francisco Delgado directed the painting of "Turning the Page" and co-directed "Mother of Exiles." Delgado defines the protagonists featured in his collectives as Bordeños, a Spanglish word that Delgado uses to refer to a person from and living along the U.S.-Mexico border ("Francisco Delgado"). Delgado

identifies with the experiences of the Bordeños he depicts in his works. He describes Bordeños as "underrepresented people," and his art aims to "highlight the sociocultural stories, struggles, and experiences that directly affect the way of life along the U.S.-Mexico border through relatable imagery" ("Francisco Delgado"). Both "Turning the Page" and "Mother of Exiles" incorporate mural making practices that enact alliance-building efforts to empower the community.

Both murals are located in El Paso's southside. An array of wall art decorates community centers, churches, government buildings, public-housing projects, tenement buildings, and retail establishments. This area of the city primarily consists of barrios or predominantly Mexican American and Mexican neighborhoods. These barrios are mostly concentrated around the international border crossing bridges that connect El Paso to Cd. Juárez. These are the neighborhoods where Villa and his revolutionaries once tread in the early 20th century. They are the present-day barrios that run along the mostly dried out Rio Grande and three international border checkpoints. Aspects of this notable history are captured most noticeably in "Turning the Page."

The locations of both murals are important to the symbolism embedded in these works. Offering an analytical framework for studying murals, Holly Barnet-Sanchez and Tim Drescher share their process:

> Our specific method of studying the murals begins with a basic step: look at one of the murals. Look again. And again. Analyze by examining the multiple relationships operating in it, the relation of form to content among the specific images and backgrounds. Then note how the mural relates to things outside it such as the wall on which it is painted, the building where it is located, the neighborhood surrounding it, the

> city of which it is a part, the geography of its location, other murals nearby, other murals throughout art history, other visual sources, and so on. (8)

These directives emphasize the contextualization involved in mural analysis. The public aspect of mural exhibition means that external factors, including location, surroundings, and local history, among other factors, are equally significant in mural interpretation as the themes they depict. Located in El Paso's El Segundo Barrio (Second Ward), "Turning the Page" visually depicts a timeline of the history of the events that have passed through the streets of one of the oldest neighborhoods in El Paso (Romo, "The Other Ellis Island" 92). El Segundo Barrio, known as just Segundo Barrio or El Segundo to those who live in the area, borders an international port of entry to the United States and has been a pathway into the United States for Mexican immigrants since its establishment over a century ago. As one of the city's primary sites for mural production, Robert Draper describes Segundo Barrio as "its own outdoor museum of the border proletariat." Undoubtedly the barrio's murals reflect the lives of working-class people, but like most murals around this area, "Turning the Page" emphasizes themes that relate to the history, politics, and community interests of the people living in the barrio. Bearing in mind Barnet-Sanchez and Drescher's analytical framework, the barrio not only offers a backdrop to the display but functions as the mural's central theme offering a visual interpretation of Segundo Barrio's rich history.

Framed by the imagery of pages in a book, "Turning Pages" (see Figure 7) is designed to be viewed from left to right, just as one would read a book. The left-hand side of the mural introduces Mexican revolutionary figures, including rebel fighters in a car and Villa mounted on a horse, all representing the Battle of Juárez that took place in May 1911 (Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution* 103-106*)*. Although the battle took place in Cd. Juárez, the depiction of the

revolutionary leader and his soldiers crossing a street and surrounded by the tenement buildings that still exist in Segundo Barrio draws attention to the comings and goings of revolutionary leaders, including Villa and some of his men, between the two border cities. Interestingly, the night before the Battle of Juárez, Villa spent the night in El Paso scheming and waiting for the attack that his troops would carry out the next day (Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution* 96).

In the next scene, the color of the tenement buildings transitions from a grey color palette to a brown one, signaling the passage of time. A couple stands in the foreground, and the male figure is dressed as a pachuco. Chicano youth in the 1940s embraced pachuco subculture as a form of resistance to a Eurocentric American identity. Some frequent characteristics associated with pachucos are wearing zoot suit attire, speaking caló (a slang dialect), speaking jive, participating in swing dancing, and sometimes engaging in delinquent activities. When defining pachuco identity, it is important to consider that it is "not static," and markers of pachuco identity are varied, as noted by Gerardo Licón. Different historical accounts detail the origins of the term pachuco, and one of these accounts credit El Paso as an etymological origin. Slang names of El Paso include "El Chuco" and "Chuco Town." In caló, "pa'l Chuco" means going to El Paso. One theory is that "pa'l Chuco" evolved into the term pachuco to identify Mexican immigrants traveling to and through El Paso (Licón). The representation of the male pachuco in "Turning the Page" represents the formative impact El Paso, particularly Segundo Barrio, had on



Figure 7 "Turning the Page" is located in El Paso's Segundo Barrio. Photograph by Amanda E. Cuellar.

pachuco culture.

The local community will recognize the imagery depicted in the mural such as the barrio's iconic bakery, The Bowie Bakery; recognition of the 1949 Bowie High School state baseball champions; and San Jacinto Plaza, or La Plaza de los Lagartos, which translates to Plaza of the Alligators and is a fitting description of the downtown square inhabited by live alligators from the early 20th century until the 1970s. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe sitting with her legs outstretched and an American flag draped across her legs is central in the mural (see Figure 8). A group of Brown Berets, the Chicano social justice group founded during the Chicano movement, march directly in front of the American flag, with one holding a Mexican flag. The Brown Berets are proportionally smaller than the American flag, marking the flag's imposition on the boundary between El Paso and Cd. Juárez. The American flag's image resting on the Virgin of Guadalupe's legs and extending to the international port of entry that feeds from Cd. Juárez into Segundo Barrio symbolizes the national and political powers the U.S. wields in the area. The physical connection between the Virgin and the flag reminds viewers that the Segundo Barrio was once part of Mexico, with Mexico represented by its national symbol, the Virgin of Guadalupe. Her image also serves as a reminder of the reverence paid to her on both sides of the border. The combination the of three images—the Virgin of Guadalupe, the American flag, and the international port of entry—represent the shifts of the U.S.-Mexico



Figure 8 The central images in the mural include the Virgin of Guadalupe, the U.S. flag, the Brown Berets, and the international bridge that connects El Segundo Barrio with Cd. Juárez. Photograph by Amanda E. Cuellar.

border and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 serving as a crucial turning point that eventually established the militarized port of entry that is present today in Segundo Barrio.

The Virgin's gaze is fixed on a patch of farmland and a pickup truck, with the symbol of the UFW, affixed to the back, that drives along a field. This imagery is multilayered. In the scene, the interconnectedness between the Virgin of Guadalupe and the land evokes the relationship between the Marian apparition in Mexico and the Mesoamerican deity Coatlicue, the earth-mother goddess, as discussed in detail in chapter three. Her outstretched legs and mantle blending with the ground indicate that she is part of the landscape. Bearing in mind the U.S. dependence on a labor force that includes workers who identify as Mexican and Mexican American, the Virgin's downward gaze on the farmlands emphasizes the land cultivated by Latinx farmworkers. The pickup truck with the UFW symbol depicts the Chicano movement's defense of farmworkers' rights and Chicano culture. At the local level, these images will resonate with residents of Segundo Barrio who are familiar with the groups of day laborers that gather at dawn in the barrio so they can be picked up and taken to the outskirts of the city during harvest season. The multiple layers of meaning introduced in "Turning the Page" capture the mural's potential to depict the multi-layered relationships that Barnet-Sanchez and Drescher describe in their approach to mural analysis.

In addition to the relationship that murals share with the community, the artists who engage in mural making practices to create murals like "Turning the Page" enact the form of "spiritual activism" Anzaldúa attributes to the path of conocimiento. Under the direction of Francisco Delgado, a group of University of El Paso (UTEP) students painted the mural in 2012 during an undergraduate art course. Delgado grew up in Segundo Barrio and recognizes the historical and cultural impact the murals have on Segundo Barrio residents or, using his term,

Bordeños like him who have firsthand experience of the sociocultural stories rooted in El Segundo. Anzaldúa states that creative acts result in conocimiento, and through creative engagement, "you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet" ("Now Let Us Shift…" 542). She considers these creative acts a form of spirituality that generates "subversive knowledges" ("Now Let Us Shift…" 542). Delgado and his students practice conocimiento by offering Segundo Barrio residents a mode of representation that reflects both cross-border and local culture. The form of cultural representation recorded in a mural like "Turning the Page" serves to educate the community's residents of their intimate history with Mexico and preserve the cultural memory of El Segundo Barrio. Albeit this preservation might be temporary because public murals are not permanent, Delgado and the collective participate in mural production that extends beyond simple exhibition by emulating the collaborative nature of both Mexican and Chicano muralists.

As praxis, Anzaldúa's concept of conocimiento emphasizes the activist spirit of Delgado's mural making practices and the collective. Knowledge is generated and shared from Delgado to his students. Vargas notes that Chicano artists of the 1960s look to the Mexican muralists for inspiration, and present-day Chicana/o/x artists have mentors "in their own neighborhoods" (*Contemporary Chicano@ Art* 78-79). Although the UTEP students Delgado is working with are not necessarily from El Segundo Barrio, they participate in mural making traditions that consist of creating art for and sharing the art with Delgado's community. In fact, like most murals, "Turning the Page" is created on-site where Segundo Barrio residents can witness the process. Furthermore, the mural is rich with a local and cultural history that acts as a visual text for the community to appreciate. Delgado is introducing the UTEP student collective

to his community, and they, in turn, are offering an artistic contribution that portrays Segundo Barrio's history and culture.

One of the more compelling scenes in the timeline comes at the end of the mural. A young child with his back to the viewer is sitting amid the tenement buildings and watches a futuristic depiction of a modern city skyline outlined in bright neon colors. The international port of entry dissolves into the barrio, and the debris mixes with streams of color that illuminate the city. As the scene closes, a torrent of colors rushes out from a pair of blue hands (see Figure 9). This scene is representative of Anzaldúa's concept of a mestiza consciousness. Influenced by José Vasconcelos idea of la raza cósmica, or the cosmic race, Anzaldúa describes a mestiza consciousness as the "consciousness of the Borderlands," where tolerance allows for diverse identities and cultures to meet, blend, and create Borderland identities and cultures (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 99). Borderlands with a capital B signify boundaries beyond national borders, such as the boundaries between social categorizations, including race, class, and gender. In El Segundo, residents practice a form of mestiza consciousness by embracing and cultivating a community in a barrio situated on the U.S.-Mexico border. The symbols and events included in the mural visually represent the richness of the border community. The message the final scene sends to residents of El Segundo Barrio is both of possibility and continuation. By



Figure 9 The last series of images in "Turning the Page." Photograph by Amanda E. Cuellar.

presenting the barrio's impressive history, "Turning the Page" reminds residents to carry forward with the same resiliency and strength that keeps El Segundo Barrio border culture alive and will continue to create the barrio's "next pages" of events.

Outside of El Segundo Barrio, but still located in the barrio neighborhoods of south El Paso, is another of Delgado's collaborative mural projects, "Brown Mother of Exiles." Delgado, together with Juan Ortiz, painted the mural in 2017 to protest U.S. immigration law, support the dismantling of the current Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, and push for a clean Dream Act that would create a pathway to citizenship for immigrant young people (Curran). 2017, when the mural was painted, was a significant year for young immigrants and undocumented people. After the termination of the Obama administration's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) in 2017, a bipartisan bill in the U.S. Senate and a similar version in the U.S. House of Representatives known as the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act were introduced but were not passed. In October of the same year, a pilot program separating migrant families was implemented in El Paso. Under the pilot program, migrants entering the country illegally and those seeking asylum were criminally charged, and children were intentionally separated from their parents and sent to detention centers (Riordan Seville and Rappleye). Delgado and Ortiz's mural "Brown Mother of Exiles" brings together child migration themes and the U.S. national response to the crisis through emotive symbolism. Likewise, participatory mural making practices engage in the form of activist art that involves the community impacted by immigration issues.

Activist art demands attention to injustices and promotes democratic change for groups who face systemic and institutional oppression. In *Art and Social Movements*, Edward J. McCaughan writes about the role of art in shaping social protests in North America starting in

the 1960s. His examination includes art that emerged from the student protest in Mexico City in 1968, the Zapotec indigenous struggles in Oaxaca, and the Chicano movement in California (xi). McCaughan determines that the "visual discourses" created by artists during these movements continue to play a role in current social movements that seek "democratic rights and social justice for working people, women, ethnic communities, immigrants, and sexual minorities throughout Mexico and the United States" (1). Following McCaughan's description of activist art, "Brown Mother of Exiles" contributes to the body of work from activist artists whose visual discourses express political themes.

The mural relies on pathos to communicate its message of immigration reform through an array of symbolism (see Figure 10). The title of the piece "Brown Mother of Exiles" alludes to the Statue of Liberty and Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus," attached to the statue's pedestal. In the mural, Lady Liberty is depicted as a brown figure with her illuminated torch placed in her heart rather than raised in her hand. The poetic lines influenced by "The New Colossus" frame the figure. The lines state, "mighty woman with a torch, whose name is Mother of Exiles." Her hand reaches out to a young migrant girl who emerges behind a railroad track. Above the girl's head is more text from Lazarus's poem that reads, "Give me your tired, your



Figure 10 "Brown Mother of Exiles" in an area in the southside of El Paso. Photograph by Amanda E. Cuellar.

poor, your huddled masses." The Statue of Liberty and the Lazarus poem introduce the theme of hospitality to the mural. Lazarus's lines, that is, the text that frames the girl, indicate that the girl accepts the invitation that the speaker in the poem offers, but the Mother of Exiles cannot fully grip the girl from behind the railroad track. This division, or border, does not allow the figure to realize its assurance of hospitality and inclusion.

Although the Statue of Liberty is the influence for the Mother of Exiles, the figure is also infused with religious iconography, particularly Christian symbols. The statue figure is Marian-like with her brown skin tone evoking the Virgin of Guadalupe. The illuminated torch in her chest conjures the image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Mostly observed in Catholicism, the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus honors Jesus's self-sacrificing love and compassion (Morgan 125). Even though the iconography of the Sacred Heart varies, the symbol is usually depicted with a crown of thorns surrounding a heart and rays of light emanating from it. The symbolism associated with the Sacred Heart signifies the compassion that the Mother of Exiles can extend to migrants, but she cannot offer any help since the girl cannot fully reach the figure's extended hand. Extending the themes of compassion, hospitality, and inclusion further is a banner that states "Leviticus 19:33" at the bottom of the mural. This banner alludes to the Biblical verse that states "when a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them" (*New International Version*, Lev. 19.33). The mural's message is clear—the migrant, especially the *child migrant*, is worthy of compassion, hospitality, and inclusion.

Additional symbolism in the mural includes the border wall, a body of water, an ICE helmet in the shape of a spider with a razor-wire web that wraps along the lower edge of the mural wall, and railroad tracks that represent the deterrents and obstacles immigrants face when border crossing. A few of these symbols are natural obstacles, such as the brown background

representing the desert crossings that some migrants are willing to make. The text above two railroad spikes in the shape of a cross offers an in memoriam that states "para los que perdimos en el desierto"[72] and serves as a reminder of the perilous journey that many migrants do not survive. Other symbols represent institutionalized deterrents to dissuade illegal immigration, such as the spider helmet representing the government branch of ICE. Behind the web spun from the ICE spider helmet is a boy appearing to climb over the border fence and silhouettes of other children in the background. For most migrants who cross the border, some of the first people they encounter on the U.S. side of the border are ICE agents. An additional interpretation of this scene is suggestive of the migrant children who were, and up until the writing of this chapter continue to be, incarcerated in juvenile detention centers. The young boy grabs the spider web as if he is behind prison bars. Rumors of the zero-tolerance pilot program happening in El Paso in 2017 spread around locally. However, as Linda Rivas, executive director of Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, discloses, "People didn't believe it" (qtd. in Seville and Rappleye). The emotive symbolism in this imagery communicates the social injustices that immigrants, particularly children, face along their migrant journey. This mural is a direct expression of solidarity with the immigrant community.

Like the mural making practices used to create "Turning the Page," Anzaldúa's concept of the path of conocimiento is activated through solidarity practices the muralists incorporate in their process. In addition to expressions of solidarity through their artistic representation, the artists recruited members of the immigrant community who were in El Paso during the mural production to participate in its development. Some of the participants' legal fees were paid in return for their contributions. The participatory component of collaborating with people whose

[72] Translated, the in memoriam states, "for those we have lost in the desert."

lived experiences reflect the mural's themes demonstrates the alliance-building effort that Anzaldúa attributes to reaching conocimiento. She writes:

> Conocimiento es otro mode de conectar[73] across colors and other differences to allies also trying to negotiate racial contradictions, survive the stresses and traumas of daily life, and develop a spiritual-imaginal-political vision together. Conocimiento shares a sense of affinity with all things and advocates mobilizing, organizing, sharing information, knowledge, insights, and resources with other groups. ("Now Let Us Shift…" 571)

Purposeful connectivity with others is central in the path of conocimiento. Activist art that involves diverse ways of creating meaning and sharing it with others are modes of conocimiento. Delgado and Ortiz use the participatory mural making strategy to connect with issues of child immigration and undocumented people. The strategy involves a shared experience with members of the immigrant community that the mural represents. In turn, the mural offers the local community a message about the afflictions of migrants, particularly child migrants, and the lack of hospitality they receive as reminded by the symbolism of the Statue of Liberty, lines from "The New Colossus," and the Biblical chapter from Leviticus. The mural reminds the local community that child migration and family separation are happening in their communities. Advocacy for the migrants achieves conocimiento. The mural also serves as a reminder of the values that hospitality, inclusion, and compassion can offer the immigrants living among them.

Conclusion

The mural making practices that Delgado carries out are examples of how these practices achieve conocimiento. Anzaldúa's concept of the path of conocimiento achieves transformational healing through soul-searching reflection and alliance-building efforts.

[73] Conocimiento es otro mode de conectar translates to conocimiento is another mode of connecting.

Muralists and other activist artists who share their art and practices with their local communities achieve conocimiento by using cultural histories and practices to share knowledge. "Turning the Page" demonstrates the mural making tradition of having a collective share with the community their local history. The mural reminds the local community of the significance El Segundo Barrio has in shaping Chicana/o/x identity and border history. The example of "Brown Mother of Exiles" illustrates a participatory component in the mural production from the immigrant community that the mural represents. This group contribution reflects the alliance-building component that is essential in Anzaldúa's path of conocimiento. In a similar way that "Turning the Page" represents the surrounding community, "Brown Mother of Exiles" offers the community a reminder of the immigration policies affecting migrant children and the undocumented people who live among them. McCaughan explains that activist art "challenge[s] hegemonic and purposefully fractured ways of understanding the world and potentially empower the public with alternative, more holistic ways of knowing and being" (165). In mural productions such as the examples covered in this chapter, these alternative ways of knowing and being are achieved through the path of conocimiento.

CONCLUSION:

FRAMEWORKS OF SELF-LOVE, HEALING, AND TRANSFORMATION

In Gloria Anzaldúa's essay, "Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—La Sombra y el Sueño." she shares her reaction to the September 11th attacks. One passage states:

> Conocimiento urges us to respond not just with the traditional practice of spirituality (contemplation, meditation, and private rituals) or with the technologies of political activism (protests, demonstrations, and speak-outs), but with the amalgam of the two—spiritual activism, which we've also inherited along with la sombra. Conocimiento pushes us into engaging the spirit in confronting our social sickness with new tools and practices whose goal is to effect a shift. *Spirt-in-the world* becomes conscious, and *we* become conscious of the spirit in the world. The healing of our wounds results in transformation, and the transformation results in the healing of our wounds. (311)

The description of the relationship between conocimiento and spiritual activism explains how transformation is the healing action that will bring about change. Anzaldúa encourages her readers to find their conocimiento and exercise spiritual activism as a source for transformational healing. In several moments of Anzaldúa's essay, she reveals her indignation over the September 11th attacks and the state of the world in their aftermath. Anzaldúa's resolution of employing conocimiento, spiritual activism, and nepantla as a response to the historical tuning point she understood she was experiencing models her approach in using her theoretical framework to seek individual and community healing.

I return to Anzaldúa's metaphor of la "herida abierta"[74] to describe a border consciousness that begins from a source of deep-rooted pain to one that progresses to transformational healing (*Borderlands* 25). Those who find themselves in spaces where geographical borders meet, as well as in liminal spaces within social identities such race, culture, gender, and class—Anzaldúa refers to them as the psychological borderlands, sexual borderlands, and spiritual borderlands—are the Borderlands that some people frequently navigate (*Borderlands* 19). Navigating Borderlands is difficult as Anzaldúa describes in her most of her writings. Nevertheless, as I insist in my introduction, Anzaldúan theory involves much more than an analysis of border consciousness. Over the course of these chapters, we have seen that the idea of the wound reaches beyond the divisions that exist in the Borderlands. Anzaldúa's theoretical framework offers an approach to navigate, understand, and reframe Borderland identities.

The spiritual activism and alliance-building efforts activated when working through Anzaldúa's theoretical framework advance personal and community healing opportunities. Mural-making processes representing the path of conocimiento are traced in the practices used to develop murals that depict the history and the social realities of a barrio community are. As discussed in chapter five, "Brown Mother of Exiles" uses community activism to bring attention to the child migration issue that is taking place in El Paso, Texas. Undocumented people are active members of borderland communities, and the project employs alliance-building strategies to invite undocumented community members to participate in the mural production.

The nepantla filmmaking process in chapter four describes a valuable collaborative strategy for film production that impacts how underrepresented communities are depicted on

[74] La herida abrieta means the open wound.

screen. The film production strategies for *La Palabra de la Cueva* demonstrates the ways community involvement can become part of alliance-building efforts. Both short story collections *The Sinkhole and Other Stories* and *from flesh to bone* discussed in chapters two and three establish the analytical value of Anzaldúa's theoretical framework for literary interpretation. The collections weave Chicana/o/x and Mesoamerican stories from the past as a way of (re)imagining the present realities of Mexican and Mexican American borderlands. Both collections depict characters who achieve transformational healing.

As previously noted in this project, Anzaldúa is criticized for reenacting forms of erasure advanced by colonial acculturation through the reappropriation of indigenous Mesoamerican symbology and an embrace of mestizaje. Moreover, some accuse Anzaldúan theory as exceptionalist or utopian. However, Anzaldúa, the other writers, filmmakers, and artists featured in this project reappropriate cultural and historical ancestries in ways that empower themselves and their communities. The (re)imaginings of their historical and cultural identities reflect the transnational dimensions embedded in their identities. Their practice of autohistoria accounts for cultural distinctions that are both personal and representative of their communities. The writers, filmmakers, and artists examined in this project express how their relationships with their historical and cultural identities are tied to a collective identity. Through a relationship with the self, namely through the Coatlicue state, nepantla and conocimiento lead to alliance-building efforts that envision more unified communities.

The alliance-building efforts fostered in Anzaldúa's theoretical framework offer a praxis that Anzaldúa devised for herself. Her essay responding to the September 11th attacks explains her method for navigating through anger and despair. During an interview with Anzaldúa, Ann E. Reuman observes that "*This Bridge Called My Back* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* seemed to

use anger transformatively" (16). I agree and posit that Anzaldúa's post-*Borderlands* works shape the activist philosophy she develops. Influenced by Mesoamerican thought, Chicana/o/x activism, and her spirituality, Anzaldúan theory continues to be a powerful source for those who find themselves in a Coatlicue state full of anger, confusion, or despair. As Anzaldúan theory evolved after *Borderlands*, the nepantla and mestiza consciousness stages developed as part of a broader alliance-building framework. Grappling in a nepantla state or in a liminal state and reaching a mestiza consciousness, that is to say a state of tolerance, is a pathway for conocimiento. As Anzaldúa maintains, concocimiento activates diverse ways of knowing to effect positive change. I come back to the metaphor of the sphere and see the sphere as set in motion when conocimiento is achieved. A person, group, or community who finds themselves in El Mundo Zurdo works through the steps of the Coatlicue state, mestiza consciousness, and nepantla to reach conocimiento.

I often wonder what Anzaldúa's response would be to Arizona House Bill 2281 banning the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson public schools,[75] including her work; or her response to the election of a U.S. president who disparaged Mexican immigrants by referring to them as criminals and rapists;[76] or her response to a presidential ban blocking refugees;[77] or her response to children being separated at the U.S.-Mexico border from their parents because of a "zero tolerance" policy enforced by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol[78] Although the list can

[75] Arizona HB 2281 was signed into law in 2010. In 2017, a federal judge found the ban of Tucson's Mexican American studies program to be unconstitutional (Simón).
[76] U.S. President Donald Trump announced his presidential candidacy in 2015 with a speech that maintained that Mexican immigrants were bringing drugs and crime to the U.S. and were rapists (Scott).
[77] The executive order by President Donald Trump, known as the Muslim Ban, went into effect in January 2017. Several federal courts blocked the order. A revised executive order limits travel to the U.S. by citizens of specific countries including Iran, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Venezuela, and North Korea. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the executive order in June 2018 ("Timeline of the Muslim Ban").
[78] The Trump administration in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice effected a "zero tolerance" enforcement policy separating all migrant families crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. The program was piloted in 2017 in El Paso, Texas. The Department of Homeland Security later admitted that about 2,000 children were

continue, I will stop there. Anzaldúa acknowledged that putting Coyolxauhqui together is an ongoing process and reaching conocimiento is difficult. She writes, "Conocimiento, the more difficult path, leads to awakening, insights, understandings, realizations, and courage, and the motivation to engage in concrete ways that have the potential to bring us into compassionate interactions" ("Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound" 312). Although enacting meaningful change is challenging work, her framework offers hope in the promise of social change. We must continue putting Coyolxauhqui together for only through collective action can communities continue to heal their wounds.

separated from their parents or legal guardians (Seville and Rappleye). As of November 2020, over 500 children have yet to be reunited with their families because their parents cannot be located (Dickerson).

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