



**Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences**

**Department of American Culture and Literature**

**A JOURNEY INTO THE DEPTHS: THE NEW MESTIZA  
CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE LIFE WRITINGS OF CHERRIE MORAGA  
AND GLORIA ANZALDUA**

Gizem Akçil

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2013

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## KABUL VE ONAY

Gizem Akçil tarafından hazırlanan “*A Journey into the Depths: the New Mestiza Consciousness in the Life Writings of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa*” başlıklı bu çalışma, 1 Temmuz 2013 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından yüksek lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.



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[İmza]

*Gizem Akçil*

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## ÖZET

AKÇİL, Gizem. *Derinliğe Yolculuk: Cherríe Moraga ve Gloria Anzaldúa'nın Yaşam Yazınlarında Yeni Mestiza Bilinci*, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2013.

Meksika kökenli Amerikalı kadın yazarlar Cherríe Moraga ve Gloria Anzaldúa'nın “yaşam yazını” türündeki eserleri, *Loving in the War Years* ve *Borderlands/La Frontera* üçüncü dalga feminist akımın ilkelerini kişisel deneyimlerden yola çıkarak dile getirir. Her iki yazar da, İngilizce ve İspanyolca'yı birlikte kullanarak; anı, kısa öykü, şiir ve deneme türlerinin derlenmesinden oluşturdukları sentezle iç dünyalarını, belleklerinde iz bırakan deneyimlerini ve politik görüşlerini okuyucuya aktarır. Farklı dillerin, düzyazının ve şiirsel anlatımın iç içe geçmiş bu uyumlu birlikteliği; Anzaldúa'nın “yeni *mestiza* bilinci” olarak nitelendirdiği, kalıplaşmış düşünceleri, ayrıştırıcı toplumsal sınıflamaları/sınırları reddeden, çok kültürlü, yapıcı ve esnek bir bakış açısının yansımasıdır. Bu bilinç, farklı kültürlerin ve toplumların buluştuğu sınırlarda yaşayanların kimlik karmaşasının sonucudur; çünkü sınır kavramı yalnızca coğrafi bir mekânı—Amerika ile Meksika arasındaki sınırı—değil, aynı zamanda kültürel, dilsel, psikolojik ve ruhsal her türlü değişkeni ve sadece bir yere ait olamamaktan kaynaklanan belirsizlik duygusunu kapsar. Sınırlarda yaşam zor, riskli ve çelişkilerle doludur. Kişi bu kültürel ikilemden çelişkileri ve önyargıları aşan bir düşünüş biçimini, “*mestiza* bilincini” geliştirerek çıkabilir. Bu düşünce biçimi üçüncü dalga feminist akımın bir parçası olan “Chicana” feminizmi ile yakından ilgilidir. “Chicana” feminizmi toplumsal sınırların kesiştiği noktalarda baskıların çokluğuna vurgu yapar. Birey bu baskıları öncelikle bedeniyle hisseder. Kültürel ve içsel çatışmalar, dışlanmışlık hissi parçalanmış beden ve bölünmüş benlik algısına yol açar. Moraga ve Anzaldúa yaşadıkları kişisel dönüşümü bir bütünlük ve kimlik arayışı, parçalarını yeniden birleştirme süreci olarak dile getirirler. Böylece, katı çizgilerle belirlenmiş sınırların ötesine geçilir. Zıtlıkların ve baskıların bireyin yaşamında oluşturduğu çatlak ya da Anzaldúa'nın deyimleriyle sınırda yaşamının oluşturduğu “yara” iyileşme sürecine girer.

### Anahtar Sözcükler

Yaşam yazını, *Mestiza* bilinci, Sınır, “Chicana” feminizmi, Parçalanma, Dönüşüm

## ABSTRACT

AKÇİL, Gizem. *A Journey into the Depths: the New Mestiza Consciousness in the Life Writings of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2013.

Chicana authors Cherríe Moraga's and Gloria Anzaldúa's works entitled *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* can be studied under the umbrella term "life writing," since both works articulate third-wave feminist concerns as they draw on personal experiences. Both writers convey their inner struggles, memories and political views through a combination of English and Spanish, memoir, short story, poetry and essays. The harmonious unity of different languages, prose and poetic narratives is a reflection of a multicultural, flexible and creative perspective Anzaldúa calls a "new *mestiza* consciousness," which rejects the conventional discriminatory social classifications. The "new *mestiza* consciousness" is the outcome of the identity conflict of those living in the borderlands, in the places where diverse cultures and societies merge. "The border" not only refers to a geographical area—the border between the United States and Mexico—but also comprises all kinds of cultural, linguistic, psychological and mental variables as well as a feeling of ambiguity. Life in the borderlands is difficult, risky and full of contradictions. The inhabitants of such spaces overcome the cultural dilemma, the condition of being in-between by developing such a consciousness that transcends the dualistic thought. Related to Chicana feminism, which is a part of the larger movement of third-wave-feminism, the *mestiza* viewpoint emphasizes the multiplicity of oppressions experienced at the intersections of social borders. The Chicana feels these pressures initially through her body. Cultural and internal conflicts and the feeling of alienation lead to a perception of a fragmented body, a split self. Moraga and Anzaldúa describe their self-transformation as a process of searching for an identity, for wholeness and uniting the fragments. Hence, they transcend designated borders and take the initial step toward healing the crack or what Anzaldúa calls the "wound" caused by the borderland.

### **Key Words**

Life writing, *Mestiza* consciousness, the Border, Chicana feminism, Fragmentation, Transformation

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## INTRODUCTION

*The quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon the changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. It is within this light that . . . we pursue our magic and make it realized.*

Audre Lorde “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” from *Feminist Theory: A Reader*

Chicana feminist authors communicate the complexity of Chicana cultural identity through their self-expressive writings. They articulate the overlapping dimensions of Chicana identity which is characterized by a comingling of cultures and expose the multiplicity of oppressions they encounter at the margins of these cultural fronts. Chicana feminists are concerned with finding a voice of their own and raising the consciousness of ethnic woman on the issues of race, class, gender and sexual oppression. For Chicana feminist writers, identifying the sources of oppression within one’s personal life is the basis of a long-term political struggle. Their works relate the personal to the political, as they aim to create new venues for Chicana cultural expression.

Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa disclose their multifarious identity which occupies the space where the Anglo, Mexican and Native worldviews collide. Their sense of self comes from the borderland between the United States and Mexico which appears in their writings both as a geographical locale and a symbol alluding to cultural heterogeneity. Their emphasis on hybrid identities challenges traditional western thinking that relegates those who cross over the dominant paradigms as the “other.” As Wilson Neate explains,

An ambiguous, liminal identity at the point of intersection of differences offers a context for renewed articulations of self and community. Consequently, Chicana writing shows how those isolated selves created by the binary narratives of dominant communities with a view to disempowerment may be linked together into an acquiescence of a multiform identity. (*Tolerating Ambiguity* 170)

These authors reject the notion of an essential female self and illustrate how Chicana selfhood/identity is affected by socio-cultural determinants. They display how race, ethnicity, gender and class issues intersect in the formation of their identities and

explore the ways in which constrictive social structures can be transcended. As Wilson Neate explains, Chicana/o literature, in general, is “a literature of resistance and oppositionality,” which is “the product of a historically constructed border-consciousness” (i).

As Chicana feminists return to their cultural/ethnic roots, they also desire to transgress tradition. Thus, at the heart of Chicana identity lies the contradiction of forming alliances with one’s ethnic community and trying to transform the hegemonic traditions associated with that culture. In Anzaldúa’s view, Chicana identity occupies an uncertain space of transformation which is always in the process of becoming. Hence, in the borderlands between the United States and Mexico, the boundaries dividing the self converge to form a diversified mosaic which eliminates final closures.

By rejecting the rigidity of socio-cultural boundaries and patriarchal systems of domination, Chicana feminist authors re-invent and re-claim their Chicana selves. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa disclose how these power structures function as devices of oppression and separation in *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983) and *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). These authors combine their personal histories/experiences with cultural/political theory, and trace the formation of their *mestiza* identities whereby they turn the pain of living in the borderlands into an effective means of survival.

Anzaldúa’s term “the new *mestiza* consciousness,” refers to the consciousness Chicanas develop as women whose identities are formed by the confluence of multiple selves. It is a consciousness grounded in the borderlands experience that enables Chicanas to bridge the gap between cultures and to cross or transcend the constructed borders. In the light of Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* consciousness, this thesis will examine the ways in which Moraga and Anzaldúa first go through the confusion of being culturally fragmented, of living amongst multiple borders which stimulate their process of self-awakening and psychic healing. The transformative process culminates in the emergence of the *mestiza* subject, as the authors overcome the effects of cultural, racial and gender oppression on their sense of self. Thus, both Moraga and Anzaldúa communicate narratives of fluid identities and trace their emergence out of their distorted/colonized (self)-image as new subjects in their works. In addition, they adopt lesbian sexuality as part of their *mestiza*

selves and as a resistance strategy against the gendered stereotypes of Chicana womanhood. Even though Moraga and Anzaldúa seek to identify with their ethnic heritage, they reject the patriarchal aspects of Chicano culture and construct a feminist politics out of personal experiences in order to resist the boundaries/borders of a self demarcated by racism, sexism and heterosexism.

This study will also analyze Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* and Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* as specific forms of life writing. Moraga and Anzaldúa use life writing to convey their Chicana feminist perspective and express themselves in rich and diverse ways. As the critic Karen Mary Davalos argues, "Chicana feminism encourages the use of autobiographical voice" (153). Thus, a study on Chicana feminism also requires a focus on how these authors use life writing as the means to convey their experiences.

A poet, playwright, essayist and Chicana feminist activist Cherríe Moraga was born in 1952 in Whittier, California. Her mother was a Chicana with indigenous roots, and her father an Anglo. As a Chicana of mixed-raced ancestry, she grew up within the extended family of her mother and in spite of her father's Anglo heritage; she culturally placed herself within the Chicana/o community. Before she moved to San Francisco, Moraga received her bachelor's degree from Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles and worked as a teacher for several years. She received her master's degree from San Francisco State University and edited with Gloria Anzaldúa *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), "a pioneering collection of essays by women of color" in the United States (*The New Anthology of American Poetry* 444). She helped found Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press which in 1983 published *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas* (1983) edited by Alma Gómez, Moraga and Mariana Romo-Carmona. With Norma Alarcon and Ana Castillo, she edited *The Sexuality of Latinas* (1989) and the new edition and translation of *Bridge en Esta Puente mi espalda (In Other Words* 229).

Apart from the anthologies mentioned above, Moraga subsequently published other life writings, besides *Loving in the War Years*, which include *the Last Generation* (1993) and *Waiting in the Wings* (1997). *The Last Generation* is a collection of prose and poetry including "personal narratives, insightful dreams, poetic forays into the author's past. . . political visions and prose transliterations of talks and conferences given at

various conferences and symposia” (Wheatwind 22). The book argues for a reconsideration “of gender, sexuality, race, art, nationalism, and the politics of survival” (*In Other Words* 229). *Waiting in the Wings* sub as *portrait of a queer motherhood* is a memoir which depicts the narrator’s mothering a child, her son Rafael, through artificial insemination. In the memoir, she describes how she forms a “family” by challenging the “established norms of families being always heterosexual” (*Postcolonial Literature* 172). Moraga’s works have received several awards including the Before Columbus American Book Award, and the Fund for New American Plays Award. Currently she teaches creative writing and Chicana/o literature at Stanford (*The New Anthology of American Poetry* 444).

Like Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa (1942-2004) was one of the leading Chicana feminist writers in the United States. As a poet, author, critic and editor, she was “deeply committed to political and social issues that affect the lives of all third-world women of color” (*Chicana Ways* 1). Anzaldúa was born on September 26, 1942, in the Valley of South Texas to Urbano and Amalia García Anzaldúa. As a Chicana who challenged the patriarchal cultural values of the Chicano community, she rejected the socially agreed gender roles transmitted to her by her family and community. Instead, she devoted her time to pursuing an education receiving her bachelor’s degree in art from Pan American University in 1969 and three years later her master’s degree in English from the University of Texas at Austin. After earning her master’s degree she worked as a lecturer teaching creative writing, feminist studies and Chicano studies (*Chicana Ways* 2).

*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) is Anzaldúa’s first book. Pursuing its publication, in 1990, Anzaldúa edited *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* which is an anthology of writings by ethnic women in the United States. *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, “is a book of revelations” bringing together “experience and theory through a spectrum of diverse voices” (Matsuma 1-2). Her most recent anthology is *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002) which she co-edited with AnaLouise Keating. Keating explains that the anthology “challenges readers to re-

examine existing identity categories and develop new forms of feminist theorizing and action” (3).

Anzaldúa also worked on the new genre of children’s literature and wrote bilingual books for children including *Prietita Has a Friend/Prietita Tiene un Amigo* (1991), *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del Otro Lado* (1993), and *Prietita and the Ghost Women/Prietita y La Llorana* (1996) (*Chicana Ways* 1-2). Contrary to conventional fairy tales that mirror the social codes in patriarchal societies, Anzaldúa’s books for children depict “strong female protagonists” (Keating 3). Thus, both her life writing and works for children contain a subversive component and present a critique of the patriarchal social order like the works of Cherríe Moraga.

Examining the two writers’ incorporation of their lives and visionary politics into *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* necessitates an overview of the concept of “life writing.” “Life writing” is an umbrella term which contains a large variety of writing practices that comprise the many forms of auto/biography, memoir, diaries, letters, and personal essays which are called by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson as “self-referential” writing (4) in which the narrating voices seek to reveal the narrators’ sense of self, as they create their identities through writing. Life writings do not comprise only factual details, since facts are influenced by the narrators’ interpretations of the world. Hence, the boundaries between life writing and fiction are always blurred, as life writers select, choose and interpret the material they wish to put into words. Similarly, writers of fictional works may also be inspired by actual lives and present those lives by constructing a “fictional” world out of experiences. Smith and Watson argue that even though life writing and fiction share some common characteristics, “they are distinguished by their relationship to and claims about a referential world.” As they explain, “We might think of what fiction represents as ‘a world’ and what life writing refers to as ‘the world’” (10). Unlike fictional writing, life writing deliberately creates an authenticity effect through references to specific times, real places, people and instances in one’s life although each of these elements are influenced by the narrator’s subjectivity.

Life writing takes the self of the narrator as the focus of the work. Smith and Watson explain that “the teller of his or her story becomes, in the act of narration, both the

observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance and contemplation. We might approach life writing then as a moving target, a set of shifting self-referential practices that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present” (1). Yet, the self that life writers reveal is not the actual self of the author, but rather a version of that self created by the act of writing. In spite of the gaps between writing and the actual truth, between the real self of the author and the narrated subject, most readers engage in a suspension of disbelief while reading life writing. The French theorist Philippe Lejeune calls this an “autobiographical pact,” in which the readers assume that the author who produces the work and the protagonist who appears in it are the same person (Smith and Watson 207). On the other hand, in his article entitled “Autobiography as De-facement,” the Belgian deconstructivist theorist and literary critic Paul de Man argues that life writing de-faces the subject; for while it claims to represent a “face” or the self of the author, it actually presents an altered and deformed picture of that self by simultaneously creating a face and erasing the actual face (926-930). Hence, according to Paul de Man, the line between “autobiography” and fiction is undecidable, and he rejects the notion that “autobiography” is a genre as he claims that it is “a figure of reading or of understanding” (921).

Paul de Man’s notion of “autobiography as de-facement” parallels Smith and Watson’s argument that writers first create “a narrating I” which in turn constructs a “narrated I,” and therefore, produce a distance between their actual/historical selves and the selves as narrated in the literary works (Smith and Watson 71-76). Besides, the “narrating” and “narrated Is,” in a work are mostly heterogeneous, fragmented, fractured, and multiple. The “narrating I,” may consist of a variety of voices which creates a multiplicity of narrating subjects in a work, and they are each affected by the ideological viewpoints or “the ideological Is” of the writer (Smith and Watson 76-77). As Chicana feminist lesbians, Moraga and Anzaldúa create a multiplicity of narrative voices and “ideological Is,” in their life writings. In *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, they bring together poetry and prose, and through this merging, assume the voices of a poet, essayist, academic and political activist in order to reveal their multiple socio-cultural positions. Davalos calls the hybrid mixture observed in Chicana life writing as “a transdisciplinary method” which, for her, is “a major advancement of Chicana feminist

thought” (153). It facilitates the narrators’ use of multiple voices, provides a ground for reflecting their feminist concerns and conveys the richness of Chicana cultural identity.

Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* and Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* fall into the category of ethnic life narrative which seeks to reinforce an ethnic identity by bringing together diverse cultural aspects and constructing hybrid identities. Anzaldúa terms her own writing as “autohistoria,”

. . . to describe women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional western autobiographical forms. Deeply infused with the search for personal and cultural meaning . . . Autohistoria focuses on the personal life story but, as the autohistorian tells her own life story, she simultaneously tells the life stories of others. (*The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* 319)

As Sonia Saldívar-Hull explains, “The *historia* [Anzaldúa] tells” is an account of how “indigenous icons, traditions, and rituals replace post-Cortesian, Catholic customs” (2). Like Moraga’s text, Anzaldúa’s work reflects the indigenous Mexican heritage, as it blends a myriad of cultural spaces, social locations and brings together personal memories and experiences, communal history, Mexican folklore and mythical stories. Thus, Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s life writings are situated at that juncture where the personal narratives of the self are combined with the collective experience. Susan Stanford Friedman argues that “women’s sense of collective identity . . . can be a source of strength and transformation” (35). For Friedman,

Isolate individualism is an illusion. It is also the privilege of power [promoted by the members of dominant social groups]. A white man has the luxury of forgetting his skin color and sex. He can think of himself as an “individual.” Women and minorities, reminded at every turn in the great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex and color, have no such luxury. (39)

Therefore, in situating their experiences within the multiple communities to which they are connected, both Moraga and Anzaldúa affirm their multi-cultural identities through ethnic life narrative and subvert distorted representations of their selves.

In her article entitled “The Construction of the Self in U.S. Latina Autobiographies,” Lourdes Torres explains that life writings by Latina writers challenge “the often negative and degrading images which others have used to construct the Latina” (278). In order to resist these negative social constructions, Latina writers, in general, have

sought a validation of their multiple personal/public selves which have become a source of empowerment in their quest to acquire visibility. As Torres argues,

Like black autobiographers . . . , Latina autobiographers do not create a monolithic self, but rather present the construction of the self as a member of multiple oppressed groups, whose political identity can never be divorced from her conditions. The subject created is at once individual and collective. . . (130)

In accordance with Torres's argument, C. Alejandra Elenes also draws attention to the link between Chicanas' sense of subjugation and their self-expressive writings which articulate the multiple sources of oppression in their lives. As Elenes conveys,

A considerable body of Chicana feminist writing consists of autobiographical narratives that speak of Chicanas' economic, political and cultural subordination in the U.S and Chicano societies. In these narratives Chicanas have constructed knowledge that is linked with multiple forms of oppression including race, class, gender, age and sexual orientation. Chicanas' oppression, both within and outside academic circles, has been crucial to the development of their cultural productions. Consequently, Chicana feminist narratives can be called "outlaw" genres or re-articulations of "master" genres. (105)

In ethnic life narratives, thus, women of color, in general, have exposed how their identities are misrepresented within racist and sexist discourses. Therefore, for ethnic women, writing becomes an act of representing their selves truthfully and outside the dominant categorizations of identity. Elenes argues that, "Writing thus becomes a political act of survival for women outside the boundaries" (107). In *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty also refers to the basic issues informing narratives by "third-world" women:

(1) the idea of the simultaneity of oppressions as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism; (2) the crucial role of a hegemonic state in circumscribing their/our daily lives and survival strategies; (3) the significance of memory and writing in the creation of oppositional agency; and (4) the differences, conflicts, and contradictions internal to third world women's organizations and communities. (10)

All of these concerns are presented in the life writings of Moraga and Anzaldúa who wish to refute the notion of a homogenous self put forward by Euro-centric ways of thinking and communicate the idea that cultural differences mark the Chicana identity.



Neate also argues that dominant societies and cultures enforce their notions of identity by ignoring the diverse cultural aspects and perspectives of marginalized social groups:

Such dominant communities structure themselves on the basis of one specific vector of identity or difference, at the cost of other possible differences. In order for an individual to function within a given collective, those aspects of their identity not relevant or not suited to the project of the latter are suppressed. In this way, the Chicana experience . . . has been one of unrepresentability due to that repression of significant vectors of identity required by each dominant collective. (169-170)

The life writings of Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa attend to those differences which do not conform to dominant norms as crucial aspects of their self-representation. Their sexual choice and self-identification as Chicana feminists lead to their social ostracism from both the Anglo and Chicano societies, and their alienation from the feminist groups who view heterosexism as the norm and interpret women's concerns only from a white, heterosexual, middle-class perspective. Hence, Chicana feminism constitutes the basic tenet of Moraga and Anzaldúa's political consciousness, and in order to expound these authors' political views, a brief overview of Chicana feminism is essential.

The years between 1970 and 1980 represented a formative period in the development of a Chicana feminist thought in the United States (Garcia 217). The emergence of Chicana feminism should be viewed within the larger framework known as third wave feminism, a movement which celebrates diversity, women's multiple identities and focuses on the social, economic and political empowerment of women. Third-wave feminism (1980s-present) in the United States refers to an all-encompassing women's movement which comprises the sub-branches of Chicana, African American and Asian American feminisms. The third wave emerged out of the need to find a common ground among women from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds "with the basic assumption that the oppression of women in one part of the world affects what happens in another, and that no woman is free until the conditions of oppression . . . are eliminated everywhere" (Kolmar, 59). The movement also arose as a response to the backlash against feminism in the 1980s, and the perceived failures of first and second wave of feminism in encompassing the experiences of multicultural and ethnic women.

The First Wave of Feminism (1848-1920) is rooted in the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. Led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony; the convention approved the Declaration of Sentiments, a document which listed the grievances and injustices done to women under patriarchal authority in almost all areas of their lives including education, workplace, marriage and political affairs. The Declaration of Sentiments, adopting the style of the Declaration of Independence, set out the main goals of the First Wave of Feminism and resolved that women should have the same rights as men including the right to vote, to own property, to participate in the public affairs of the Church, to have a proper education, to hold up the positions that men have monopolized and receive equal payment (*Women's America* 200-216). Thus, the First Wave of Feminism was concerned with the issues of education, employment, marriage laws and women's rights in the political arena. After years of struggle, first wave feminists succeeded in gaining the right to the elective franchise with the passage of the nineteenth amendment which gave women the right to vote in 1920 (*Women's America* 367-368). Afterwards, feminism became less politically visible until the rise of the Civil Rights Movement and other social movements for equality which gave rise to the Second Wave of Feminism (1963-1978) that began to question gender inequality in the 1960s.

The publication of Betty Friedan's *the Feminine Mystique* in 1963 marks the beginning of the Second Wave of Feminism. The book explored the dissatisfaction that most upper and middle class women felt due to their confinement within the domestic sphere and the gender biases they have internalized. Most of these women were unable to identify the reasons behind their feelings of dissatisfaction, since they regarded the domestic sphere as a place they "naturally" belonged to. The publication of *the Feminine Mystique* urged many women to observe their lives more closely and it made Betty Friedan one of the leading figures of the Second Wave of Feminism. Friedan contributed to the foundation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) with the purpose to protect and promote the rights of women (*Women's America* 489-490). The central issues with which Second Wave feminists, like Friedan and Glori Steinem, were concerned included equal protection under the laws, education, equal payment for equal work, sexuality, family, the workplace and reproductive rights. In the 1970s, the passage of the Title IX which allowed women's access to higher education, particularly

to college and professional schools marks one of the greatest achievements of the Second Wave feminists (*Women's America* 625-627). Yet, in 1978, however, when the Equal Rights Amendment failed, the Second Wave of Feminism came to a close.

In spite of the success of the first and second wave of feminisms in raising women's concerns, the particular experiences of women of color remained unnoticed, since both the first and second waves were formed by white, middle-class women. Contrary to the previous women's movements, third-wave-feminism celebrates diversity, women's multiple and contradictory identities. Apart from Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Rebecca Walker, Audre Lorde (African American), Anna Nietogomez, Ana Castillo and Mitsuye Yamada (Japanese American) are some of the prominent third-wave feminists who have tried to dismantle the stereotypical representations of women of color, gender roles and the interlocking oppressive systems of power. The movement has adopted a poststructuralist perspective by subverting the mainstream narratives, interpretations of feminism and including elements of anti-racism, eco-feminism as well as psychoanalytic and queer theories.

Chicana feminism or "Xicanisma"—a term coined by the Chicana author Ana Castillo in *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1994)—articulates the concerns of the third wave feminist movement, since Chicana feminists identify with the struggles of other ethnic women in the United States despite their varied cultural experiences. In line with Anzaldúa's views on Chicana feminism, Castillo defines "Xicanisma" as follows:

Xicanisma is an ever present consciousness of our interdependence specifically rooted in our culture and history. Although Xicanisma is a way to understand ourselves in the world, it may also help others who are not necessarily of Mexican background and/or women. It is yielding; never resistant to change, one based on wholeness not dualisms. Men are not our opposites, our opponents, our "other." (*Massacre of the Dreamers* 226)

Like Anzaldúa, Castillo rejects the dualisms rooted in the Western thinking, views "Xicanisma," Chicana feminism as a *mestiza* consciousness which can explain and give meaning to humans' partaking in a world of transitions, in a diversity of cultures. As a third-wave feminist, Castillo rejects the boundaries and binary oppositions, for she embraces the numerous shades of difference between people from diverse origins and

turns “difference” into a unifying force. Thus, Chicana feminist authors connect their own lives with the lives of all those who undergo similar experiences, particularly with the experiences of all ethnic women. As Saldivar-Hull argues,

For Chicanas, *women of color* is a *political* designation that expresses our solidarity with Asian American, African American, and Native American women who share similarities in our histories under racism, class exploitation, and cultural domination in the United States—a kinship that extends beyond sharing a national language. (46)

Chicanas have played significant roles in the third wave feminist movement, since they have voiced the concerns of all ethnic women within the various cultural, ethnic and political communities they belong to. Saldivar-Hull terms Chicana feminism as “feminism on the border” which “addresses a multiplicity of experiences” (48). Chicana feminism is built and reinforced by this “multiplicity of experiences” and the *mestiza* consciousness of Chicanas who embrace all parts of their identities.

Chicana feminism emerged as a response to the sexism Chicana women experienced within the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and to the racism they encountered within the mainstream women’s movement which ignored differences between women on the basis of race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation (Moya 448). In the 1960s and 1970s, Chicanas participated in the Chicano Movement which struggled for equal social and political rights for Chicanos. As Sylvia Gonzales explains,

The Chicana joined the Chicano struggle with equal commitment to self-actualization for her people. Along with her male counterpart, she attended meetings, organized boycotts, did everything asked of her for “*El Movimiento*.” But at no time did she step beyond her traditional role and assume leadership. If she did, she was met with the same questions of her femininity. . . . The Chicana movement seemed to demand self-actualization for only the male members of the group. There can be no doubt that the Chicano movement of the 1960s was a male movement. (49)

The Chicano Movement urged a return to the indigenous heritage (Yarbro-Bejarano 11) and advocated the values of the traditional Chicano family which was based on patriarchal power structures that denigrated the values advocated by the women’s movement. In her article “Chicana Critical Rhetoric: Recrafting La Causa in Chicano Movement Discourse,” Perlita A. Dicochea argues, Chicanas who adopted feminism

were accused of being “Anglocized” by “traditionalists” who despised feminism as an Anglo influence. She mentions that for traditionalists “the questioning of patriarchal social relations was . . . destructive to the culture” (83). Chicana women with feminist concerns were seen as betrayers of their own culture and family values. As Gonzalez explains, “The Chicana was warned by her Raza brothers to stay away from the women’s movement because of its destructive effect on Chicano culture and family. But she began to feel the damage this same family and culture had done to her . . .” (49). Alma M. Garcia argues that “cultural nationalism” was an integral part of the Chicana Movement which emphasized “cultural pride and cultural survival” within the mainstream Anglo culture (222). In “Challenging the Chicano Text: Toward a More Inclusive Contemporary Causa,” Denise A. Segura also explores the primary concerns of the Chicano Movement as articulated in two documents of Chicano cultural nationalist thought, *El Plan de Santa Barbara* and *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* :

*The Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was primarily a call to arms by activists in the movement to create a Chicano “homeland,” or *Aztlán*, whereas *the Plan de Santa Barbara* sought to bring the study of people of Mexican heritage to the halls of the academy in a way that benefited these communities. The principle of self-determination included asserting the term *Chicano* in much the same way African Americans reclaimed the term *black*. (542)

Segura argues that neither of these plans provides a space for the liberation of Chicanas, since Chicano cultural nationalism viewed Chicana women only as members of the Chicano family “whose unity of interests is assumed to be absolute and essential” (543). The movement’s primary focus on Chicano cultural survival did not respond to Chicana women’s need to find a voice of their own. Unable to articulate their concerns as women within the Chicano Movement, Chicanas first participated in the mainstream women’s movement to combat oppression on the basis of sex both in the Chicano and Anglo societies. Most Chicana women were influenced by the Anglo American feminist movement and its primary concerns such as equal social, political, educational rights as well as “the right to legal abortions on demand and access to low-cost birth-control” (Garcia 229). Even though Chicanas identified with Anglo feminism, they also found that the movement was not responding to their needs as women of color. Anglo American feminist assumption was that since all women experienced gender oppression, differences among women on the basis of race, class and ethnicity should

remain in the backdrop. They maintained that women's movement should be a unitary movement, yet overlooked how they were representing their specific concerns as white middle class women as the concerns of all women. Saldivar-Hull explains how the mainstream women's movement failed to encompass the particular concerns of Chicana feminists or ethnic women in general:

. . . [T]he specific interests of Anglo-American and other European feminists tend to erase the existence of Chicana, Puerto Rican, Native American, Asian American, and other Third World feminisms. . . . When the leading European and Anglo-American feminists working in the 1970s and 1980s displaced, misplaced, or outright ignored Chicana feminisms and other feminisms articulated by U.S. women of color, they inadvertently colonized the very terms *feminism* and *politics*. The strategies of containment practiced against feminists of color include a feminist theory that does not recognize race as a component of women's identity. (37-39)

Dissatisfied with both the Chicano Movement and the mainstream women's movement, Chicanas participated in the formation of a feminist consciousness based on their cultural identities as "women of color." Hence, Chicana feminism becomes a specific articulation of feminism on the basis of ethnicity and cultural roots. Yet, Chicana feminists do not view women's movement as secondary to the cultural struggles of Chicanos, but argue for an analysis of race and gender as multiple sources of oppression (Garcia 230). Thus, Chicana feminism combines the concerns of both the Chicano Movement and the women's movement positing that Chicanas experience oppression both as members of an ethnic group and as women. Chicana feminists also question the *machismo* or the sexist aspects of Chicano culture which categorizes Chicana women either as nuns or mothers, and those who cross over these dominant social roles are stigmatized as traitors. In "Chicana Feminism," Anna Nieto-Gomez points to the "good woman/bad woman" archetypes in the traditional Chicano culture:

In our culture we happen to say "*la mujer buena*" [the Good Woman] and "*la mujer mala*" [the bad woman]. And if you are active in *Raza Unida*, you're suspected of being *la mujer mala*, and in order to prove that you're not, you have to live the life of a nun. Well, I say the life of a nun is oppressive. "*La mujer buena*" and "*la mujer mala*" are historical ideas that came from the colonization of the people in Mexico. (304)

The colonization of Mexico by the Spaniards transformed the ancient goddesses of Mexican natives into "chaste virgins" due to the impact of Catholicism. As Dicochea

illustrates, “Tonantzin, the precolonial goddess of life and death,” was transformed “into *La Virgen de Guadalupe*”<sup>1</sup> which “has had a lasting impact on all women of Mexican heritage who were expected to be poor, passive and self-sacrificing” (81). Dicochea argues that the image of La Virgen leads to the emergence of the figure of “La Malinche (the derogatory name of Malintzin Tenepal) as the only alternative role for the women to play in relation to their families” (82). Malintzin Tenepal, “a native woman and translator, strategic adviser and the mistress to the Spanish conqueror of Mexico, Hernán Cortés,” is “considered the mother of the mestizo people.” “But unlike La Virgen de Guadalupe she is not revered. . . but rather slandered as La Chingada, . . . or La Vendida,” which means “sell out to the white race” (Moraga 91). Thus, “Malintzin Tenepal was transformed into Guadalupe’s monstrous double” (Alarcón 58). She was considered “a willing whore to Cortez” and named derogatorily as “Malinche,” “the ultimate betrayer of all Mexican people” (Dicochea 82). Therefore, in Mexican culture, such myths have reinforced the constrictive social roles of women in accordance with the “good woman/bad woman” stereotypes. Chicana feminism questions these categorizations in an effort to re-define women’s identity and place in Chicano culture. Dicochea explains that “Chicana feminists distinguished so-called ‘traditional’ values from the changing roles and ambitions of Chicanas” (80). Hence, they seek to transform the gender roles in their communities by both embracing their ethnic heritage and challenging the sexist aspects of their cultures.

Moraga and Anzaldúa are among the leading Chicana feminists who have contributed to the development of the third wave women’s movement in the United States. With the 1981 publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Moraga and Anzaldúa helped launch an oppositional movement centered on the perspectives of women of color. Inspired by feelings of alienation and exclusion, the anthology articulates an alternative to Anglo American feminism (Quintana 112). Thus, *This Bridge Called My Back* lays the groundwork for a long political struggle by Chicanas and other ethnic women for visibility and equal representation. AnaLouise Keating explains that “*This Bridge Called My Back* is especially praised for its attention

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<sup>1</sup> Guadalupe is the [new representation] of the Virgin Mary and the native goddess Tonantzin (Alarcón 57-58). As such, [she] is capable of alternately evoking the Catholic and meek Virgin Mother and the [Aztec] earth goddesses (Alarcón 60).

to differences among women” (84). Yet, she also notes that even though in *This Bridge Called My Back*,

. . . [As] writers acknowledge, express, and investigate differences, yet—*and simultaneously*—they insist on commonalities. This intertwined acknowledgment of differences and commonalities, coupled with a willingness to self-exposure, can revolutionize our approaches to difference. Making themselves vulnerable, *Bridge* authors draw on their personal experiences to explore the stereotypes and the limitations in identity labels. Their bold explorations challenge assumptions of sameness, demonstrating that it is not differences that divide us but rather our refusal to openly examine and discuss the differences among us. (86)

As Keating argues in the quotation above, acknowledging differences help women with diverse ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic status to establish a common ground and bridge societal gaps, which is what *This Bridge Called My Back* achieved. The anthology calls into question the traditional notions about life writing by presenting the perspectives of women across cultures and moves beyond the dominant heterosexual white male understandings of the self. Watson argues that,

Women such as the writers in *Bridge*, in voicing experiences of invisibility, necessarily write against the norms of autobiography, traditionally understood as an institutionalized discourse of patriarchal authority that has rendered their differences unspeakable. (*De/Colonizing the Subject* 143)

Likewise, in *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Moraga and Anzaldúa re-define life writing as they articulate a Chicana feminist perspective and challenge the heterosexist norms of their cultures. In her article, Bonnie Zimmerman focuses on some of the central issues observed at the intersection between feminist and queer theories:

[A] set of assumptions underlies virtually all lesbian criticism: that a woman’s identity is not defined only by her relation to a male world and male literary tradition (a relationship brilliantly dissected by feminist critics), that powerful bonds between women are a crucial factor in women’s lives, and that sexual and emotional identification of women profoundly affects her consciousness and thus her creativity. (34)

In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga regards her sexual choice as “the avenue through which [she has] learned the most about silence and oppression,” as “the most tactile reminder to [her] that we are not free human beings” (Moraga 44). Likewise, Robert



McRuer argues that in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, “Anzaldúa’s particular brand of queer/Chicana theory challenges the unchecked mobility of oppressive systems of power” (117). Furthermore, Anzaldúa perceives being “queer” as the means to challenge dualistic thinking based on the binary oppositions which function as devices of oppression and separation. As McRuer explains,

For Anzaldúa, “the border” and “queerness” stand as figures for the failure of easy separation. Rather than establishing two discrete identities, each attempt at separation actually produces (mestiza/queer) identities that do not fit in either location. Such identities are consequently marked as “other” (undocumented, illegal, perverse) by those with the power to police the border. (117)

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator conveys the interrelatedness between the border as a concept and queer theory which blurs the rigid boundaries erected by the socially constructed gender roles. In “Half and Half,” a brief tale that appears in the first chapter, she provides an anecdote about a maid who lived near her house. The maid is depicted as an androgynous figure embodying mestiza/queer identity, as she appears to be a woman for six months and a man during the other half of the year, thus she was called a “half and half.” The narrator tells that it must be an intriguing experience to be a male and a female at the same time, and challenges the notion that half and halves are suffering from a psychological illness or mental confusion. Instead, she argues that the cause of sufferings is the dualistic thought which posits that a person can have only one “distinct” identity. For her, the rigidity of the borders of all kinds constructs the dualities that limit the space of each individual and divide people along separations. Challenging these constructs, she proclaims that “. . . I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *bieros gamos*: the coming together of the opposite qualities within” (41). For both Anzaldúa and Moraga lesbianism seems to have such a function, since it rejects the gender roles and appears as an indispensable part of their *mestiza*, feminist consciousness that erases the definitive boundaries of self. Furthermore, as Torres argues, Moraga and Anzaldúa regard *mestiza*, *queer* identities and their sexual choice,

. . . as a path that led them to be more politicized; it led them to explore how they are oppressed based on their sexuality and crucially how this particular type of oppression is related to other forms of oppression. The discussion of sexuality in Moraga and Anzaldúa is concerned with challenging the

construction of female sexuality by the family, the state and the church. Moraga's analysis of sexuality specifically considers how this construction affects the relationship between Chicano men and women; she explores how women are denied a right to their bodies through the repression of their sexuality, the lifelong threat of sexual violence, and the denial of reproductive rights. (134)

Therefore, in the works of Moraga and Anzaldúa sexuality becomes the ground upon which they construct their political views, as Saldivar-Hull explains, Moraga "asserted sexuality" as "a legitimate site of political struggle" (51). Even though Moraga and Anzaldúa face rejection from their own communities by challenging the socially constructed definitions of sexuality, they view the transcendence of sexual borders/boundaries as a crucial tenet of their *mestiza* consciousness. In order to comprehend how Moraga and Anzaldúa form this *mestiza*/border consciousness, a brief overview of the border concept and the history of the borderlands as reflected in Anzaldúa's work is necessary.

In the preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa describes herself as a border woman having grown up amidst the clash of two cultures, Mexican with an influence of Native culture and Anglo. For her, the concept of a border refers to psychic, mental, spiritual, sexual and physical borderlands that emerge where numerous cultures face each other, and people from different social backgrounds inhabit the same precinct. Even though living in the borderlands necessitates occupying an uncomfortable territory of contradictions, it enables the inhabitant to discover a new way of life, a new cultural space of existence. Thus, Anzaldúa's concept of the border—as a representation of the *mestiza* consciousness—signifies the conflictual yet pro-creative space where her true identity flourishes. For her, the border is the cultural and geographical locale in which she can create a "home" of her own, even though the struggle to survive in this home constitutes a painful process (19).

Similarly, in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga also creates her own self-definitions through the border consciousness. Although Moraga does not specifically refer to the physical borderlands, she depicts the ways in which her identity is formed at the intersection of multiple cultural elements. Hence, in the works of Moraga and Anzaldúa, the border appears both as a place of confusion and as a constantly transforming and constructive realm where Chicana feminist *mestiza* selves are created.

In Anzaldúa's work, the narrator conveys her conception of the border as a territory which synthesises Mexican and Anglo cultures. In *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*, José David Saldívar argues, "the U.S.-Mexico borderlands have earned a reputation as a 'third country,' because our southern border is not Anglocentric on one side and Mexican on the other" (8). In the first chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, "The Homeland, Aztlán," Anzaldúa's narrator also describes the borderlands as "a third country:"

The U.S-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms its hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. (25)

For Anzaldúa, the border is also where marginalized people reside: "The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of 'the normal'" (25). In Anzaldúa's work the border becomes a site in which those who are discriminated experience the existence of clashing cultural spheres as they try to cross the physical/metaphorical borders.

After giving her own definitions of the border, Anzaldúa's narrator presents a brief history of the borderlands between the United States and Mexico. She explains that the border emerged with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1948 after the United States/Mexican War (1946-1948). The annexation of California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and parts of Colorado, Utah, Nevada by the United States turned the Mexicans living in those lands into foreigners (29). Throughout the text, however, Anzaldúa's concern is not only to present historical facts, but also her own interpretations of history as well as the Mexican/Aztec myths which will be analyzed in the ensuing chapters.

Along with the history of the border, Anzaldúa's narrator also gives an account of the historical roots of Chicanas/os. She mentions that the southwestern United States, the mythical homeland *Aztlán*, was where the Aztecs' and Chicanas/os' "ancient Indian

ancestors” are believed to have lived. As she conveys, “in 1000 B.C., descendants of Cochise people [the ancestors of the Aztecs] migrated into what is now Mexico and Central America” and later “the Aztecs (the Nahuatl word for the people of *Aztlán*) left the Southwest in 1168 A.D.” (26). After she clarifies the origins of the Aztec people, the narrator explains how the European colonization resulted in the emergence of the *mestiza/o* people:

At the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Spaniards and Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico and, with the help of the tribes that the Aztecs had subjugated, conquered it. Before the Conquest, there were twenty-five million Indian people in Mexico and the Yucatán. Immediately after the Conquest, the Indian population had been reduced to seven million. By 1650, only one-and-a-half-million pure-blooded Indians remained. The *mestizos* who were genetically equipped to survive small pox, measles and typhus (Old World diseases to which the natives had no immunity,) founded a new hybrid race and inherited Central and South America. *En 1521 nació una nuevo raza, el mestizo, el mexicano* (people of mixed Indian and Spanish blood), a race that had never existed before. Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, are the offspring of those first matings. (27)

Through her account of the origins of the *mestizas/os*, Anzaldúa’s narrator conveys the diversity of the cultural roots of Mexican people. For Anzaldúa, the term *mestiza/o* not only refers to the “hybrid race” she mentions, but rather encompasses the synthesis of cultures and languages referred to in her work with the term *mestizaje* (27). Jorge Capetillo Ponce argues that, in her depiction of the formation of this synthesis or *mestizaje*, Anzaldúa uses the methodology of the Hegelian dialectic:

. . . [A]t a superficial level, Anzaldúa’s method seems dialectical. In *Borderlands* she limns the contours of a native, prehispanic Mexican heritage that can be taken as thesis, explores the Spanish cultural conquest that can be taken as antithesis, and finally describes the emergence of an implicitly synthetic Mexican culture. Then the whole process plays itself out yet again in modern times, but now with Mexican culture as thesis, the Anglo political and economic conquest of Mexico as antithesis and the New Mestiza consciousness as synthesis. (89)

Using a dialectical method, Anzaldúa’s narrator expresses the view that constructed borders can be crossed and transcended through the new *mestiza* consciousness. From Anzaldúa’s perspective, the border which divides the geographical landscape indeed produces a blending of cultures rather than separating them. Thus, for Anzaldúa, the border between the United States and Mexico is not a mere physical boundary

separating the two countries, since any “boundary becomes an attempt to divide a symbolic reality which in itself comprises cultural and historical continuity” (Borstein-Gomez 51). In her hybrid text, Anzaldúa re-enacts this “cultural and historical continuity” by crossing borders between forms and contents. Her blending of poetry and prose, multiple languages, historical details and myths are symbolic acts of border crossings that reflect the new *mestiza* consciousness. McRuer explains how constructed borders are crossable for Anzaldúa by referring to a section in the poem which opens the first chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In this poem, the poetic voice describes the setting “in Border Field Park, on the U.S-Mexican border south of San Diego” (McRuer 129):

I walk through the hole in the fence  
                                 to the other side.  
           Under my fingers I feel the gritty wire  
                                 rusted by 139 years  
   of the salty breath of the sea.  
           Beneath the iron sky  
           Mexican children kick the soccer ball across,  
           run after it, entering the U.S. (24)

By drawing on this section of the poem, McRuer argues, “This is not the “end of road” for Anzaldúa; crossing the border here marks the *beginning* of the poet’s journey in *Borderlands/La Frontera*” (129). For McRuer, like “the sea” and “the soccer ball,” “Anzaldúa is no respecter of borders” yet she “has a profound respect for the people whose lives and histories have been shaped by the border, and who have resisted, in various ways, the oppression that this accident of history has generated” (129-130). “[T]he hole in the fence” represents Anzaldúa’s desire to transgress societal restrictions as she searches for breakthroughs to escape the confinement represented by that fence. In addition, Anzaldúa’s depiction “of the border and its history, “are not picturesque; Anzaldúa uses harsh adjectives (“gritty,” “iron”) to describe the setting, and the wavelike structure of the poem itself reproduces insistent pounding of the sea that has gouged the hole in the fence” (McRuer 130). Hence, Anzaldúa describes the border as a space of constant struggle with cultural hegemony and crossing the border represents her coming into new states of awareness. Similarly, in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga also crosses enforced boundaries by expressing her Chicana feminist standpoint, re-

claiming her *mestiza* identity and blurring the lines between cultures, languages, fact and fiction. Therefore, both Moraga and Anzaldúa transgress multiple borders in their works to express the concerns of the *mestiza* subject.

Through the border consciousness, Moraga and Anzaldúa criticize the dominant power structures within the American society, expressing how a hybrid cultural identity enables both authors to go beyond hegemonic impediments and employ strategies of what Chela Sandoval identifies as “decolonization” (41) in their works. They wish to undo the effects of cultural colonization in the United States and the institution of patriarchy by conveying a revolutionary politics in their works. Sandoval argues,

In enacting [a] new form of historical consciousness, U.S third world feminism provided access to a different way of conceptualizing not just feminist consciousness but oppositional activity in general: it comprised a formulation capable of aligning U.S. movements for social justice not only with each other, but with global movements toward decolonization. (41)

Both Moraga and Anzaldúa, as third world/Chicana feminists embrace and articulate the differences between women on the basis of race, ethnicity and sexuality in an effort to give a new impetus to women’s movement. As Borstein-Gómez argues, Anzaldúa “questions the values and assumptions underpinning the cultural, economic, socio-political order imposed by U.S. colonialism. Secondly, in a process of (re)signification, Anzaldúa (re)constructs subjectivity rooted in language, culture, and history” (46). Thus, Anzaldúa and Moraga’s “de-colonizing” strategy involves transforming or reversing the hegemonic construction of histories, patriarchy and white supremacy. In order to subvert Anglo colonialism, they re-claim their hybrid language—the blending of the variants of Spanish language and Nahuatl (the ancient Aztec tongue)—indigenous histories and ancient Aztec goddesses. As Bornstein-Gomez states, “Expansionism of the United States meant colonization through military means that went beyond territorial occupation into the realm of language, culture, memory and history” (48). Yet, in spite of their criticism of Anglo colonialism, Moraga and Anzaldúa do not completely reject the Anglo culture, but rather they adopt a variety of cultural elements from both the Chicana/o and Anglo communities. Anzaldúa describes this “intercultural situation” in an interview with Karin Ikas through the symbolism of “the Banyan tree” (233). As she explains,

It is a tree that is originally from India but which I saw in Hawaii first. It looks like a solid wall. When the seeds from the tree fall, they don't take root in the ground. They take root in the branches. So the seeds fall in the branches, and it is there above the earth, where the tree blooms and forms its fruits. And I thought, that is where *we* are getting it. Instead of going to the roots of our Hispanic and Chicano culture we are getting it from the branches, from white dominant culture. I mean, it is not that I reject everything that has to do with white culture. I like the English language, for example, and there is a lot of Anglo ideology that I like as well. But not all of it fits with our experiences and cultural roots. And that is why it is dangerous not to know about your cultural heritage at all, because then you don't have the chance to choose and select. (Anzaldúa 234)

Therefore, in their works, Moraga and Anzaldúa wish to re-invigorate their true identities by resisting patriarchal, social-cultural, linguistic hegemony by uniting the Anglo and Chicana/o heritage and putting their experiences as women of color at the forefront.

The following chapters will examine the ways in which Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa go through a transformation process at the end of which they come to construct/realize their *mestiza* identities. The chapters will analyze how these authors reflect the new *mestiza* consciousness through a Chicana feminist perspective by incorporating memories, mythical/factual history and queer theory in their life writings.

Chapter One entitled "Re-Membering Experience via 'Embodied' Memory and the Fragmentation of Identity" will discuss how Anzaldúa and Moraga recognize the effects of racial, cultural and sexual oppression on their sense of self by re-evaluating memories and personal experiences. The chapter will focus on the symbolic fragmentation of the *mestiza* body and analyze the meanings behind the bodily images as reflected in the poems, short narratives and essays of the two works. In both works, Moraga's and Anzaldúa's narrators reflect on the relation between their social location and the socio-cultural constructions of their bodies. They challenge the conventional ways in which the self is understood only through the rational mind/consciousness and question the traditional body/mind dichotomy in Western thought. The chapter will also focus on how the narrators interpret their remembered experiences and locate the concerns and experiences of a privatized self within the larger collective experience of Chicanas/os. By reflecting on their personal experiences and memories, Moraga's and Anzaldúa's narrating subjects recognize the effects of Anglo colonialism, cultural hegemony and

patriarchy on their sense of self and form a Chicana feminist epistemology that becomes the lens through which they interpret both Chicana/o and Anglo cultures.

Chapter Two, “Transformation Through ‘Psychic Healing,’ Spiritual Vision and Revising Chicano Myths” will analyze how the narrators in each work go through the process of self-awakening and psychic healing by confronting racial, cultural, gender and sexual oppression through the Chicana feminist consciousness they have formed. It will examine how Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s narrators resist the simultaneity of oppressions they face by subverting/rejecting patriarchal Chicano myths (e.g. the myths of La Malinche, La Llorona and La Virgen de Guadalupe), adopting the female icons and goddesses of Mesoamerica and forming alternative views on spirituality. Thus, Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s identification with an indigenous heritage and their reclamation, revision and re-adaptation of Aztec myths and mythical figures will be studied in relation to the narrating subjects’ transformation/healing process. The chapter will also focus on the narrators’ analysis of community, art, literature and culture; and their socio-political views in the light of the new *mestiza* consciousness which brings together the numerous facets of their identities. To sum up, the speaking subjects’ emergence out of their colonized status as new *mestizas* will be examined in the second chapter.

To conclude, the above-mentioned chapters will trace the trajectory of Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s journey toward a new *mestiza* selfhood and a new political consciousness which gives meaning to their previous experiences and enables them to emerge out of the confines of constrictive social-cultural boundaries. The *mestiza* consciousness enables these authors to go beyond borders of all kinds: geographical, cultural, racial, social, linguistic, psychological, spiritual and sexual. It becomes an effective strategy for them to eradicate the binaries of the Western culture and to survive the pain and confusion of living in the borderlands, which, in Anzaldúa’s words, necessitates “[being] in all cultures at the same time” (99).



## CHAPTER 1

### RE-MEMBERING EXPERIENCE VIA “EMBODIED” MEMORY AND THE FRAGMENTATION OF IDENTITY

*Each of us constructs and lives a “narrative,” and . . . this narrative is us, our identities.*

Oliver Sacks, *the Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (1985)

*The failure to remember, the failure to respect and defend the memory carriers destroys cultures, ecological environments, destroys lives.*

Cherríe L. Moraga, *Loving in the War Years* (1983)

*When I write it feels like I’m carving a bone. It feels like I am creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body.*

Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)

Cherríe L. Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* (1983) and Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) are life writings which consist of a hybrid mixture of essays and poems that both reveal the narrator’s personal stories and speak of Chicana women’s collective experience within the Anglo and Chicano communities. Both works trace the development of a fluid Chicana subjectivity situated at multiple borders by combining individual narratives or memories with social analysis and political theory. In line with the epigraph from the British-American neurologist, psychiatrist and writer Oliver Sacks, Moraga and Anzaldúa convey narratives of identity construction in their life writings. Both authors try to sustain a sense of self through memory in spite of the fact that the autobiographical self is, for the most part, fragmented or discontinuous. Even though the act of remembering is always impaired by the gaps in one’s memory,

recollection of experiences is indispensable for understanding individual and collective identities. Thus, for Moraga and Anzaldúa, life writing appears to be a device to establish connections between memories and self-knowledge; physical/material existence and social location. In addition, in each of the two works, the constitution of identities is dependent on the adoption of a women-identified ethnic language along with a recognition of the physical body as a signification that occupies a central place in the narrators' interpretation of personal and social experiences; for it is through their bodies and language that Moraga and Anzaldúa comprehend and come to terms with memories.

In *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue that “the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge because memory itself is embodied. And life narrative is a site of embodied knowledge (a textual surface on which a person's experience is inscribed) because autobiographical narrators are embodied subjects” (49). Smith and Watson's argument is an extension of the neurologist Antonia Damasio's ideas which focus on the relationship between a person's sense of self resulting from the functions of memory:

The ability to recover memories in fact depends on the material body. There must be a somatic body that perceives and internalizes the images, sensations, and experiences of the external world. Subjectivity is impossible unless the subject recognizes her location in the materiality of an ever-present body. (239)

For Smith and Watson, the self as explored in life writings—particularly by ethnic women writers—challenge the notion of a universalized self with an emphasis on the physical body and the socio-cultural aspects of one's identity. In *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body*, Smith traces the development of a Western selfhood, beginning with the Renaissance during which the idea of an “individual” emerged. As they explain, the pursuing time periods, particularly the “eighteenth century enlightenment, early nineteenth-century romanticism, expanding bourgeois capitalism, and Victorian optimism,” shaped and reinforced the idea of an essential, individual self (5). They further note that “this self is persistently rational. As such, it is an ahistorical . . . phenomenon and remains autonomous and free” (7). The identification of the self solely with the rational mind/consciousness and “a universal/male subject,” Smith

argues, resulted in the “peripheralization” or marginalization of women’s identities, since the identities of women have been disassociated from the mind/intellect and reduced to the reproductive capacity of the female body under patriarchal domination (11). Thus, in order to de-center the notion of a unilateral/essential self and disclose falsity of the conventional meanings associated with the female body; Chicana feminist writers, particularly Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, have re-conceptualized identity and re-envisioned women’s relations to their bodies.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, even though Anzaldúa embraces the romantic view that there is in each individual the spirit of the whole universe, she also takes into account the effects of socio-cultural determinants on one’s identity. In an interview with Christine Weiland, Anzaldúa defines herself “as a citizen of the universe” (118), yet what Anzaldúa understands by the term “universal” is far from the dominant conception of selfhood as a “universal white male subject” identified by Smith and Watson; for Anzaldúa does not posit a totalizing, pre-linguistic concept of self, but rather emphasizes the fluidity and diversity of identities. Hence, her work simultaneously focuses on cultural difference and aims to create a common ground between individuals by bridging those differences. Moreover, she puts equal emphasis on both bodily and spiritual experiences; and like Smith and Watson, she criticizes the western Cartesian thinking for its dualism and strict rationalism that disembodies human subjects and separates the material and spiritual realms.

In their life writings, Anzaldúa and Moraga challenge the notion of a disembodied subjectivity, as they reveal the interrelatedness of memory and physical body. In both *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the re-collection of life stories and personal, collective experiences parallels the representation of the body in its fragments. The fragmentation signifies not only the socio-cultural conflicts that Chicanas face, but also the multiplicity of oppressions transmitted onto and felt by the bodies of women of color. Remembered experiences cause pain and suffering and create a feeling of being torn apart; yet they also initiate the process of self-awakening and enable the narrators to form a Chicana feminist viewpoint. This chapter, thus, will examine and analyze the ways in which the narrating subjects in both works reflect their sense of identity and cultural confusion by representing the symbolic fragmentation of

the *mestiza* body. The chapter will also focus on how the narrators re-member and give meaning to their personal stories or experiences in the process of self-transformation.

Both *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, convey the authors' conception of subjectivity in terms of the comingling of the body and mind as well as the private and the communal. For them, identity is a complex construct that cannot be explained through rigid binaries, as the *mestiza* self is placed at the constantly changing interstice where the seemingly opposite concepts become united. Both Moraga's and Anzaldúa's narrators first experience the clash of those opposing realities through their bodies through which they interpret socio-cultural experiences.

Sidonie Smith's understanding of identity, as conveyed in her article "Identity's Body," provides an insight in thinking through Moraga's and Anzaldúa's conceptualization of a Chicana subjectivity. In the article, Smith explains that subjectivity is not a non-corporeal experience, since bodies place individuals within space, time and community. Thus, the body is situated at the intersection between the personal and the communal, positioning individuals "as demarcated subjects separate from others and" locating them "in bounded temporalities and trajectories of identification" (*Autobiography and Postmodernism* 267).

For Moraga and Anzaldúa, re-collecting experience and recognizing the cultural conflicts and oppressions they face due to the conventional meanings attributed to their bodies—as women of color—constitute the first phase of their transformation process. As they depict the physical body in its fragments, they both try to come to terms with their sense of cultural ambiguity, pain and suffering; and "dismember the bodiliness of the universal subject" (*Autobiography and Postmodernism* 287).

According to the critic Leslie Bow, through a focus on the relation between life writing and the body, *Loving in the War Years* reflects the concerns of the French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous (9). In "the Laugh of the Medusa," an article published in 1975, Cixous argues that writing involves an exploration of the experiences of the physical body and enables women to recognize the effects of patriarchy on their sense of selves. According to Cixous, censoring the body in writing means hindering "breath and speech at the same time" (880). Like Moraga and Anzaldúa, Cixous criticizes essentialist

arguments about gender, since she rejects any equation between body and nature. According to Cixous, women's "relation to their bodies are culturally inscribed," since bodies are constructed in culture, language and representation (Shiach 18). Similarly, Moraga's and Anzaldúa's works disentangle the dichotomy between nature and culture, as they disclose how biology becomes entangled with socially constructed definitions of identity and cultural values.

Both Moraga and Anzaldúa reveal the ways in which women's bodies have been abused or exploited. Even though they focus on the connection between physical body and cultural identity, like Cixous, they present a critique of the deterministic notion that "Anatomy" only is "the irreducible granite at the core of a woman's being" (*Subjectivity, Identity and the Body* 12). By re-appropriating representations of their bodies in the inscription of memories, the narrating subjects of both *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* reveal the anguish such an essentialist viewpoint has caused in their lives.

For Cixous, writing is an activity that includes "the very possibility of change" as she explores "the subversive and political possibilities of a writing practice" which she calls "'feminine'" (Shiach 9-10). Cixous's term "feminine writing" does not only refer to writings by women, since men's writing—if it contains the same features or similar concerns observed in writings by women—can also be classified as *écriture féminine*. Yet, Cixous notes that currently, women are closer to this type of writing than men (Susan Sellers xxix).

Cixous's *écriture féminine* deconstructs the gender roles and re-formulates them in a way to restore the equality between the sexes. In this respect, Moraga's and Anzaldúa's life writings comprise the features of "feminine writing," as the narrators in both works connect language to the body and desire in order to affect a change within their communities. Thus, they make use of writing as the means for conveying their political views. Furthermore, the mingling of poems, essays and short stories in both *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera* is congruent with Cixous's understanding of *écriture féminine* as a subversion of the traditional forms of "narrative like the novel" (Bow 7). For Cixous, poetry, in particular, is an integral part of "feminine writing," since it enables the poet to disclose unconscious thoughts and feelings that she has

repressed (“The Laugh of the Medusa” 879-880). In order to explore the unconscious, “the archaic,” Cixous incorporates myths and dreams in her texts (Schiach 80), which parallel Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s focus on mythical elements and dreams through poems, essays and short narratives. Regarding the blending of genres in Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s works, Kate Adams explains that,

. . . [I]n Cherríe Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years*, the extrapoetic is invited into the poem’s space. In this text’s mix of genres, the poem’s work is continued beyond the poem’s end by essay, confession, story and dream. . . . Dream, in fact, opens Moraga’s book and provides her with its title. Beyond that, dream and Moraga’s use of it stand in synecdochal relation to the function of genre-bending in the *poemario* [book of poems] as a whole, for dream-time interrupts the usual chronologies of narrative, and dream-image interrupts the calculations of expository analysis . . . . Gloria Anzaldúa’s work also pushes the boundaries of *poemario*. . . . [It] begins and ends with poetry, allows poetry to interrupt prose, to illuminate it, to introduce it. . . . (134-135)

In both works, the narrators’ communication of experiences, ideas and personal insights through a non-chronological narrative reflect the shifts in the authors’ memory and combines the conscious with the unconscious. Furthermore, as they blur the boundaries between genres, the narrators in both works also ponder on “the limits of gender,” since, as Shari Benstock notes, “genre itself raises questions about gender,” for the “two terms are etymologically linked” (20). Thus, through the hybrid mixture of literary forms and disordering of the sequence of events, both Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s narrating subjects circumvent the rigidity of gender/genre boundaries and comment on the act of writing as a reflection of their stories of transformation.

With regard to Moraga’s work, Leigh Gilmore argues that in blending languages and genres, and “combining poems written over several years with essays;” Moraga’s narrator explores “the places of change textually” while disclosing the process of writing her work (196). Yet, in spite of their exploration of writing as a transformative act, Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s works differ from Cixous’s *écriture féminine* in terms of their maintenance of sentence structures. As Bow mentions, the “coherence” of Moraga’s text and its “acceptance of the rules of” grammar contrast Cixous’s conception of “feminine writing” as a practice that subverts linguistic arrangements through “a sweeping away of syntax” (7-9). According to Bow, the parallelism between

Moraga's work and Cixous's *écriture féminine* is in its multiplicity of narrative forms and subversion of linear chronology as "a narrative of psycho-sexual revelation," but not in terms of sentence patterns (9).

Through "feminine" writing, Moraga's and Anzaldúa's narrators acquire visibility and re-gain speech which has been curtailed by a patriarchal discourse. As Smith explains, "If the body is the source of an identity that leads to oppression, the sexed body, the racialized body, then the body must be taken back and honored [in the process of] writing" (*Subjectivity, Identity and the Body* 177). In line with Smith's argument, Moraga's and Anzaldúa's life writings communicate their sense of cultural and sexual identity through narratives and poems that represent the experiences of bodies as rooted in culture and language.

In Anzaldúa's work, the first reference to physical body appears in the opening poem of the chapter entitled "The Homeland, Aztlán/*El otro México*." In the poem, Anzaldúa establishes a connection between the land divided by the border and her own body:

1,950 mile-long open wound  
                                   dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,  
                                   running down the length of my body,  
                                   staking fence rods in my flesh,  
                                   splits me    splits me  
                                   *me raja me raja* (24)

In the stanza above, Anzaldúa conveys her feeling of being torn apart by externally imposed boundaries, and she imagines that her body is divided by the border like the land. According to McRuer, in "this passage, Anzaldúa foregrounds an ongoing history of oppression" which is "inscribed" not only onto the land but also "onto the poet's very body" (133). Likewise, in the "Introducción to the First Edition" of *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga's narrator presents an image of the split/torn apart *mestiza* body, as she identifies with the Aztec moon goddess *Coyolxauhqui* who, according to the myth, was "severed into pieces in the war against her brother [the war god and the Sun, *Huitzilopochtli*]" (iii). In *the Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (1993), Moraga's narrator presents a brief account of the myth explaining that *Coyolxauhqui* had planned to kill her mother—the Earth Goddess *Coatlicue*—who was pregnant with

Huitzilopochtli in order to prevent his birth “rather than submit to a world where War would become God:”

Huitzilopochtli is warned of this by a hummingbird and vows to defend his mother. At the moment of birth, he murders Coyolxauhqui, cutting off her head and completely dismembering her body. Breast splits from chest splits from hip splits from thigh from knee from arm and foot. Coyolxauhqui is banished to the darkness and becomes the moon, la diosa de la luna. (Moraga 73)

The myth reflects the emergence of a warrior culture, of patriarchy; and it complements the title of Moraga’s work. For Moraga being a “queer” Chicana feminist is like living in the war years, for it necessitates a constant struggle against the sexist and heterosexist norms of patriarchy as represented by *Huitzilopochtli* in the myth. In Moraga’s interpretation of the mythical story, *Coyolxauhqui*—the daughter—desires to eliminate a male-defined motherhood to protect the society from wars, avarice, prejudice and women-hate. Yet, *Huitzilopochtli* “comes to the defense of patriarchal motherhood, kills la mujer rebelde, and female power is eclipsed by the rising power of the Sun/Son” (*The Last Generation* 74). The narrator’s reference to *Coyolxauhqui* is also related to conflicting cultural spheres and the simultaneity of oppressions which split her body/identity. She wishes to fuse the fragmentary aspects of her selfhood within her *mestiza* body and consciousness as reflected in her work. As she mentions in “Foreword to the Second Edition” of *Loving in The War Years*, “Maybe I could re-member Coyolxauhqui at least in this writing, this preaching, this praying, this home” (vii).

In “Introducción to the First Edition,” Moraga clarifies the meaning of the title of her book, *Loving in the War Years*, by opening the section with a symbolic sueño or dream. In the dream, she is in a prison camp with her lover during wartime. A young soldier who works as a guard befriends them, and the narrator asks him whether or not they are going to die. In response, the soldier tells them that the possibility of death is almost inevitable. The narrator thinks of fleeing and asks for the soldier’s help, yet he reminds her of the impossibility of escaping. Her dream ends with the recognition that no matter what danger awaits her, she and her lover “must . . . remain with each other,” since “it is [their] being together that makes the pain” or “even . . . dying, human” (viii).



In “Guerrilla Autobiographics,” Leigh Gilmore argues that “metaphors of war,” such as the one observed in Moraga’s *sueño*, symbolize “how women are imprisoned by sexist and homophobic ideology” (185). The title poem “Loving in the War Years” which appears in the section “Like Family: Loving on the Run,” is one of Moraga’s “companion [or love] poems” that seek “for places of ‘loving’ offered Chicanas” (Gilmore 187). The poet addresses the poem to her lover and presents an analogy between “loving” and trying to survive “in the war years,” as she imagines that she and her lover are in “a broken world” where “bombs split outside” (23). For the poet, “loving in the war years” calls for the risk of living without “home” or becoming an outcast as she tells her lover that “We’re all we have got. You and I / maintaining this war time morality / where being queer / and female / is as warrior / as we can get” (24). Thus, the poem’s ending conveys the meaning of the title of Moraga’s work in which the narrating subject pictures herself engaged in a symbolic war to create a private/communal space where she can pursue her desires and arrive at her own self definitions. Gilmore argues that the idea of survival, as reflected in the poem, is transformed “into [an] agency of resistance” (190). Hence, Moraga makes use of life writing as the means for creating sites of resistance against dominant cultural narratives and “renders . . . autobiographical [elements]” (Gilmore 187) both in her poems and essays.

The subtitle of Moraga’s work, *lo que nunca pasó por sus labios [what never passed through her lips]*, signifies “how, during the war years, loving is silent yet present, spoken between interstices and gaps of words [or] language.” For Moraga, the “queer” Chicana feminist “always” faces the risk of “having her voice/passion silenced” (Cutter 204). Nonetheless, contrary to the meaning expressed in the subtitle, *Loving in the War Years* becomes an articulation of “what never passed” through the narrator’s “lips,” since the work gives voice to her desires that have been repressed by male-identified, homophobic communities.

Prior to “Loving in the War Years,” Moraga introduces another poem entitled “Loving on the Run.” According to Gilmore, the title of the poem reflects “the compulsory transience of” “queer” love and reveals “the difficulties of seeing, being seen, seeing oneself” as homosexual (187). The poem opens with an image of the speaker’s lover on

a corner, having a conversation with a number of boys. She and the boys “talk about women” (19), and ironically in order to be able to articulate her desire for women, the lesbian seeks entrance to the group of heterosexual boys. Thus, the beginning of the poem presents a heterosexually defined space where the speaker’s lover looks for a false sense of belonging by disguising her desire within a heterosexual discourse. Yet, as the poem proceeds, the speaker reconfigures the “neighborhood until it can be read as a lesbian space,” since the pursuing stanzas present a scene of “sexual intimacy” between the speaker of the poem and her lover on a porch (Gilmore 187-188). Hence, the poet depicts the lovers’ attempts to carve a space for themselves out of a hostile territory as they wish to come to terms with their sense of displacement and re-create or re-interpret the environment in which they live in a way that suits their own needs. The poem, thus, becomes an expression of what Gilmore calls “a war of territory” with the perpetrators of hegemonic cultural codes over “place,” meaning and “identity” (187); which is observed not only in the poem, but also throughout Moraga’s work as a whole.

Following the love poems noted above, the narrator conveys a short narrative entitled “The Slow Dance” in which she explores her unfulfilled lesbian desire. The story opens with the narrator’s recollection of observing two women, Elena and Susan, dancing together. As she watches how Elena, the “butch,” directs the dance by moving Susan around the dance floor, she wishes to be in the place of one of those women, particularly Elena with whom she identifies. Thus, the “text becomes a site where desire is appeased but not fully experienced” (*Latin American Writers on Gay and Lesbian Themes* 258). Elena’s movements make the narrator remember her “mother’s words” which suddenly rise up inside” her: “A real man, when he dances with you, you’ll know he’s a real man by how he holds you in the back” (25). Pondering on the statement, she remembers an image of her father dancing in an awkward and coy manner with her mother. The reminiscence of her father’s timidity awakens in her a desire to fill in his position in order to be able to “provide for” (26) her mother. Hence, her appreciation of Elena arouses in her a yearning to express her lesbianism in her family relations, yet the thirst for articulation is always coupled with a feeling of guilt and being fragmented, which is explored in the poem “The Voices of the Fallers.”

“The Voices of the Fallers” is a dramatic verse narrative which appears at the very beginning of the literary work depicting the body of the poet as falling to the ground in its fragments. Leslie Bow argues that “In the poem, the fall is both the punishment for the ‘sin’ of” sexual transgression “and the hope of redemption if ‘falling/in love’ is the only counter-action to violence” (10). The poet describes “the fall” as follows:

I was born queer with the dream  
of falling  
the small sack of my body  
dropping  
off a ledge  
suddenly. (xv)

From the instance of fall, the poet’s body begins to fragment into pieces, as her body parts separate from the whole and plummet to the ground. The fragmentation and the separate pieces of her body represent the bits and scraps of an identity which is at the point of disintegration. As she describes the symbolic fall, the poet wants the readers to listen to the sounds coming from her falling body which reflect the external pressure/oppression felt by it:

*Listen.*  
can you hear my mouth crack  
open the sound  
of my lips bending  
back against the force  
of the fall? (xv)

*Listen.*  
Put your ear deep  
down  
through the opening  
of my throat and  
*listen.*

.....

In the stanzas above, corporeality is tied to the poet’s psychological condition, as the internal voices coming from her “throat” mirror her response to the trauma of “the fall;” yet, it also signifies her emergence out of silence and reclamation of her female voice. Thus, her falling represents a threshold on the way to a new selfhood, for she shatters

the boundaries of her former self in the process of falling into pieces which is depicted in the following stanzas:

her shoulder first  
tumbling  
off  
the cliff the legs

following  
over  
her head . . . (xvi)  
.....

her body's  
dead

silent

collision  
with the sand. (xvii)

Behind the metaphorical representation of the split body, the poem articulates the underlying desire to re-construct identity. As Yarbro-Bejarano mentions, Moraga's poetry constantly takes apart the entire female body, recognizing how it has been appropriated, and attempting to re-claim it" (5). Thus, the poems invoke the myth of *Coyolxauhqui*, as they reflect the process of taking apart and uniting the separate parts of *mestiza* identity. As Moraga explains,

In 1977 when I wrote the first poems of what later would become part of *Loving in the War Years*, I had never heard of Coyolxauhqui . . . . Without knowing, I looked for Coyolxauhqui in these dark wartime writings of twenty years ago, the dim reflection of my own pale moon-face lighting my way. . . . The month that *Loving* was to be released, I escaped to the anonymity of México, somehow thinking the distance would shield me from a more profound banishment waiting to happen. Still, I thought only of return, someday, to my Califas, where I could be all my fragmented parts at once: the re-membered Coyolxauhqui taking up permanent residence in Aztlán. (iii-iv)

The desire to be "all [these] fragmented parts at once" is also articulated in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. For Anzaldúa, the formation of *mestiza* consciousness involves recognizing the cultural body as a fusion of the numerous facets of Chicana/*mestiza* identity. Furthermore, in Anzaldúa's writing, the body is situated at the

border where the spiritual and the somatic intermingle. As the critic George Hartley conveys, “Body, mind, soul and writing are intimately and intricately interwoven . . . as they are in the embodied experiences of colonialism in the borderlands” (43). Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator represents this interrelatedness through the symbolism of “the serpent” which will be further analyzed in the next chapter. The serpent stands for the negotiation between the narrator’s multiple selves, as she moves between multiple borders or the various aspects of her identity like a slithering serpent. It also represents both the female body and the psyche, and becomes a metaphor for her spiritual/sexual awakening. Smith argues that,

Through the text the body is deployed in endless metaphors of movement, meaning, and metamorphosis, the most provocative of which is the metaphor of the serpent, privileged here against a western mythology that denigrated the serpent. The serpent as female im/personation and as agent provocateur insinuates itself throughout the narrator’s text. . . . (*Subjectivity, Identity and the Body* 177-178)

In the chapter “Entering into the Serpent,” Anzaldúa’s narrating subject conveys the corporeal and the metaphysical meanings combined within the image of the serpent. In the brief section entitled “*Ella tiene su tono*” meaning “She grasps her animal soul,” she mentions that “Forty years it’s taken me to enter into the Serpent, to acknowledge that I have a body, that I am a body and to assimilate the animal body, the animal soul” (48). Her entrance “into the serpent” and her “animal soul” represent her access to her instinctual side and reclamation of native traditions. The “animal soul” rejects the patriarchal myths and Cartesian rationality that ignores the body. Rather than adopting those myths, she embraces the mythology and spirituality of pre-Columbian America before the emergence of the patriarchal system of domination in indigenous México.

In the first chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the narrator conveys the Mexican myth which reflects the emergence of the patriarchal order before the Spanish conquest. She describes the arrival of the Aztecs in present-day Mexico City by referring to the story of the eagle and the serpent which is represented in the flag of México:

*Huitzilopochtli*, the God of War, guided them [the Aztecs] to the place (that later became Mexico City) where an eagle with a writhing serpent in its beak perched on a cactus. The eagle symbolizes the spirit (as the sun, the father); the serpent symbolizes the soul (as the earth, the mother). Together,

they symbolize the struggle between the spiritual/celestial/male and underworld/earth/feminine. The symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the “higher” masculine powers indicates that the patriarchal order had already vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order in pre-Columbian America. (27)

Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator reverses this patriarchal myth by embracing the serpent figure as a representation of her shifting *mestiza* identity and border spirituality that “create[s] new ways of thinking [and] displace the boundaries between inner/outer, subject/object, spirit/matter and other dichotomous terms” (Keating 20). Thus, Anzaldúa’s narrator acts as the bridge between material and spiritual realms and diverse cultural spheres, since she is the new *mestiza* who embraces diversities, “the officiating priestess at the crossroads” (102).

The new *mestizas* connect and transcend not only the binaries between the sky/the underworld, the soul/the body, and light and dark; but also between the past and the present through memories which are ignited by the physical environment that surrounds them. In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga argues that her task as an author is to find ways to gain access to memory:

Finding the path to memory is my task as an artist. Writing for the “Ancestors,” as playwright August Wilson has said, that’s my job. To remember ancestral messages, to counter the U.S. culture of forgetfulness. Sometimes memory is no more than a very faint scent. You sniff it, take a step, stop and sniff again, and gradually make your way along a path to a people. (168)

As the quotation above suggests, Moraga views remembering and gaining access to memory as the means to preserve cultural identity and heritage. In “Sour Grapes: The Art of Anger in America,” Moraga’s narrator points to the indispensable role of memory in creating collective identities within the Mexican culture and emphasizes its tangibility: “Mexicans, however, don’t forget. Anything. We remember our land daily in the same smells, same seasons, same skies, same Sierras, same street signs . . .” (162). However, Moraga regards remembering not only as an act of recollecting past events, but also as an act of illuminating those experiences to give them new meanings and to decipher and shed light on the untold. At the end of the work, she illustrates her point by citing the words of the American essayist, poet and sculptor Jimmie Durham: “We, you and I, must remember everything. / We must especially remember those

things we never knew” (213). Thus, the narrator equates remembering with knowing and views her writing as the means for uncovering personal and collective truths. Likewise, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the act of remembering is also both individual and communal, since the narrator locates her experiences within the history of her people. Like Moraga’s narrator, Anzaldúa’s narrating subject focuses on the relation between cultural identity and memory which is stimulated through the remembrance of the environment in which she lived:

For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland. Woodsmoke curling up to an immense blue sky; woodsmoke perfuming my grandmother’s clothes, her skin. The stench of cow manure and the yellow patches on the ground; the crack of a .22 rifle and the reek of cordite. Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded *tortilla*. My sister Hilda’s hot, spicy *menudo*, *chile colorado* making it deep red, pieces of *panza* and hominy floating on top. My brother Carito barbecuing *fajitas* in the backyard. (83)

Thus, both Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s texts reflect the narrators’ self-identification as Mexicans through “images,” “emotions” (83) and sensations emanating from the cultural and physical milieu that surround them. As Smith and Watson explain,

Memory, apparently so immaterial, personal and elusive, is always implicated in materiality, whether it be the materiality of sound, stone, text, garment . . . or the materiality of our very bodies . . . . Memory is evoked by the senses—smell, taste, touch, sight, sound—and encoded in objects or events with particular meaning for the narrator. (*Reading Autobiography* 27)

Furthermore, in both works, remembering is turned into a source of power, since it enables the narrating subjects to author their experiences in a way that earns them what Smith and Watson call “agency.” The term “agency” refers to the idea that humans are active performers or agents of their lives rather than passive conveyors of cultural values and codes of behavior. Despite the fact that there are many ways in which the idea of human agency can be called into question, Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s life writings create a textual space of agency where they subvert the power of cultural institutions. Therefore, in the process of writing, they become agents of liberation through the recognition, analysis and reinterpretation of experiences of oppression; for in Chicana feminist works “agency is conceptualized” by the construction of “an oppositional tactic of resistance” (*Reading Autobiography* 54-55).

Furthermore, in her article “Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness,” Teresa de Lauretis argues that “agency” is related to “the unconscious as ‘a point of resistance,’” for it has the potential to transcend “the mechanisms of social determination” (125). Since the unconscious is the reservoir of “the repressed,” it is also “the source” of emancipation from the “socially enforced calls to fixed identities” (*Reading Autobiography* 57). In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa adopts the notion of the unconscious as agency that informs the process of her writing.

In “*Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink*,” Anzaldúa’s narrator reflects on the act of writing as the means for establishing a connection to her inner sense of self and to her unconscious—an issue which will be further analyzed in-depth in the ensuing chapter. She indicates that writing makes her identify the sources of her pain and confusion. The title of the chapter is a reference to the Aztec belief that writing is related to wisdom: “For the ancient Aztecs, *tlilli, tlapalli, la tinta negra y roja de sus códices* (the black and red ink painted on codices) were the colors symbolizing *escritura y sabiduría* (writing and wisdom)” (91). For Anzaldúa, writing and identity are intimately connected, as she mentions how “[b]eing a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being queer . . .” (94). Despite the fact that writing creates uneasiness, it enables her to examine inner conflicts and interpret personal experiences. The soul and the body also become connected in the process of writing, for she says “When I write it feels like I’m carving a bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart—a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body” (95). The statement reveals the ancient beliefs and traditions of her ancestors regarding “the importance for the individual of establishing an individual ‘face’ or ‘countenance’ within indigenous cultures,” since self-knowledge is “expressed through the metaphor of ‘possessing a face’” (Spencer 70). Thus, Anzaldúa’s narrator describes her acquisition of self-awareness by making use of the metaphors of the body: her “face” and “heart.” Furthermore, she describes writing as “a sensuous act” (94) and relates it to physical/bodily experiences. In the subchapter “Something to Do With the Dark,” she describes her internal confusions in the process of writing through stark bodily images:

The toad comes out of its hiding place inside the lobes of my brain. It’s going to happen again. The ghost of the toad that betrayed me—I hold it in



my hand. The toad is sipping the strength from my veins, it is sucking my pale heart. I am a dried serpent skin, wind scuttling me across the hard ground, pieces of me scattered over the countryside. And there in the dark I meet the crippled spider crawling in the gutter, the day-old newspaper fluttering in the dirty rain water. (94)

In the excerpt above, the narrator depicts the painful process of inscribing the thoughts inside her mind. In an article entitled “Writing the Self: Gloria Anzaldúa, Textual Form, and Feminist Epistemology” which appears on the website *Michigan Feminist Studies*, Tara Lockhart argues, “in terms of writing, [the ghost of the] . . . toad” can be a reference to “a previous idea” which “did not develop or existed as the narrator intended, thus resulting in betrayal” (Lockhart). As a result of the “sipping of strength” from the writer’s “veins” by “the toad” or thought, she changes “into an empty shell (dried serpent skin) and an injured entity (crippled spider) devoid of meaningful content (day-old newspaper)” (Lockhart). In order to express her conflicts and fears, the narrator, at first, confronts them; which results in her feeling of being fractured into “pieces.” The “dried serpent skin” represents her transformation in the act of writing, as the “skin” of the older self “is scattered over the countryside” by “the wind” (Anzaldúa 94). The spider that she sees functions as an allusion to the “Spider Woman” of Teotihuacán in Aztec mythology, “a female deity identified with earth, water and precious stones and with shamanic powers related to weaving and warfare” (Nash 336). The narrator draws on the mythical figure as she makes an association between weaving and writing, for she portrays her work as “a mosaic pattern” or “weaving pattern” with “numerous overlays of paint” and “leitmotifs” (Anzaldúa 88). Besides, she depicts her writing process as a “shamanic state” (91) in line with the ancient Aztec belief that weaving is connected to spiritual/shamanic forces.

In addition to the spiritual connotations of the writing practice she describes, the narrating subject conveys the idea that the existence of “the toad” depends on “the writer’s material, bodily being,” since it augments “itself through a parasitic ‘sipping’ of strength from” the narrator’s “veins and heart” (Lockhart). Hence, writing and self-transformation begin on the level of the speaker’s body, for at the end of the chapter she proclaims that “. . . only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed. And for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth’s body—

stone, sky, liquid and soil” (97). Yet, reflecting the influence of Native spirituality, Anzaldúa conceives of bodies not only as material entities, but also as spirits. Thus, for Anzaldúa, writing becomes a process of psychic, spiritual metamorphoses that draws on bodily experiences and functions as a device for articulating a change of consciousness.

In *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, both Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s narrators communicate their stories of change through writing of memories that disclose the connection between personal, bodily and socio-cultural experiences. In order to examine the ways in which the recollection of memories and the physical body relate to one another and reflect the narrators’ sense of cultural identity, an in-depth analysis and comparison of Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s works is necessary.

In *Loving in the War Years*, most of the narrated memories consist of the narrator’s recollection of experiences related to her social location and situated within her family. In *Autobiographics*, Gilmore argues that “Through poems, journal entries, and short essays, Moraga explores how the autobiographical is embedded in the discourse of the *familia* [or family]” (186). For Moraga, “The familia forms a nexus” in which she wishes to construct her ethnic and sexual identity, and “represents a highly charged and shifting place of loving and combat” (Gilmore 186). Moraga’s concept of “familia” does not only refer to her own family or to the conventional understandings of families as units constructed through blood ties, but also to her community building with Chicanas or women of color in general. As a displaced Chicana, Moraga’s narrator depicts her quest for a home signified through the word “family” by representing “relationships and places that do and do not feel like home” (Gilmore 190).

In her short narratives, Moraga’s narrator presents her experiences and memories within the “familia” through “the voice of a literary persona” named “Cecilia” who represents her “alter ego” (Cloud 92). According to Lourdes Torres, Cecilia can be interpreted as a representation of “a coming-into-consciousness Cherríe” (247). Through Cecilia, the narrator represents her identity as split into two, as Cecilia stands for her former/younger self who is contrasted to her adult, transformed selfhood.

In the short narrative entitled “It Is You, My Sister, Who Must Be Protected,” Cecilia or Moraga’s narrating/narrated persona conveys her memories regarding her Anglo father.

The narrating subject addresses the story to her sister who, in the words of Cecilia's mother, must not hear or be protected from the family secret she discloses to her. The mother's preference to reveal the concealed matter to Cecilia is related to her view of Cecilia's character as "peculiar" or "queer," for the narrator tells that unlike her sister, she is thought to be "worldly and full of knowledge when something goes queer" (4).

At the beginning of the story, Cecilia articulates her lack of knowledge about her father whom she thinks of as a figure representing the mainstream society and defines him as the "*queer I run from. This white man in me*" (2). The statement signifies Cecilia's desire to leave the identity mask that she has worn as a result of her acculturation in Anglo values and her wish to re-adopt her Chicana heritage as represented by her mother.

In an interview with Rosemary Weatherston, Moraga explains, she used the word "queer" not to mean that her father is a homosexual—for she clearly states he is a heterosexual man—but rather to represent him as a man who is far from conventional definitions of masculinity. Yet, she mentions that the adjective "queer" also refers to "the vulnerable place" (64) in her father or his passivity, a feature that she does not want to see in herself. Hence, she clarifies another meaning of the word "queer," as she tells "I was talking about how that's that queer I run from—that person in me who is passive, or who's beaten down or who can't express herself fully" (64). Thus, as the critic Paul Allatson notes, in the short narrative, "Moraga's equations that 'Anglo' equals 'passivity,' that 'passivity' equals 'queerness,' and that this 'queerness' equals 'whiteness,' have the effect of disparaging her (not Chicano father) from a machista Chicano perspective" (183). She judges her father according to masculine Chicano values that she internalizes as part of her identity in order to avoid the passive gender role attributed to women. To illustrate her father's passivity or inability to articulate his feelings, the narrator reveals the story about her Anglo grandfather who abandoned his son and one day returned to visit him for only a few hours. When her father tells Cecilia the story, she asks him, "Were you angry with him, Dad? How did you feel?" (3). Cecilia's inquiry is suggestive of her father's lack of reaction or unresponsiveness. Furthermore, by conveying her father's story, Cecilia represents the Anglo grandfather as an absent figure both in her father's life and in her own memories. She contrasts her

blurry mental picture of him with the vividness of the imagery she brings forth when she thinks about her Chicano grandfather:

I thought of the old man now sleeping in his grave somewhere in Canada, blameless as an English saint. In our children's imagination, he was so unlike the other one, the dark one, who died a young and defiant death. We had seen that grandfather's grave with our own eyes, touched with our own hands the dry and broken earth which held the stone. . . . [G]randma would brush it off carefully with the crumpled kleenexes she drew from her purse, until the letters of his name, *Esteban*, shown through as vividly as the man they chose to remember at that moment. (3)

Cecilia conveys the above-mentioned details to present her cultural confusion or identity conflict which dates back to her ancestors who come from different social backgrounds. Yet, in spite of Cecilia's sense of aloofness from her father's culture represented by his family lineage; she, nevertheless, wishes to identify with him after her mother reveals his lack of sexual/emotional intimacy in their relationship. For Allatson, by conveying her mother's secret, Moraga's narrating subject depicts "the gulf between her father's 'Anglo' nature and her Chicana mother's unmet expectations of a 'real' man-husband-lover" (281-282). In response to her mother's revelation, for a moment, Cecilia imagines her father as a homosexual man when she tells that "but daddy does seem to love men. It's true. You know how he always gets so excited with any ol' new friend he makes at work. Like a kid" (5). Cecilia desires to find a connection to the father by hypothesizing that he and she may be sharing the common feature of being "queer." Accompanying the yearning to re-identify with her father; more significantly, Cecilia recognizes her deep affection and love for her mother and wishes to compensate the lack that her mother feels by imagining herself leaving her chair and touching her the way she wishes to be touched. Hence, Cecilia substitutes "her father's body with her own" by "[interpolating] both her lesbianism and her body into the gender and sexual structures of her Borderlands family" (Allatson 283) and picturing herself as her mother's lover. Furthermore, her recognition of the intimate connection between her and her mother is marked by a desire to embrace her Chicana self, for as Adams argues, throughout the book, Moraga's narrator describes her embracement of Chicana/o culture by conveying how "[t]he mother-daughter bond" is an indispensable factor "[in her envisioning or] revisioning of Chicana identity" (Adams 139). Thus, by conveying her love for the mother, the narrator re-affirms her connection

to the mother's ethnicity/culture and wishes to fill in the "emotional and sexual absence in her and her mother's lives" left by her father (Tatonetti 228-229).

Upon the mother's wish, Cecilia acts as a mediator between her parents and tells her father that he "need[s] to let [his] feelings out more" in a conversation with him during a "ride back to the airport" (6). As Allatson notes, the conversation between "the emasculated father" and "masculinized daughter" is marked by a lack of communication; and since they are unable to "complete questions or answers," Cecilia likens the dialogue with her father to "'beating a dead horse' (13)" (Allatson 282). After the conversation, Cecilia begins to sense her own need to be loved and recognizes her vulnerability or her being unsafe in a world full of hatred and prejudices stemming from racism, sexism and heterosexism. Towards the end of the narrative, she conveys her anxiety and mistrust by exclaiming: "When is someone going to make love to me unequivocally? Me. I am worried about me, mother sister brother father. All of you. Boarding the plane, I want to say, *Daddy, I am worried about me*" (Moraga 7). Cecilia is worried about herself, for she realizes the danger of being a "queer" Chicana and expresses her disillusionment at the unfruitful conversation she had with her father by once again conveying her vision of "a dead horse" as being beaten by the plane. Thus, despite Cecilia's attempts to understand better and communicate with her father, the gap between them remains unbridgeable.

In the pursuing poem entitled "La Dulce Culpa [The Sweet Guilt]," the poetic voice wishes to balance contradiction or retribute the familial aperture by creating a sense of safety/belonging as she expresses her strong identification with and love for her mother:

What kind of lover have you made me, mother  
 who drew me into bed with you at six/at sixteen  
 oh, even at sixty-six you do still  
 lifting up the blanket with one arm  
 lining out the space for my body with the other

as if our bodies still beat  
 inside the same skin  
 as if you never noticed  
 when they cut me  
 out  
 from you. (8)

In the stanzas above, the body becomes the main bridge connecting the speaker to the mother. She specifies her desire to gain access to her mother's legacy which becomes her means to apprehend the world: "Mamá / I use you like the belt pressed inside your grip / seething for contact / I take / what I know from you and / want to whip this world into shape" (9). "The belt" in the mother's hand represents her "disciplinarian will" and concern over the daughter's sexual "non-conformity;" yet, in the last stanza, the poet expresses her desire to "overcome conflict" (Allatson 282) and establish dialogue with her mother, as she tells "I promise you / I *will* fight back / Strip the belt from your hands / and take you / into my arms" (10). Thus, the title of the poem reflects how the feeling of guilt emerging from disapproval and controversy are rhetorically transformed into intimacy or connection between the daughter and the mother.

Moraga's focus on the role of her mother in the shaping of her identity parallels Hélène Cixous's views on maternal function. Cixous argues that "a woman is never far from 'mother' . . . who stands up against separation" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 882). Yet, Cixous does not refer to motherhood in essentialist terms, but rather she focuses on its social function in the formation of subjectivity. As Susan Sellers explains, Cixous puts emphasis on "how the inscription of the rhythms and articulations of the mother's body which continue to influence the adult self provides a link to the pre-symbolic union between self and m/other, and so affects the subject's relationship to language . . . himself and the world" (xxxix). Hence, Moraga, like Cixous, reveals how her identity is related to her mother, to her mother's culture/language and reflects on the role of her mother's legacy in her relation to the outside world.

Apart from Cixous, the Bulgarian-French philosopher, sociologist and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva focuses on "maternity" as "a bridge" between bodily drives and the symbolic order of language (Oliver 5). She presents a critique of Lacan's view that entrance into the realm of culture necessitates "the repression of the primary relationship to the maternal body" (Butler 164). Thus, Kristeva revises Lacan's theory regarding the individual's access to the symbolic order/language through the paternal figure or law which he terms "the Name-of-the-Father" (*Lacan: Ecrits* 152). Instead, she focuses on the maternal function in the construction of cultural/linguistic identity,

and differentiates between “the semiotic” or “the imaginary” and the “symbolic” in her theoretical work entitled *New Maladies of the Soul*:

By symbolic, I am referring to the discursive practice that adheres to the logical and grammatical rules of speaking. And by the *imaginary*, I mean the representation of identification strategies . . . that mobilize the image of the body . . . accompanied by a grasping of the mother’s image. (Kristeva 103)

“The semiotic” or “the imaginary” refers to “the sensory” experiences of the body which include “sound, melody, rhythm, color [and] odors;” whereas the symbolic comprises signification in language “manifested in linguistic signs” (Kristeva 104). Yet, for Kristeva, linguistic signs are related to the physical body as the imaginary is instilled in the symbolic realm and “the semiotic” of maternal presence or bodily existence is transmitted onto and reflected by “the symbolic.” In aligning the maternal with “the symbolic,” Kristeva criticizes Lacan’s conception of linguistic order as maintained by paternal law. In the light of Kristeva’s argument, Moraga’s work engages in “the semiotic,” since Moraga’s narrating subject articulates her connection to the mother through images, colors, smells and sounds she identifies with her, and constructs her identity by embracing her language and culture.

Unlike Moraga’s narrator, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrating subject does not specifically refer to a close affinity between her and her mother, yet articulates her wish to re-invigorate the indigenous heritage of her Chicana/o family as a whole. Since both of Anzaldúa’s parents were *Mexicanos*, she specifies that she did not have access to the Anglo culture and community during her childhood and adolescent years in “the Rio Grande Valley also known as the Magic Valley situated in the Southeastern tip of Texas” (Herrera-Sobek 266). As a Chicana who was raised in the Magic Valley in the same period with Gloria Anzaldúa, María Herrera-Sobek describes the place as “one of the poorest areas in the United States,” where “Segregation was in full force,” and Mexican Americans, African Americans and Anglos lived in “separate sections” of town (266-267). In line with Herrera-Sobek’s explanation, in the second chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator tells that until she went to high-school, she had not “seen” any “white” people before, since she grew up in an isolated, rural Chicana/o community.

In “Homeland, Aztlán: *El Otro México* [The Other Mexico],” as Anzaldúa’s narrating subject provides a mytho-historical background of Chicanas/os and focuses on her family’s detached life style in the rural landscape of the border town, she wishes to “reterritorialize the Chicano population” in Aztlán (Herrera-Sobek 267). Thus, she re-emphasizes a Native heritage and confronts privation in order to re-create a sense of belonging and consolidate her ties to the land of her ancestors.

Unlike Anzaldúa, in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga depicts Aztlán as “a decidedly less attractive destination,” as she thinks that it “cannot be extricated from an androcentric, homophobic nationalist discourse that [she] feels has hitherto neither overcome its mythical blindness, nor accorded her lesbianism a space or voice” (Allatson 279). In the poem entitled “Passage,” she conveys her critique of the myth of the patriarchal Aztlán. In the first stanza, the speaker of the poem talks about “a very old wound in [her]” caused by “a memory / of some ancient / betrayal” (38). The “ancient betrayal” she refers to is the historically grounded subordination of Chicana women so as to forward the nationalist Chicano cause and promote the patriarchal ideology in the name of protecting the Chicano family against “corrupting” foreign influences. Nonetheless, in her disavowal, the poet re-envisioned Aztlán as “lesbian-friendly” (Allatson 280) by exposing the illusory aspect of the conventional Chicano myth in the following lines from the poem: Your mouth opens, I long for dryness. / The desert untouched. / Sands swept without sweat. / *Aztlán*. / Pero, es un sueño. / This safety of the desert. / My country was not like that. / Neither was yours” (38). She depicts the “safety of the desert” as a “sueño,” a dream with no relevance to reality, and contrasts it with the space she creates for herself, her “own private Aztlán” (Allatson 278) she longs for. She concludes the poem by noting that women have always bled before uncontrollable forces. Thus, she recognizes that the quest for a safe place is propelled by a delusion, since there is no safety within the patriarchal, hegemonic structures of power.

In a similar way, in the first chapter of *Borderland/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa provides a dismal account of borderlands history and depicts the border as a dangerous place to live in, especially for Mexican women and Chicanas. In the subchapter entitled “*El Cruzar del mojado/Illegal Crossings*,” Anzaldúa’s narrator explains the economic



reasons behind the illegal immigrations from Mexico to the north of the border: the reduction of the exchange value of the peso, the dependency of Mexico on American corporations and high rates of unemployment. As a result, Mexicans are left with no choices but to move north of the border to re-gain economic self-sufficiency or remain in Mexico and live amidst poverty. Yet, as the narrator mentions, the illegal refugees or “wetbacks” who manage to cross the border only find “suffering” and “pain,” as their labor is exploited by “big farming combines and farm bosses” who “don’t have to pay federal minimum wages or ensure adequate housing or sanitary conditions” (34). Among the refugees, the Mexican woman suffers the most, as she encounters sexual violence besides the misuse of her labor. As the narrator mentions,

Often the *coyote* (smuggler) doesn’t feed her for days or let her go to the bathroom. Often he rapes her and sells her into prostitution. She cannot call on county or state health or economic resources because she doesn’t know English and fears deportation. . . . She can’t go home. She’s sold her house, her furniture, borrowed from friends in order to pay the *coyote* who charges her four to five thousand dollars to smuggle her to Chicago. She may work as a live-in maid for white, Chicano or Latino households for as little as \$ 15 a week. (34)

Thus, as the above-mentioned account describes, border-crossings involve hazardous encounters for Mexican women, which controverts Aztlán’s promise of safety. In Anzaldúa’s description, the north of the border is no longer a secure home for the Mexicana where “she is prey to a sense of physical helplessness” (35), or in Moraga’s words, “open / to forces / beyond [her] control” (38). The narrator bitterly concludes the chapter by presenting a stanza from the poem that opens *Borderlands/La Frontera*: “This is her home / this thin edge of / barbwire” (35). In these lines, she replaces the pronoun “my” which appears in the opening poem with “her,” as she brings together her own personal experiences with those of other Chicanas and Mexican woman. Even though the “thin edge of / barbwire” is not a sheltered place from the external threats, Anzaldúa, nevertheless, specifies that it is a home where her identity is grounded.

Throughout the chapter, Anzaldúa’s narrating subject moves between the communal home and the private home in which she focuses on the stories of her family members. After presenting a historicized picture of the landscape as examined earlier in the

introduction section, Anzaldúa conveys her memories of the place where she grew up and describes how she and her family labored as farmers to earn a living:

To make a living my father became a sharecropper. . . . Altogether we lived on three successive Rio farms; the second was adjacent to the King Ranch and included a dairy farm; the third was a chicken farm. I remember the white feathers of three thousand Leghorn chickens blanketing the land for acres around. My sister, mother and I cleaned, weighed and packaged the eggs. (31)

Anzaldúa's depiction of her family's life in this landscape, yet, is not picturesque, since the narrating subject recounts the injustices suffered by her family members in times of drought and when their lands were taken away from them:

"Drought hit South Texas,' my mother tells me. . . . "The next year, the drought continued. . . . A smart *gabacho* lawyer took the land away *mamá* hadn't paid the taxes. *No hablaba inglés*, she didn't know how to ask for time to raise the money." My father's mother, Mama Locha, also lost her *terreno*. (30)

As the narrator conveys her grandmother's story told to her by her mother, she discloses the process in which "The history of dispossession is transmitted orally from one generation to the next" (Saldívar-Hull 212). The historical displacement is particularly felt by the narrator's paternal grandmother when she asks to be buried beside her deceased husband in the cemetery which is all left behind the lands of their ancestors. Yet, even the cemetery is enclosed by a fence erected by the landowners, preventing their visits to the graves. Besides, there is a sign that reads, "'Keep out. Trespassers will be shot'" (30). Thus, Anzaldúa provides a poignant portrait of life in the borderlands as she describes the harsh environment in which her family lived and the exploitative politics of Anglo colonizers that led to the dislocation of *mestizas/os*.

In the second part of *Borderlands/La Frontera* which consists of narratives in verse, Anzaldúa's narrating subject continues to examine the story of her grandmother whose economic/cultural subjugation as noted above is accompanied by sexual maltreatment. In a poem entitled "Immaculate, Inviolable: *Como Ella* [Like Her]," the poet describes her grandmother's difficult life and abuse under patriarchal domination. She introduces her childhood memories describing her grandmother's affection for her as she mentions that even though the grandmother did not live with them, she frequently visited the

family and gave her some dollars as a gift. She remembers sitting by her grandmother as she smokes tobacco and watching “smoke escape between chapped lips / curl through her white hair and pink skull” and notes that “They said at sixteen [her grandmother’s hair] had turned white overnight” (130). She describes the scars on the grandmother’s face and her clothing telling that she always wore mourning clothes following the deaths of her husband, her brother and her son— Anzaldúa’s father. The poet’s descriptions of the grandmother’s physical appearance mirror the exploitation she faced both physically and psychologically. She conveys the grandmother’s account of the *papagrande*’s (grandfather’s) abusive attitude and his lack of respect toward her sexually; and reveals that *papagrande* had children from another woman apart from those of the grandmother: “I can almost see Mamagrande’s face / watching him [papagrande] leave / taking her two eldest / to play with his other children / watching her sons *y los de la otra* [and those of his other woman] / grow up together” (132). Through the story of her paternal grandmother, Anzaldúa’s poetic persona questions the subordinate status of Chicanas in marriage and the “commodification” of women’s bodies. The title of the poem, thus, is bitter in that; it refers to how the grandmother’s integrity as an individual is violated, yet in the eyes of her granddaughter she is “immaculate” as a woman who stayed strong. By connecting her experiences of racial, economical, sexual oppression with those of her grandmother, she creates a narrative of identification on the basis of common experiences amongst Chicanas.

Likewise, in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga’s narrating subject conveys her sense of unity/identification with the community of women of color in the United States by focusing on her social experiences and presenting her Chicana feminist politics. Throughout the literary work, she provides an in-depth analysis of the issue introduced in the opening narrative “It’s You My Sister Who Must Be Protected” by reflecting on the complexity of her socio-cultural position as the daughter of a Chicana mother and an Anglo father. Like Anzaldúa’s text, *Loving in the War Years* reveals how memories and the cultural markers of the body intermingle and gain meaning within the communal experience and history. Smith and Watson note that in her life writing,

. . . Moraga directs attention to the very materiality of her skin as the source of her political consciousness. In this way she joins skin to the body politic, observing different significations of “light” and “dark” in different

communities. Taking her body as a narrative point of departure, she elaborates, through multiple modes of address, her complex cultural position as lesbian, biracial Chicana, and daughter of working-class parents. (*Reading Autobiography* 50)

In the essay entitled “La Güera” which means “fair-skinned,” Moraga’s narrator describes how her skin color as a lighter-skinned Chicana provided her with the privileges that her Chicana mother and her fellow darker-skinned Chicanas/os lacked due to racism and classism. In this essay, she reveals the conventional meanings associated with light skin color and unravels their impact on her sense of cultural identity. As a Chicana of mixed ethnic heritage, she does not place herself within rigidly defined identity categories, but rather admits her position at the intersection between Anglo American and Chicana/o cultures. Paula M. L. Moya argues that in “‘La Güera,’ Moraga articulates her desire to work through the fragmenting conditions she has faced in her own life” (475). In order to illustrate her point, Moya cites Moraga’s words describing her in-between position as a light-skinned Chicana: “I think: *what is my responsibility to my roots: both white and brown, Spanish-speaking and English?* I am a woman with a foot in both worlds. I refuse the split. I feel the necessity of dialogue. Sometimes I feel it urgently” (Moraga 50). Yet, as Allatson notes, Moraga’s search “for dialogic bridging” is complicated by conflict, for she is the Chicana “around and over whom ethnic, linguistic, and sexual classifications battle” (Allatson 272). Consequently, her desire for communication produces a new cultural space beyond mere reconciliation, as the synthesis she seeks becomes essentially altered by both Chicana/o and Anglo cultures. For this reason, Allatson describes Moraga’s understanding of her socio-cultural positioning as “a transcultural conundrum” for while she wishes “to embody a cultural, racial and sexual bridge between Anglo and Chicano,” she also seeks “a return to a ‘feminine’ space of certainty” as represented by her “Spanish-speaking,” “brown” Chicana mother (272). Thus, unlike Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Moraga’s work is further confounded by the existence of an Anglo father who facilitates her access to the mainstream culture; and depicts the inner conflict resulting from such cultural ambiguity as well as the process of realizing and recovering from the state of being torn apart. Therefore, in “La Güera,” Moraga’s narrator describes her journey toward coming into a consciousness of who she is by identifying her place amidst clashing cultural domains. She expresses her will to accept all parts of her identity

including her Mexican side which was paradoxically denied to her by her Chicana mother who wished to integrate her children into the Anglo community in order to provide them with a better future. As the critic Christine Cloud explains,

Having been a victim of discrimination all her life because of her darker complexion, Moraga's mother refused to teach her and her siblings Spanish in hope that they would become less affiliated with their ethnicity. To that end, [she] also tried to convince her daughter to distance herself from the Chicano/a community and become Anglo. (87)

In spite of her being distanced from Mexican culture, Moraga's narrator seeks to re-attain her lost identity by empathizing with her mother who, she explains, left school at an early age in order to earn a living for her family. She contrasts her more privileged upbringing to that of her undereducated mother's marginalized status when she describes herself as "the very-well educated daughter of a woman who, by the standards in this country would be considered largely illiterate" (42). She mentions how she "wore" her education "with a keen sense of pride and satisfaction," and says: "my head propped up with the knowledge; from my mother, that my life would be easier than hers. I was educated but more than this, I was 'la güera'—fair-skinned" (43). In conveying such a prospect, Moraga's narrator both discloses her sense of guilt for subduing her Chicana identity to make her "whiteness" visible and presents a critique of the racist and classist outlook of a society that judges according to skin color. As Cloud argues "'passing' in white society left this particular young *güera* feeling as if she were moving through life as a fake, a fraud hiding behind her light skin, feeling guilty for doing so" (87).

Her feeling of guilt makes Moraga's narrating subject realize her own prejudices and internalized oppression, which has produced the distance between herself and her Chicana heritage. As she explains,

[A]t the age of twenty-seven, it is frightening to acknowledge that I have internalized a racism and classism, where the object of oppression is not only someone *outside* my skin, but someone *inside* my skin. In fact, to a large degree, the real battle with such oppression, for all of us, begins under the skin. I have had to confront the fact that much of what I value about being Chicana, about my family, has been subverted by anglo culture and my own cooperation with it. (46)

With this recognition in mind, Moraga's narrator re-claims the cultural identity of her mother in order to define herself on her own terms rather than from an Anglo perspective. She describes the moment of self-awareness she went through after hearing Ntozake Shange's reading at a concert, which made her discern the illusory aspect of her social identity:

There, everything exploded for me. [Ntozake Shange] was speaking in a language that I knew, in the deepest parts of me, existed, and that I ignored in my own feminist studies and even in my own writing. What [she] caught in me is the realization that in my development as a poet, I have in many ways, denied the voice of my own brown mother, the brown in me. I have acclimated to the sound of a white language which, as my father represents it, does not speak to the emotions in my poems, emotions which stem from the love of my mother. (47)

Ntozake Shange's reading triggers Moraga to remember and know her roots that she has been taught to disclaim and forget. She realizes that in making use of her "light-skin privilege," she has ignored her attachment and intimate relation to her mother and Chicana/o culture. From this instance of coming into awareness, she searches for ways to integrate into her ethnic community and perceives the impediment that her Anglo heritage creates in her attempts to restore her connection to the Chicana/o community.

In a pursuing essay entitled "Like a White Sheep I Followed," Moraga's narrator comments on the ways in which her skin color has determined her social place. She articulates her resentment at the fact that her light skin has erected barriers between her and the Chicana/o community. She expresses her desire to be in unity with this community which has sometimes rejected her due to her "light skin privilege." The narrator opens this section by articulating her wish to look like her darker-skinned cousins:

*I am having my face made up, especially my eyes, by a very beautiful Chicana. The make-up artist changes me entirely for only five dollars. I think this is a very low price for how deep and dark she makes me look. When I was growing up, I looked forward to the ways when my skin would toast to match my cousins', their skin turning pure black in the creases. I could never quite catch up, but my skin did turn smooth like theirs, oily brown—like my mamá's, holding depth, density, the possibility of infinite provision. (87)*

In the narrator's imagination, "having [her] face made up" and having the same skin color as her cousins, will make her look more like a Chicana and enable her to express better her identification with her ethnic group. She remembers her efforts as a child to convince her classmates she and Teresita are cousins. Yet, as she seeks a way back into her Chicana roots, she faces the prejudice of her Chicana/o friends who think of her as someone different and encounters discrimination within her own ethnic community as well. She comments on her exclusion by explaining that "I feel at times I am trying to bulldoze my way back into a people who forced me to live them in the first place, who taught me to take my whiteness and run with it" (87). In the section, the narrator mainly describes how her friendships at school broke up due to these racial barriers. An instance of such a break-up occurs when one of her Chicana friends named Vivian Molina stops talking to her after hearing she and Moraga are "in different leagues now" (87-88). Likewise, her companionship with her highschool friend named Rocky Hernández, whom she describes as a bright student, is damaged when Rocky is placed in a lower group in rank—"business and general education" (88)—while the narrator herself is placed into the group of college preparation due to her Anglo looks. From then on, she explains, Rocky and she rarely talked to each other.

Reflecting on those experiences, she comes to realize how her mixed ethnic identity as a "light-skinned" Chicana has created the distance between her and her fellow Chicana/os in a society based on what Alvina A. Quintana calls "color consciousness" (120). As Cloud argues, within the Chicano/a community, Moraga "became an object of mistrust as well" (88), which is also observed in her Chicano friend Tavo's statement that "he didn't trust güeros," since "at anytime" she "can . . . use [her] light skin privilege" and "decide [she] is suddenly not Chicana" (89). Tavo's bias makes her realize the difficulty involved in trying to abolish misunderstandings and the societal gaps between her and the members her ethnic community. Towards the end of the essay, she indicates that when she encountered Rocky Hernández with her infant son at a supermarket after a very long time, she once again perceived how deeply ingrained those social barriers were:

Rocky and I talked. It was clear we both still felt some affection for each other from those early grade-school days. I touched the kid's cheek complementing her on him. When she turned to enter the checkout line, I

wanted to stop her, invite her to dinner, not let her out of my sight again. But I hesitated, wondering what more we could have to say to each other after so many years. I let her go. (90)

Thus, the narrator's remarks suggest their different cultural and social backgrounds have produced the sense of remoteness between her and Rocky. Both of them "realize that the distance between them will never be bridged. Ultimately, it is because of this mutually perceived unbridgeable gap that rather than 'stop her, invite her to dinner'" she "Let her go" (Cloud 88-89). Hence, the title of this section, "Like a White Sheep I Followed," indicates the narrating subject was made an outsider to her own community and was forced to choose her Anglo side by detaching herself from her Chicana heritage.

Prior to the above-mentioned essays, in "Like Family: Loving on the Run," Moraga presents an autobiographical poem entitled "Later, She Met Joyce" where she explores the constructed relation between skin color and social status/roles. In the poem, the poet reflects on her experiences by creating a third-person/omniscient perspective and referring to herself as "she" or more specifically as "Cecilia." The first stanza depicts the adolescent Cecilia befriending a Chicana girl named Joyce at school and together forming a "girls' gang with code words & rhymes" (13). Yet, in spite of their close friendship, they get "separated by the summer" without an apparent reason. According to Allatson, "The summer marks a temporal barrier between adolescent intimacy and parameters of divergent Chicana adulthoods" (Allatson 275). The poetic voice tells that after a while, Joyce quitted coming "to cath-lic school" and when Cecilia comes across her "after mass one Sunday" she thinks Joyce looks "more like a momma / than her childhood friend . . . wearing / shiny clothes and never getting / to college," like what Cecilia's mother "called / *a difernt claz o'people*" (Moraga 14). Joyce's entrance into the marginalized racial, class and gender category is contrasted to Cecilia's "upward class mobility" (Allatson 275), as in the last stanza the poetic persona sarcastically concludes that "Later that year, / Cecilia was picked / by the smart / white / girls / for president" (Moraga 15).

Despite the fact that her integration into the Anglo society enabled Moraga to transgress the subordinated/domesticated space of the Chicana; she feels disdain over her forced isolation from her mother's culture. In "For the Color of My Mother," a poem which



pursues “La Güera,” she seeks a connection to her Chicana roots through the repetition of the line “I am a white girl gone brown to the blood color of my mother speaking for her” (52). The phrase describes Moraga’s reclamation of her body and the cultural identity of her mother in order to avoid defining herself only from an Anglo perspective. Like Moraga’s metaphorical usage of “blood color,” in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa employs the same symbolism in the opening poem of the first chapter: “Wind tugging at my sleeve / feet sinking into the sand / I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean . . . / *Miro el mar atacar* [I watch the sea attack] / *la cerca en* [the fence in] Border Field Park / *con sus buchones de agua* [with its water hyacinth], / an Easter Sunday resurrection / of the brown blood in my veins / . . . my heart surges to the beat of the sea” (23-24). In these lines, the poet draws an analogy between the waves of the sea at the border and the “blood” in her “veins” which signifies the resurgence or revival of the poet’s Mexican legacy. Thus, within the textual frameworks of both *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, “brown blood” signifies the narrators’ ties to their ethnic heritage. In Moraga’s poem, the ensuing lines convey such a unifying vision by presenting an image of “dark women” (53) connected by a common heritage:

as it should be,  
dark women come to me  
sitting in circles  
I pass thru their hands  
the head of my mother  
painted in clay colors  
touching each carved feature swollen eyes and mouth  
they understand the explosion, the splitting  
open    contained within the fixed expression  
they cradle her silence  
nodding to me (53)

According to Yarbrow-Bejarano, “the head” of the mother “signifies a possible ‘bridge’ among women of color. It’s also exemplary of the symbolic chain in Moraga’s work which links ‘brownness’ and the indigenous to the idea of home” (14). The poet desires to be taken in the envisioned group of “dark women” who can comprehend the “silence” and provide shelter, since they have experienced the same eruption, the same violence

and partition. Thus, in Moraga's writing, "dark" skin color becomes a metaphor of cultural identity, as she searches for ways to establish a sense of belonging to her own community and a common ground with Chicanas and other ethnic women.

Likewise, in an essay entitled "My Brother's Sex was White. Mine, Brown," Moraga's narrating voice explains how she has identified with Chicana culture and her mother Elvira's identity by relating her sexuality to ethnicity. In this brief account of her childhood and adolescent memories, the narrator points to the gender distinctions within the family. She describes how the women in her family were supposed to "wait on" (82) the male members:

If somebody would have asked me when I was a teenager what it means to be a Chicana, I would probably have listed the grievances done to me. When my sister [JoAnn] and I were fifteen and fourteen, respectively, and my brother a few years older, we were still waiting on him. . . . I write "were" as if now, nearly two decades later, it were over. To this day in my mother's home, my brother and father are waited on by the women including me. . . . In those early years, however, it was mainly in relation to my brother that I resented providing such service. For unlike my father, who sometimes worked as much as seventy hours a week to feed my face every day, the only thing that earned my brother my servitude was his maleness. (82)

The narrator describes her brother's coming into the house with his male friends "exhausted from an afternoon's basketball" and "demanding, 'Girls, bring us something to drink'" (82-83). Apart from "providing service" to her brother, she also remembers "making [her brother's] bed" each day, "cleaning his room" every week, "shining his shoes, ironing his shirts" and lending him the money she has earned "house-cleaning for twelve hours so he could blow it on one night with a girl" (84). Reflecting on her subordination by her brother, the narrator feels betrayed by him like *Coyolxauhqui*, the moon goddess, who, according to the Aztec myth, was cut into pieces by her brother *Huitzilopochtli*. She explains that unlike her brother, she does not have much desire to identify with the Anglo culture, as she thinks that if she chooses to pass as an Anglo, she will still be considered as secondary to the white men just because she is a woman. Hence, she discerns the reason why her brother did not feel the need to change, because he was "*Male in a man's world. Light-skinned in a white world,*" thus, in her sister's words "He got the best of both worlds" (84). Hence, the narrator reveals that contrary to her brother's social positioning; as a Chicana lesbian she has faced inequity within both

the Anglo and Chicano cultures. In “Traitor Begets Traitor,” she expounds upon her subordination as she mentions that in her culture male children, in general, are privileged within the family:

Ask, for example any Chicana about her children and she is quick to tell you that she loves them all the same, but she doesn't. *The boys are different.* Sometimes I sense that she feels this way because . . . through her son she can get a small taste of male privilege . . . . The daughter can never offer the mother such hope, straddled by the same forces that confine the mother. As a result, the daughter must constantly earn the mother's love, prove her fidelity to her. The son—he gets her love for free. (93-94)

In line with the argument above, Moraga's narrating subject conveys a memory regarding her mother's privileging of the brother over her. In a journal entry dated “April 1980,” she describes how her mother ended their conversation over the phone after she had received another call from her son. Pondering on the memory, she notes, that “*I am relieved when I hang up that I did not have the chance to say more. The graceful reminder. This man doesn't have to earn her love. My brother has always come first*” (94).

Towards the end of the essay, the narrator re-structures her sexuality based on her Chicana roots in order to overcome racial and patriarchal barriers:

If I were to build my womanhood on this self-evident truth, it is the love of the Chicana, the love of myself as a Chicana I had to embrace, no white man. Maybe this ultimately was the cutting difference between my brother and me. To be a woman fully necessitated my claiming the race of my mother. My brother's sex was white. Mine, brown. (86)

Her coming at this conclusion is not only the result of the brother's domineering attitudes but also the outcome of her Anglo father's reticence. As mentioned earlier, she views her father as the stranger, the queer partly because of his lack of parental support and intimacy. She describes the father's distance to the children during the time of the mother's stay at hospital. At the time of the mother's illness, she comments,

. . . I saw that he couldn't love us—not in the way we so desperately needed. I saw that he didn't know how and he came into my tía's [aunt's] house like a huge lumbering child—awkward and embarrassed out of his league—trying to *play* a parent when he needed our mother back just as much as we did just to keep him eating and protected. . . . I knew how he was letting us all down, visiting my mother daily, unable to say, “The children, honey, I

held them. They love you. They think of you,” . . . Years later, my mother spoke of his visits to hospital. . . . “I knew that I had to live,” she told us. “I knew he would never take care of you children.” (85)

During her visit to the hospital with her sister and aunt, the narrator recognizes once again her connection to and intimacy for the mother as she tries to keep her tears upon the warning of her *tía* not to cry: “*But mi tía [my aunt] had not warned me about the smell, the unmistakable smell of the woman, mi mamá [my mother]. . . . And when I catch the smell I am lost in tears, deep long tears when you have hold your breath for centuries*” (86). At that moment, she explains, she realized that the smell of her mother meant vitality, solace and peace to her. Thus, the desire to be identified as a Chicana and to embrace the culture of the mother, and “the brown” in her, emanates from her experiences in her childhood and adolescent years. Her sexual and cultural identity gain meaning in reference to the mother to whom she relates through her body, the color of her skin and through language. Thus, her love finds expression in and through “*color, texture and smell*” (86) to which she attributes specialized and cultural meanings.

In the story entitled “Pesadilla” which means “nightmare,” Moraga’s narrating voice elaborates on the personal/social connotations of skin color just as she does in “La Güera,” “Like a White Sheep I Followed,” “For the Color of My Mother” and in the above-mentioned narratives. In “Pesadilla,” the narrator refers to herself in the third person singular through her alter ego, Cecilia. The story opens with a brief account which describes Cecilia’s thoughts on “color:”

*There came the day Cecilia began to think about color.*

*Not the color of trees or painted billboards or the magnificent spreads of color laid down upon the hundreds of Victorians that lined the streets of her hometown city. She began to think about skin color. And the thought took hold of her and would not give; would not let loose. So that every person—man, woman and child—had its particular grade of shade. And that fact meant all the difference in the world. (30)*

As the initial remark suggests, “‘Pesadilla,’ describes Cecilia’s initiation into an American reality founded on color consciousness and social injustice” (Quintana 120). “Pesadilla,” is the story of two women, Cecilia who represents the narrator and an African American woman named Deborah. In the story, Cecilia and Deborah wish to build a life of their own by moving in their new apartment in Brooklyn. Yet, their hope

of living a peaceful life is destroyed when they realize that someone has broken into their house and drew “his parts” (32) on their newly painted walls during their absence. Along with the drawings, there is also an angry curse written by the intruder who specifies that he is “black.” She describes Cecilia’s and Deborah’s encounter with the terrifying scene as follows:

Entering the apartment, her heart pounding, Cecilia led the way down the long hallway—a dark labyrinth to the *pesadilla* that awaited them. At the end of it, she could see their bedroom, the light burning. A tornado had hit it! No, this was not the result of some faceless natural disaster. This was a live and breathing thing. An animal. An animal had broken in. And the women broke down. What kind of beast they cried would do this? (31-32)

The beginning of the story “dramatizes Moraga’s critique of white supremacy and the dominant ideology that systematically destroys potential and promise, eliciting both the inner-city black man’s angry reaction and Cecilia’s and Deborah’s cognition of their powerless status” (Quintana 120). After the incident, Cecilia begins to feel that there is always someone else “living amongst” them, “some white man somewhere” with “monosyllabic [names]: Tom, Dick, Jack” (34). Thus, Cecilia’s nightmare reminds her of the presence of white patriarchy under which she is at risk and insecure.

In her attempts to ignore the possibility that the inscriptions on the wall may be “about her” (Torres 248), she assumes that the intruder is someone who knows Deborah:

And Cecilia knew if he had had the time and sense enough he would have even written her lover’s name out there upon the bedroom wall. He wanted Dee, too. Even in his hatred, he wanted Cecilia’s lover. Everybody, it seemed, had something to say about Deborah’s place on the planet. (32)

As she determines that the black man’s writing “is addressed to Deborah,” “Cecilia refuses to admit that this intruder has the ability to script and read her” (Torres 248). Nonetheless, the intruder’s insistence on “compulsory heterosexuality” reminds Cecilia of “the dangers of being with Deborah” (Torres 249) and indicates that Cecilia’s and Deborah’s free-will is impaired by external pressures. Thus, the story depicts the destruction of Cecilia’s and Deborah’s “romantic naiveté” and “portrays Cecilia’s rude awakening into the ‘real’ world of inequality and hatred” (Quintana 120-121).

In the aftermath of the “nightmare,” Cecilia and Deborah seek “relief from the city” by staying “in the home of friends by the Hudson” (Moraga 32). During this time, Cecilia feels more composed and safer; yet she soon discerns that this feeling of “safety” comes from pretending to be “white,” and realizes how in her unconscious mind, being “white” and being “safe” have become interrelated:

Cecilia found herself breathing more deeply than she had in months. She felt calmer somehow. A feeling she had left somewhere, she thought, back in California.

*But what? . . . What exactly was it?*

*The smell?*

*The light?* She held the bottle to pour. Yes, both these things, but . . . “Salud.” She mimed a toast in the air, pushing back the thought coming at her, her heart speeding up.

*It was . . . white*

*It was whiteness and . . . safety. (33)*

Cecilia realizes how “like [newly painted] apartment wall” which is marked by the intruder, “whiteness” is an “illusion of safety,” as it constantly “attracts dirt” (Torres 249). She perceives that hiding behind her light skin is not the solution, for like the wall she is constantly inscribed by racism, sexism and heterosexism. Thus, Cecilia goes through a transformation of consciousness and begins to untangle the illusion as well as the normative thoughts that she has unconsciously adopted. Through her symbolic nightmare, and her subsequent awakening, she seeks a way out of both external and internalized oppression.

In the midst of the nightmare, Cecilia witnesses Deborah’s going through an attack—it is suggested that Deborah is suffering from epilepsy—which makes Cecilia realize her lack of agency in the face of misfortunes that enter into their lives, as she ponders that “*her loving couldn’t change a thing*” (35). Deborah’s fit appears in the story as another “pesadilla” that coincides with/arises at the time of the intrusion of the black man (Torres 250).

During her fit, Deborah hallucinates that “[a] man is coming down on her with the back of his hand. The hand enlarging as it [advances]—broad and blacker than she has ever seen it” (Moraga 34). Thus, Deborah’s vision is “the embodiment of both Deborah’s

and Cecilia's nightmares (one of the nightmares embodied within the narrative titled 'Nightmare')" (Torres 250). It is not only Deborah's dreamy picture but also Cecilia's, for it is Cecilia herself who visualizes and re-creates Deborah's hallucination in her mind, it is she "who is struck by the blackness of the hand," not Deborah (Torres 250). The "black hand," thus, appears to be a symbol of Cecilia's awakening into "color consciousness" (Quintana 120), as "the blackness" reminds Cecilia of her identity as a woman of color which she has tried to conceal. At the time of Deborah's attack, Cecilia senses that she has transformed into a different person after recognizing her unsafety. As she searches for Deborah's pills, she begins to feel numbness in her chest, which makes her remember the first time she had the same feeling, the time when she saw her mother crying "elbows dug into the kitchen table, yellow, the photograph curled into her hand, yellow too, tears streaming down her cheeks" (35). The memory of her mother's tears mingling with her own reminds the narrator of her primary identifications with culture, sex, ethnicity and family. Both the reminiscence of her mother's crying and the "pesadilla" she and Deborah go through, "function as a reminder of the heaviness of family, the 'inescapability' of a certain kind of desire, the 'inescapability' of raced, classed, gendered history, the 'inescapability' of betrayal" (Torres 250). Hence, the desire to construct family, the desire for love is always complicated by the weight of the inevitable.

After Deborah recovers from her attack and falls into sleep, Cecilia begins to remember her times as a child with insomnia. She realizes that even in those times she was struggling against a fear which resided inside her:

Getting up six and seven times a night, locking and re-locking the doors. Praying in whispers the same prayers over and over and over again, nodding into sleep, resisting. Resisting the pictures the dreams would bring. . . . Locking and re-locking the doors. Keeping the fearful out, while it wrestles inside without restraint. (36)

The fears of Cecilia's childhood, thus, are perpetuated within the context of the nightmarish quality of lives lived under the threat of racism, sexism and heterosexism during her adulthood. In such a world, fear is felt both from the inside and the outside, as the narrator closes the story with this "pesadilla:"

*There is a man on the fire escape. He is crouched just below the window sill. I could barely catch the curve of his back descending, but I have seen the movement. I know it is the animal, returned.*

*The figure suddenly rises to attack . . .*

*DEBORAH!*

*The dark woman looking in through the glass is as frightened as I am. She is weeping. I will not let her in. (37)*

In the quotation above, the “man on the fire escape” represents the presence of patriarchy. The “dark woman” who looks “through the glass” functions as a symbol of Cecilia’s alter ego, her dark side which observes the world behind the “safety” of “whiteness” or “the glass” that she has constructed to shield herself from danger so far. Yet, since she discerns the falsity of this “glass,” she realizes that danger awaits her whether or not “the glass” exists.

Like Moraga’s story of “Pesadilla,” in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrating voice focuses on a literal and symbolic nightmare she experienced in a semi-conscious state during her operation in a hospital room. In the second part of the literary work, her poem entitled as “*Matriz sin tumba ‘o el bano de la basura ajena’ [Womb without tomb ‘or the bath of other people’s trash’]*,” which is written wholly in Spanish, the poet deals with her congenital illness—her “early menstruation” due to “a hormonal imbalance”—and “her subsequent hysterectomy and near death experience in 1980” (Keating 38-39). In the fourth chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator refers to her first period which occurred when she was only “two or three years old (64):”

*By the worried look on my parents’ faces I learned early that something was fundamentally wrong with me. . . . The secret I tried to conceal was that I was not normal, that I was not like the others. I felt alien, I knew I was alien. I was the mutant stoned out of the herd . . . . She felt shame for being abnormal. The bleeding distanced her from others. Her body had betrayed her. (64-65)*

In the extract above, the narrating subject describes her sense of isolation from her community due to the labeling of her body as “abnormal.” By conveying her feelings of alienation, she calls into question the social construction of “normalcy” and expresses her resentment at her being objectified by the people around:



Her soft belly exposed to the sharp eyes of everyone; . . . Their eyes penetrate her; they slit her from head to the belly. *Rajada*. She is at their mercy, she can do nothing to defend herself. And she is ashamed that they see her so exposed, so vulnerable. She has to learn to push their eyes away. (Anzaldúa 65)

This brief memory of on her traumatic childhood experiences function as a background for the poem “*Matriz sin tumba*.” In the poem, similar to the way Moraga situates her body, her skin-color within a narrative that describes her fears; Anzaldúa connects her physical illness with psychological unrest, disclosing the ways in which her body is marked by the patriarchy represented by the medical profession. In the poem, the poet depicts the pain of her body during the removal of her womb as a vivid and metaphorical account of her struggle against oppression, maltreatment, subjugation and silencing. The title of the poem refers to “the mainstream Anglo-American conversion of the mestiza’s womb/matrix . . . into mere trash,” as the doctors throw the removed womb into the waste, in other words, deny “the organ that brings forth new life,” “the rites of death” (Hartley 45). Hence, Anzaldúa discloses how “the (pro)creative power of the women of color’s womb” is “policed, devalued” and becomes a tool “for enslaving women” (Hartley 41). The hysterectomy that the poet undergoes, thus, signifies not only a physical loss, but also a loss of social identity in a society where a woman’s worth is viewed merely in terms of reproductive function. As a result, according to George Hartley, the poetic voice begins to feel like “the alien trash of the dominant [patriarchal] culture” (42-45). Consequently, throughout the poem, she depicts her desire to overcome the sense of having been rejected as well as her internalization of the oppression she feels through her body.

The first lines of the poem depict the alienating scene of the clinic room: “Tendida estoy en una cama angosta / calzones empapados de sangre [I am lying down on a narrow bed, / underpants soaked in blood]” (158). The opening lines, thus, present a nightmarish scene to be explored in the poem, for the setting becomes an exteriorization of the poet’s inner condition and nightmare. As she lies in the hospital bed with “swollen mouth / vomiting something yellow / . . . repeating senseless words,” she surrenders to “a taste of . . . ether” and begins to hallucinate about “an explosion of algo [something] inside her” (trans. by Hartley 45). Physical/psychic pain and “the inability to speak clearly” suggest that “in her own treatment” she is denied her own voice and

“bodily control” (Hartley 44). By presenting a picture of her restraint, the poet conveys her critique of the medical patriarchs who have turned her into an object of investigation.

In the rest of the poem, the poetic voice articulates her desire to rid herself of the internalized oppression represented as “inner trash” which she seeks to purify or “bath” through her invocation of *Tlazolteotl*<sup>2</sup>—“the goddess of filth and trash” (Hartley 47). Thus, she reflects on the connection between body and identity, between the physical and the psycho-social as she discloses how the dominant culture views her body and how this influences her inner sense of self.

Like Anzaldúa’s “*Matriz sin tumba*,” Moraga’s poem titled “You Call It Amputation” depicts women’s lack of control over their own bodies by presenting an image of a physically crippled female body. The first lines of the poem read: “You call it / ‘*amputation*’ / but even after the cut / they say the toes still itch / the body remembers the knee, / gracefully bending / she reaches down to find her leg gone / the shape under the blanket dropping off / suddenly, irregularly” (74). In spite of the fact that “the leg” is amputated, “the body” still feels the presence of the absent part which, in turn, continues to feel the existence of the whole body. According to Yarbrow-Bejarano, in the poem, “The body with its amputated parts is there and not there at the same time, much in the same way women’s bodies are theirs and not theirs, constructed as they are in the image of phallogocentric desire” (15). While the poet desires to recompensate the absence, she also realizes the inefficiency of words to achieve a sense of unity. As David Foster argues, the poem “questions the class bias inherent in assuming that writing (the symbolic) can bring back what has been lost or mutilated by history (marked on the body)” (258). She establishes “an oppositional dialogue with Virginia Woolf (one of the foremost representatives of an individually middle-class centered feminist discourse,” as she challenges Woolf’s supposition that “writing . . . can make whole what the many manifestations of violence have inscribed in a body” (258-259 Foster). Even though, like Anzaldúa’s narrator, she looks into her cultural and

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<sup>2</sup> Tlazolteotl—an alternative embodiment of [the Aztec Earth Goddess] Coatlicue—represents the condition of filth, promiscuity, or any breach and perversion of culturally sanctioned norms of sexuality (Hartley 42). This particular earth goddess of sexuality and childbirth is the eater of filth, the one to whom the defiler prays for the purification of the stench and rottenness of sexual transgression (Hartley 47).

psychological wounds by means of writing, she rejects the notion that physical suffering and lack can be cured by merely putting together words. Thus, Moraga embraces writing to express her feminist politics and to resolve psychological conflict and anguish, yet she questions the idea that the traces of bodily/physical pain can be erased by merely inscribing experiences.

In the last stanza, Moraga's poetic voice alludes to Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* through an epigraph that appears at the beginning of the poem: "*Macalister's boy took one of the fish and cut a square out of its side to bait his hook with. The mutilated body and (it was alive still) was thrown back into the sea.*" She identifies with the injured fish in the novel, telling that: ". . . I feel / the mutilated body / swimming in side stroke / pumping twice as hard / for the lack / of body, pushing / through . . . words / which hold no water / for me" (74). Hence, the last stanza "captures both the struggle to compensate for [the] lack ('pumping twice as hard') and barriers to communication erected by [the] traces of loss written on the body (. . . words / which hold no water for me)" (Yarbro-Bejarano 15). Consequently, the process of re-claiming her identity and body becomes a difficult journey with hindrances, as the poet "confronts [a] loss of self, the 'mutilated body' of the repressed individual" (Bow 2).

Similar to "You Call It Amputation," in a poem titled "the Anatomy Lesson," Moraga's poetic persona explores the damage done to women's bodies under patriarchal domination. In the poem, she presents an alternative anatomy lesson—unlike the conventional lessons conducted for scientific study—addressed to women living "in the [metaphorical] war years." In the first lines, the poetic voice tells that "A black woman and a small beige one talk about their bodies. / About putting a piece of their anatomy in their pockets / upon entering any given room" (60). The women talking "about their bodies," reflect on the ways in which they conceal parts/pieces of their identities. In the poem, the "beige" woman is the poet herself—for the color "beige" represents her hybrid cultural identity as a "fair-skinned" Chicana throughout Moraga's work—and "the black woman" appears as a representative of women of color. "The black woman" tells "the beige one" that when she enters a room of soldiers who are afraid of hearts, she should place her heart in her back pocket, for the soldiers keep their guns not in

their pockets. According to Yarbro-Bejarano, “‘the heart’ is associated with the dangers of ‘loving in the war years . . .’” (11) completing the theme introduced by the title.

In addition, the poem alludes to the rise of a militaristic patriarchal order in the Aztec society and to the “flowery wars” in which “the hearts of captives” were taken in order “to feed the sun [the war god] and keep it in motion” (Nash 339). Through the reference to Aztec history, the poet elaborates on the theme of loving and the dangers of loving, as she presents an allegorical narrative about a hidden heart and “the soldiers” who “wear guns” (60). Thus, “hearts” representing love and “guns” symbolizing external threats are juxtaposed and contrasted. While the “heart” is kept hidden, the “guns,” the violence and danger are visible. Yet, as “the black woman” explains in the next stanza, although it is concealed:

. . . the power of the heart hidden begins to be felt in the room.  
 Until the absence of the heart begins to take on the shape  
 of a presence.  
 Until the soldiers look at you and begin to beg you  
 to open up your heart to them . . .  
 ..... (60)

The black woman indicates that in spite of not being seen from the outside, the “heart” will make its presence felt. The lines function as an allusion to Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Tell-Tale Heart” in which the protagonist murders an old man with a “vulture eye,” dismembers his body and hides his body parts beneath the floorboards in order to conceal the crime from the police. When the police arrive, the protagonist begins to hallucinate that the heart of the old man whom he has murdered is beating under the floorboards, which makes him reveal his guilt (3-7). The poet draws on the story, since it contains the metaphor of the dismembered body which parallels the myth of *Coyolxauhqui* and attributes a special meaning to “the heart” as a symbol of a person’s inner sense of self and concealed truths.

In the poem, “the black woman” warns against the danger, the threat of the heterosexist patriarchy that seeks to take away “the heart:” “Do not be seduced. / Do not forget for a minute that the soldiers wear guns. / Hang onto your heart” (60). Hence, throughout the poem, “the heart” is presented as a living presence not as a dead object, and signifies the existence of love amidst the metaphorical war between the speaker of the poem and the soldiers.

Both Moraga's and Anzaldúa's works, thus, connect physicality to psychological and social domains as well as to language and speech. Although Moraga problematizes the ability of language to re-create a sense of wholeness, she recognizes its vital function "in the difficult discursive political task of building a Chicana feminist community" (Foster 259). By presenting bodily images, both authors depict the repression of female voice and minority languages in their struggle to re-gain speech. In *Loving in the War Years*, in the section entitled "A Long Line of Vendidas," Moraga's narrator interweaves language with desire, as towards the end of the essay she proclaims,

My mouth cannot be controlled . . . It is as if la boca [the mouth] had lodged itself en el centro del corazón [in the middle of the heart], not in the head at all. The same place where the vagina beats.

*And there is a woman coming out of her mouth.*

*Hay una mujer saliendo de la boca.* (133)

The statement that the mouth is located in the middle of the heart brings together emotion, language, instincts and bodily drives. By telling "that 'the Mouth is like a cunt' [the narrator] both sexualizes her voice and vocalizes her sex . . ." (Cutter 200). As Yarbrow-Bejarano mentions, "In Moraga's sexual/textual project, the mouth fuses two taboo activities: female speaking" and the free expression of sexuality, thus in "this context of speech/sex," the narrator achieves a sense of unity and wholeness (6). She describes her overcoming of silence through a depiction of her vision about a "woman coming out of her mouth" (133):

In recent months, I have had a recurring dream that my mouth is too big to close; that is *the outside of* my mouth, my lips, cannot contain the inside—teeth, tongue, gums, throat. I am coming out of my mouth so to speak. The mouth is red like blood; and the teeth, white like bones. The skeleton of my feelings clattering for attention. (132)

Throughout the text, Moraga's narrator depicts the difficulties involved in translating, in becoming a bridge between various cultural domains. The act of speech, thus, signifies both the acquisition of sexual/self-autonomy and an affirmation of cultural/ethnic identity. Thus, in Moraga's work, "[h]egemonic and minority discourses overlap" by means of "linguistic fusion" and "translation" (Cutter 201).

In the excerpt above, the narrating subject depicts the emergence of a hybrid tongue, the *mestiza/o* language. The bodily images she employs connote her re-embrace of her mother's language and identity, as "the tongue (the mother tongue?) appears to be breaking free from, and birthing itself out of, the prison of the body, the white teeth and bones, which are also clearly meant to emblemize the prison of white language (Cutter 200). Therefore, language and speech are depicted as grounded in the narrator's body.

Likewise, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in the chapter entitled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa explores the diverse languages Chicanas/os speak from a *mestizaje* perspective in order to resist linguistic hegemony. The chapter opens with a brief anecdote that conveys the narrator's childhood memory of a dentist who tells her that "We're going to have to control your tongue. . . . We're going to have to do something about your tongue. . . . I've never seen anything as strong and as stubborn" as he "clean[s] out [her] roots" (76). This concise narrative presents the issue of linguistic oppression on two levels: the restraining of women's speech/body and the suppression of the language of Chicanas/os. Like Moraga's narrator, Anzaldúa's narrating subject articulates her challenge to silence through a description of her "tongue" as untamable. The image of the "wild tongue" parallels Moraga's depiction of "a woman coming out of her mouth" and her statement that her "mouth cannot be controlled" (Moraga 133). Hence, both Moraga and Anzaldúa describe their adoption of female voice and *mestiza*/border language by articulating their defiance against the norms of patriarchy and cultural hegemony. In Anzaldúa's text, language becomes closely connected to her Chicana self. In an ensuing anecdote, she expresses her resentment at the fact that she was not allowed to use her own language at school:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. "If you want to be an American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong." (74)

Resisting the dominant culture's attempts to erase the influences of her *mestiza* tongue on her speech, she proclaims that "Wild tongues cannot be tamed, they can only be cut out" (76). She not only embraces the hybrid tongue which consists of a mixture of a

variety of dialects that Chicanas/os use in different occasions—“standard English, working class and slang English, Standard Spanish, Standard Mexican Spanish, north Mexican Spanish dialect, Chicano Spanish, Tex-Mex [Spanglish] and *Pachuco*” (76-77)—but also challenges her culture’s patriarchal norms that expect women to be pacific:

“Flies don’t enter a closed mouth” is a saying I kept hearing when I was a child. *Ser hablodora* was to be a gossip and a liar to talk too much. *Muchachitas bien criadas*, well-bred girls don’t answer back. . . . In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women—I’ve never heard them applied to men. (76)

Furthermore, she articulates her critical view of gendered language which she describes “a male discourse:” “The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the world ‘*nosotras*,’ I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* [we] whether we are male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural” (76). By challenging cultural/linguistic oppression and patriarchal discourse in language, she desires to transcend the restrictions put on her means of self-expression. In order to preserve the integrity of her *mestiza* identity based on her adoption of a hybrid language and lesbian sexuality, she reveals the falsity of the misconception that “Chicano Spanish is . . . incorrect,” as she tells that “it is a living language” “sprang out of” the life in the borderlands (77).

Similarly, in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga ponders on the relation between embracing her Chicana/mestiza identity and the language of her mother, the Chicana/o Spanish. In a poem titled “It’s the Poverty,” the poetic voice depicts the “re-birth of her mother’s ethnic voice in herself” (Cutter 198). In the ensuing lines from the poem, she articulates her need to find a language to express herself truthfully:

. . . I lack language.  
The language to clarify my resistance to the literate.  
Words are a war to me.  
They threaten my family. (54-55)

In the lines above, she conveys her desire to put into words her “resistance” against the dominant culture’s conception of literacy as literacy only in the English language. Thus, she questions the notion that the prevalent symbolic order can communicate properly

her identification with her mother and her desire to build a lesbian community/family. According to Foster, in Moraga's work, "the texts relating to language are emblematic of the contradictions entailed in reclaiming another desire through language" (Foster 258). In the following lines, the poet articulates her desire to reinstate the loss of her mother's voice, to find a language that can express the deprivation:

To gain the word to describe the loss,  
 I risk losing everything.  
 I may create a monster,  
 the word's length and body  
 Swelling up colorful and thrilling  
 looming over my *mother*, characterized.  
 Her voice in the distance  
*Unintelligible illiterate.*

These are the monster's words. (55)

Yet, as the lines above indicate, "she fears" re-adopting her *mestiza* language, "her mother's voice," which has been called "illiterate" and "unintelligible" by the dominant Anglo culture (Cutter 198). Thus, the poet expresses her view that "Being the *mestiza*, the border writer means 'resistance to the literate' and to 'literature' insofar as that literature and its history is monolithic, rendering invisible and unintelligible Moraga's unique material" (Adams 138). She articulates the dilemma of trying to choose the language that would best describe her cultural complexity. "Words," the English words, are "a war to" her, since the words in the dominant language separate the poet from her Chicana/o community, thus, "they threaten her family." If she chooses to "describe the loss" in the English language, she "risks losing" *la familia*. On the other hand, if she chooses her mother's tongue, she jeopardizes being understood by the Anglo society and risks rejection by those who consider themselves as "literate." Nonetheless, she reflects on the possibility of re-gaining the mother's language and regards "the word" as something concrete which has a "length" and a "body." The image of "the monster" signifies both the "alien" status of her ethnic identity, her female voice and the fear she feels in re-claiming the language of the mother. As a result, the mother's voice becomes the monster's voice; the two intermingle in the poet's imagination.

Likewise, the poem "For the Color of My Mother," Moraga's poetic persona describes the re-emergence of the mother's language "this time "in the daughter's . . . voice even



more strongly” (Cutter 199). In the poem, the poet articulates her linguistic confusion by presenting a symbolical image of her “lip” splitting open:

at two  
 my upper lip split open  
 clear to the tip of my nose  
 it spilled forth a cry that would not yield  
 that travelled down six floors of hospital  
 where doctors wound me into white bandages  
 only the screaming mouth exposed (52)

The stanza above depicts the partitioning of voice, the cleaving of the tongue/language that occur recurrently throughout Moraga’s text. The splitting of the poet’s “upper lip” represents her oscillation between the English and Spanish languages, between the Anglo and Chicano cultures. Yet, the “doctors” who “wound her into white bandages” indicate her involuntary/inevitable adoption of the reigning language, as in the following lines she tells, “at five, her mouth / pressed into a seam / . . . pressed into mouthing yes yes yes/ . . . at fourteen, her mouth / painted, ends drawn up / the mole in the corner colored in darker larger mouthing yes” (52). However, in spite of her being detached from the language of the mother, throughout the poem she articulates her wish to articulate and interpret the mother’s story indicating that she is speaking to and for her mother. Hence, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, by means of language, she tries to re-gain access to Chicana community through a feminist and lesbian identification.

Therefore, both Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s life writings express their sense of cultural identity and fragmentation through the hybrid border language and an incorporation of the imaginary into the symbolic. In both works, the narrating subjects enact what they term a “theory in the flesh” in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back*: “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land and concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic out of necessity” (23).

In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga’s narrator explains her concept of an embodied theory in the brief essay titled “Body.” She conveys her critique of an academic discourse that disregards bodily experiences. She argues that within the academic language the particular concerns of the marginalized bodies—women, homosexuals,

minorities—have been made invisible. Thus, instead of the prevalent “disembodied discourse,” Moraga’s seeks to base language on “practical purpose” in order to explore the oppressions experienced by “othered” bodies (175).

In addition to the establishment of “a theory in the flesh” in the works of both authors, Anzaldúa introduces her term “a yoga of the body” in “now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts,” an essay that appears in the anthology *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002). For Anzaldúa, “yoga of the body” refers to her sense of being in “more than one body—each superimposed on the other like sheaths of corn” (568). Such an image reflects the multiple selves of the *mestiza* identity and Anzaldúa’s notion that spirituality contained within physicality makes her connected to every entity outside herself and gives meaning to her daily experiences.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator conveys her perception of a connection between body and psyche in the chapter entitled “Entering into the Serpent,” where she proclaims that “We are taught that the body is an ignorant animal, intelligence dwells only in the head. But the body is smart. It does not discern between external stimuli and stimuli from the imagination. It reacts equally viscerally to events from the imagination as it does to ‘real’ events” (59-60). Hence, she erases the boundary between mind/consciousness and the physical body, as she suggests that soul resides within the body and the two are interconnected. For Anzaldúa, “events” are not only experiences or occurrences in the outside world, but they also refer to the happenings of imagination and of consciousness which are felt by the body. Thus, in Anzaldúa’s view, the experiences of the psyche are as palpable as the material world.

To conclude, both Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* and Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* disclose how the narrating subjects feel the simultaneity of oppressions through their bodies in the process of transforming themselves and forming a Chicana feminist lesbian viewpoint. As they re-collect experiences, the body becomes the site where they identify the socio-cultural conflicts of Chicanas and perceive their true identities. The symbolic fragmentation of the narrators’ bodies will eventually lead to the formation of a new subjectivity, a bringing together the pieces of their selves, in the light of a new consciousness.

## CHAPTER 2

### TRANSFORMATION THROUGH “PSYCHIC HEALING,” SPIRITUAL VISION AND REVISING CHICANO MYTHS

*I tremble before the animal, the alien, the sub- or suprahuman, the me that has something in common with the wind and the trees and the rocks, that possesses a demon determination and ruthlessness beyond the human.*

Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)

*We are ready for change.*

*Let us link hands and hearts.*

*Together find a path through the dark woods.*

*Step through the doorways between worlds . . .*

*Build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes [bridges] our “home” . . .*

*Now let us shift.*

Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts.”

Cherríe Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* depict the inner journeys that the narrating subjects go through as they acquire self-knowledge and discover their identities. Recollection of experiences causes a rupture in their old selves and the conventional ways of thinking that they have internalized. The rupture brings about the fragmentation of identity which in turn gives way to a new selfhood. As the narrators make meanings out of previous experiences, they embark on the process of healing internal wounds. Severing ties with old perspectives, they reach a greater awareness of who they are as individuals and their place within the community. In both works, transforming oneself and modifying consciousness appear to be mutually related steps on the way to the re-discovery of identity. This chapter, thus, will examine the ways in which spirituality, inner reflection and the revision of patriarchal myths enable Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s narrators to recuperate and recompose their fragmented selves.

The process of self-transformation as depicted in both Moraga's and Anzaldúa's works, returns the narrators to the Chicana community and to their indigenous roots. It leads them to a place that is both familiar and unknown; as it turns out to be a mystical, psychological, anthropological journey to the accustomed cultural terrain of the Chicana/Mexicana, yet to the constantly shifting, unpredictable, transitional/in-between space of the *mestiza*. Within this space of continual change and renewal, Moraga and Anzaldúa interrogate the patriarchal myths of Chicano culture, their acculturation in Anglo values and develop a new cultural as well as spiritual perspective.

In both *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the authors' spiritual insight which reflects the influences of Aztec cosmology,—the mythical accounts explaining the nature of the universe—spirituality and Eastern philosophy is tied to political activism. Through spirituality, Moraga's and Anzaldúa's narrating subjects embrace differences between individuals and emphasize the interdependence of all beings. They express a wish to affect a change in society by enacting inner/personal transformation in the social sphere and bringing together marginalized peoples of diverse origins or socio-cultural backgrounds. Thus, their works trace the move from the private into the public, for self-conversion is viewed as part of a vision for remodeling social relations.

In "El Mundo Zurdo (the Left-Handed World)," a brief section which appears at the end of the essay entitled "La Prieta" in *This Bridge Called My Back*, Anzaldúa's speaking subject proclaims "I believe that by changing ourselves, we change the world, that travelling El Mundo Zurdo path is the path of a two way movement—a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of society" (208). Anzaldúa's term, "the Left-Handed World," refers to the peoples who are rejected by their own communities or the hegemonic cultures: "the colored, the queer, the poor, the female [and] the physically challenged" (*This Bridge Called My Back* 196). Like Moraga, Anzaldúa desires to create "a kind of family" with the people of "El Mundo Zurdo," a united force on the road to "transform the planet" (*This Bridge Called My Back* 209). In her essay "now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* [awareness] . . . inner work, public acts," Anzaldúa's narrator explains that she came up with the term "El Mundo Zurdo" to describe her spiritual vision after

her mother gave her a present, “a tiny silver hand with a heart in its palm.” For Anzaldúa, “a heart in [the] palm” is a token of one’s “engagement with self, others, [the] world” and “[t]he hand represents acting out or daily implementing an idea or vision” (*This Bridge We Call Home* 571). Thus, Anzaldúa’s decolonizing strategy involves putting into practice her spiritual vision toward sexual and cultural emancipation or acting on *conocimiento*, on knowledge, awareness and consciousness.

Similarly, in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga’s narrator articulates her view that spirituality can be a source of inspiration for social movements, which parallels Anzaldúa’s concept of “*conocimiento*.” In the section entitled “Feeding People in All Their Hungers,” she explains that since spirituality articulates a deeply ingrained desire for freedom, movements which have been effective throughout history contained “a spiritual imperative” (120). She illustrates her argument by referring to the Civil Rights Movement of 1960s which reached a large number of people due to its promise of emancipation and elevation through spirituality. Yet, she notes that the Civil Rights Movement as well as “the race related movements” “such as the American Indian Movement, La Raza and Black Power” which sprang from it, did little to take into account women’s issues, for women were only seen as members of the ethnic community (121). Nonetheless, for Moraga the Civil Rights Movement can be “a ‘spiritual’ reference point for Third World Feminism” due to its humanism and anti-separatism (122). She argues that since women of color they have faced oppression both sexually and spiritually, feminist movements should bring together sexuality and spirituality on the road to freedom. She questions patriarchal religions’ association of “the female body” with “sin” and “disobedience” and proclaims that “if the spirit and sex have been linked in [their] oppression, then they must be linked in the strategy toward liberation;” thus she argues that third wave feminism is “is about feeding people in all their hungers” (123), since it is both a material and spiritual struggle.

In order to trace the formation of the narrating subjects’ spiritualist/political vision as Third World feminists, it is necessary first to examine their process of personal transformation. In both *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the narrators desire to discover their true identities by developing a critical attitude toward their culture’s sexist and heterosexist values, and alternative views on spirituality. In

doing so, they re-claim, re-adapt and revise the Mexican myths, thus engage in what AnaLouise Keating calls “revisionist mythmaking” (“Mythic Ways of Knowing?” 21).

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator re-claims the instinctive tendencies/spirituality of the indigenous culture and a female-centered mythology. To discover her true identity, she looks deep down into herself and wishes to bring to the surface her Shadow-Beast, her rebellious side which rejects any kind of restrictions or limits. She mentions that from an early age, she had a conscious will to live her life on her own terms, preferring to spend her times “studying, reading, painting [and] writing” rather than “ironing [her] brothers’ shirts or cleaning the cupboards” (38). In order to find herself—her Shadow-beast concealed underneath the identity mask imposed on her—she explains that she knew she had to desert her family, the accustomed and familiar surroundings of her childhood. She remembers looking at an old picture of herself when she was six years old standing between her parents and holding the hand of her mother. The photograph ignites her memory; it reminds her of her connection to her family roots. She wonders how she found “the strength” to leave behind what all that picture represented for her, yet indicates that when she left she “carried home” with her wherever she went, never losing the “ground of [her] being” (38). Thus, leaving home returns her to the self, and even though she rejects the self-crippling patriarchal values of her culture, she does not lose her ties to her Mexican roots.

At the beginning of her psychological journey, she has a *sueño*, a dream of being swallowed by a “Coatl” which means “serpent” in the Nahuatl language (56). As Anzaldúa’s narrator explains, for the ancient Olmecs, the serpent was a symbol of womanhood, as they conceived of “the serpent’s mouth . . . guarded by rows of dangerous teeth as a sort of *vagina dentata* [toothed vagina]” and thought of the Earth as “a coiled serpent” (48-56). In “Entering into the Serpent,” the narrator re-claims this mythical symbol to represent her turning inward and confronting the undefined darkness within her. Like an alchemist who searches for the hidden substance beneath appearances, she wishes to establish contact with the secluded world, images and voices inside her. The desire to reach for a more profound experience always propels her forward in her inner journey. She conveys her dream of the serpent through a poem inserted in the prose section: “Dead / the doctor by the operating table said. / I passed

between the two fangs / the flickering tongue. / Having come to the mouth of the serpent, / swallowed, / I found myself suddenly in the dark / sliding down a smooth wet surface / down down down into an even darker darkness” (56). Through the serpent metaphor, she describes her descent into the depths of her own self and encounter with her shadowy side. Thus, she endows mythical motifs like the serpent with new meanings in her process of transformation.

At the beginning of the chapter, the narrator provides a brief anecdote of her mother’s attempts to prevent her from going out at night by telling her that “[a] snake will crawl into your *nalgas*, will make you pregnant. They seek warmth in the cold. . . . can draw milk out of you” (47). In her statement, the mother uses the serpent metaphor in a way that sustains the conventional meanings produced by a patriarchal culture and employs it as a phallic symbol. Contrary to such usage, Anzaldúa’s narrator reverses those meanings attached to the serpent, and uses it as a representation of femininity and her instinctual/sexual drives. Thus, her being devoured by the serpent represents her process of acquiring knowledge, particularly inner/self knowledge, which is deemed as “sinful” by conventional religious myths. Before the narrating subject expresses the above-mentioned dream about the serpent, she conveys her memory of being stung by a rattlesnake while she was laboring in the fields of the ranch with her mother. Yet, due the protection of her boots, she is not poisoned. Her mother approaches her shivering and cuts the serpent into two. Afterwards, when her mother returns to her work disappearing behind the rows of cotton and weed, the narrator begins to identify with the snake. Then, as a playful child, she brings together the snake’s separate parts “end on end” (48) and buries the mutilated body beneath the cotton field. As she conveys her memory, she presents a picture of herself sucking and spitting the blood of the serpent amidst the cotton rows. Symbolically, such an act signifies the narrator’s encounter with or her turning into the Shadow-Beast which is visualized through the serpent metaphor and revealed to her through her dreams.

In facing her Shadow-Beast—her unconscious thoughts and feelings—Anzaldúa’s narrator initiates her healing process. In *the Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Jung describes the unconscious as “a shadow” which must be confronted on the way to healing: “[The] confrontation is the first test of courage on the inner way, a test

sufficient to frighten off most people . . . But if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of the problem has already been solved: we have at least brought up the personal unconscious” (Jung 20). For Jung, facing repressed feelings is a difficult process that requires courage, just as Anzaldúa’s narrating subject describes it to be. To depict the confrontation process, Jung conveys the dream of a theologian at the pool of Bethesda<sup>3</sup> which parallels the dream that Anzaldúa’s narrator describes:

A Protestant theologian often dreamed the same dream: *He stood on a mountain slope with a deep valley below, and in it a dark lake. He knew in the dream that something has always prevented him from approaching the lake. This time he resolved to go to the water. As he approached the shore, everything grew dark and uncanny, and a gust of wind suddenly gushed over the face of water. He was seized by a panic and, awoke.* (Jung 17)

Jung explains that the dream illustrates the theologian’s reaching to “his own depths,” for the water in the dream has an enigmatic quality and contains “the miracle” of “healing power” signified by “an angel” who “comes down and touches water,” producing the wind (17). For Jung, the dream represents “natural symbolism” whereby the individual picks up images and archetypes from the personal and collective unconscious to describe his/her psychological condition (17).

Jung distinguishes between the collective unconscious which is the part of the psyche that is universal, inborn or innate and the personal unconscious which is subjective and acquired by means of personal experience. While the personal unconscious comprises *complexes* or individually charged feelings, ideas and images; the collective unconscious consists of *archetypes* which are universal “psychic contents” revealed through “dreams,” “visions,” “fairy tales” and “myths” (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 3-42). Thus, for Jung, myths are archetypes connected to the collective unconscious, as he explains “All the mythologized processes of nature . . . are symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man’s consciousness by way of projection—that is mirrored in the events of nature” (6).

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<sup>3</sup> According to an ancient Christian belief, “In the city of Jerusalem there was a famous pool, called the pool of Bethesda, which was reputed to have healing powers for the blind, the lame, and those otherwise afflicted” (Ferguson 83).



In the light of Jung's argument, Anzaldúa's narrating subject re-claims and re-adapts the mythical motifs from indigenous mythology in order to mirror her psychic states, which is most vividly observed in the chapter entitled "*La herencia de Coatlicue/the Coatlicue State*" in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. "*Coatlicue*" which means "Serpent-Skirt" in the Nahuatl tongue was the Aztec Earth goddess visualized as a deity that "had a human skull or serpent for a head, a necklace of human hearts, a skirt of twisted serpents and taloned feet [with eagle claws]" (49). The narrator adopts this mythical figure as an encoded image whose symbolical meaning corresponds to her inner condition, as she explains that "*Coatlicue* is one of the powerful images, or 'archetypes,' that inhabits, or passes through my psyche" (68). For Anzaldúa, *Coatlicue* represents a bringing together of the conflicting aspects of the human psyche, a balancing of the opposites and transcendence of dualistic thought. Within the image of *Coatlicue* who as the Earth goddess "gives and takes away life," the binaries of the male/female, "the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror" are fused together (69). Hence, *Coatlicue* becomes an embodiment of Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness, and represents the erasure of the boundaries or borders between the seemingly opposite concepts.

Reflecting on the symbolism of *Coatlicue*, Anzaldúa's narrator conveys her inner conflict in "the *Coatlicue* State," as she imagines that *Coatlicue*, the Earth devours her and pushes her into the underworld, her unconscious. The vision of being devoured by *Coatlicue* alludes to her dream of the serpent mentioned above. The narrator associates the darkness of the underworld/her "shadow" with regenerative power. In line with the belief of ancient Olmecs, she views the underbelly of the Earth/*Coatlicue* as a "creative womb from which all things [are] born to which all things [return]" (56). Yet despite the procreative potential of "the *Coatlicue* state," it is the most painful stage in her psychic development characterized by a reluctance to act, depressed feelings, seclusion and alienation. Yet, as Anzaldúa's narrating subject explains, "Behind that isolation is its opposite—a smoldering desire for love and connection" ("now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts" 551). Thus, *Coatlicue* is the stage before crossing into a new awareness which requires the difficult confrontation with one's self, with internalized oppression and fears. The narrator fears confrontation, for it will lead her to the unknown. She realizes that as a *mestiza*, although she has numerous names,

she is still nameless, since she does not know all of them and has no words to define her inner self. She is afraid that if she makes the move to reach that self, “she will not find anyone” or “won’t find the way back” (65). Her own darkness/the unknown both lures and frightens her.

Her poem “Creature of Darkness” which appears in the second part of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, depicts “the *Coatlicue* State” the narrating subject goes through. In the first stanza, the poet tells about her remaining in “the deep place” of *Coatlicue* for “three weeks.” She conveys her wish “to stay small and still in the dark” (208) or in isolation for a time without being disturbed by anyone. In the last stanza, she clarifies the meaning of the poem’s title, as she suggests that she is herself “the creature of darkness” who is both “at home” and “afraid of the dark” where she hears the voices of “shadows” (209). She realizes that those shadows are related to her own self and the prospect of an encounter with them arouses the fear in her.

In “the *Coatlicue* State,” Anzaldúa’s speaking subject describes the painful process of facing up to her shadows, more specifically the “Shadow-Beast” through mirror imagery, since the mirror shows her true self at whom she is afraid to look. Jung argues that,

. . . [W]hoever looks into the mirror . . . will see first of all his own face. Whoever goes to himself risks confrontation with himself. . . . The mirror . . . shows faithfully whatever looks into it; namely, the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the *persona*, the mask . . . But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face. (20)

In Anzaldúa’s work, the narrator’s first reference to mirrors occurs when she explains that shortly after her father passed away, her mother put blankets over the mirrors due to ancient belief that a mirror is a passage through which “the soul may pass to “the other side” (64). She tells that her mother did not want them to pursue their father to that place of the dead by accident.

Following her re-collection of this childhood memory, the narrator goes on to describe the mirror as “an ambivalent symbol” which reproduces/absorbs images and explains that anyone who looks into it becomes both the subject who sees and the object that is being seen (64). Looking into the mirror hints at self examination which also occurs in

the process of writing, as the life writer becomes both the observing subject and the object observed. Thus, the “I” looks at herself as “she” in the self-referential/self-reflective work, just as she looks at her own image in the mirror.

Likewise, in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga’s poetic voice describes the moment of self-recognition she goes through by making use of mirror imagery in “Fear, A Love Poem.” In the poem, the poet describes herself as a child “driven / to look into the darkest / part / of the eye— / that is not an eye at all / but hole” (27). When she was thirteen years old, she explains, she was brave enough to look at her dark eye hole through the looking glass. Yet, she tells that she does not have the same courage now, as she moves away from the mirror to look at the faces of other people rather than her own. Nonetheless, when she looks into her lover’s countenance, she sees hers; for the dark hole of her lover’s eye reflects her own face and marks the instance of identification, as she tells that in the dark hole of the eye she and her lover notice each other. The reflection arouses fear in the poet, as she not only recognizes the identity of her lover but also herself, her deep feelings, her longings which constitute her dark side. For her, that darkness covered with tears, can wash away her anguish and “melt down a lifetime of turned backs” (28). Thus, perceiving her real identity in the self of her lover and giving herself up into that darkness have the effect of curing the injuries inflicted by the betrayals she has experienced. Later in her work, she once more refers to initiating this process of arriving at self-knowledge which for her is the most difficult job, as she tells, “this is harder yet . . . *this naked step I take into a clouded mirror / that is my woman, my self*” (205).

In “the *Coatlicue* State” in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrating subject conveys a similar experience. She mentions that in the darkness of the nights when she looks at the black surface of “the obsidian mirror,”—a special “mirror made of volcanic glass” which was believed to disclose “a vision concerning the future of the tribe” among Mexican natives—she sees many faces: her “everyday face,” her “childhood faces . . . the face of [her] mother, sisters and brothers” (66). The multiple faces she sees are representative of her multiple identities/selves which are connected to her family as well as to her past and present. Yet, she realizes that there is also another face, this time a face of a stranger which stands for her real self of whom she was not aware but whom

she is about to embrace. Every time she walks toward the mirror to see that face, something in her resists; for she is hesitant to see the eyes of *Coatlicue* or confront her alone. Yet, eventually she breaks through the icy surface of appearances and recognizes her own eyes behind the mask, which enables her to acquire knowledge about her own self. However, the acquisition of knowledge is also distressing, as she proclaims, “‘Knowing’ is painful because after ‘it’ happens I can’t stay in the same place or be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before” (70). Thus, her newly acquired knowledge changes the way she looks at herself and the world around her, it makes her feel like a foreigner in a newly discovered place. Both self-knowledge and awareness stimulate her to develop new perspectives as she wards off the delusions and becomes conscious of the realities both inside and outside her. As she embraces the dark, she endows it with new meanings and questions the identification of the dark with the evil. According to Anzaldúa, “primordial darkness” stands for the mystery of existence (71), it is the place from which a new life, a new self springs forth. It empowers her to see her identity in a new light rather than from the perspective of the dominant culture. Her eyes, which are revealed when the mask is lifted from her face, open to the truth of her real identity. Hence, the experiences she goes through in “the *Coatlicue* state” encourage her to decolonize her identity and confront her internalized oppression once she calls upon “the little green snake” in order to “let the wound caused by the serpent be cured by the serpent” (68). Her summoning of the symbolical “green snake” represents her wish to unloose the ways in which she has conceived of her identity through the distorted lens of the colonizer. She tells that “all her life she’s been told that Mexicans are lazy,” that “she has had to work twice as hard to meet the standards of the dominant culture, which have in part become her standards” (67). The narrator’s use of the pronoun “she” in this passage represents her becoming a different person through her recognition of that lie, for the pronoun “she” refers to her former self that the narrating subject scrutinizes with a critical attitude from the perspective of her altered consciousness. Indeed, not only in the “*Coatlicue* state,” but also throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*—particularly in the more self-reflexive and poetic sections—the narrator shifts between the pronouns of “I” and “she.” These shifts signify both the noted parallel between mirror symbolism and a self-reflexive writing practice; and the conflict amongst the narrating subject’s multiple selves situated at the intersections

between the past and the present. As she acknowledges that she has so far internalized “rage” and “contempt” toward herself, she distances her present self from that of the colonized one. She realizes that “as a people” Chicanas/os “blame,” “terrorize” and “hate” themselves, believing that “there is something fundamentally wrong with” them (67). *Coatlicue* makes her slow down the pace of life for a moment so that she can reflect on or bring to the surface the falsity of such beliefs and can re-evaluate and make meaning out of her previous experiences. Once she decides to quit her inaction, determines not to remain “a stone forever,” she comes out from the depths of *Coatlicue* with a new awareness and spiritual perceptiveness. For the narrator, such a decision “means being [a] Mexican” (71) again, it signifies going back to the ancestral territory, to her indigenous roots.

In the midst of her transition to new states of awareness, the narrator recognizes that her “conscious I” is only one aspect of her identity. She begins to feel the presence of a greater self which lies beneath her consciousness: That presence is her “inner self” . . . “the godwoman in” her she calls “*Antigua, mi Diosa [Ancient, my Goddess]*” or “the divine within.” Thus, *Coatlicue*, the goddess, appears to be a representation of “the divine force” within her. It is the ancient primordial energy which is shared by all and becomes her main connection to “to the wind and the trees and the rocks” (72). Towards the end of the chapter, Anzaldúa’s narrator depicts her encounter with the spiritual realm, as she describes her going through a mystical experience:

A tremor goes through my body . . . On my plate I feel a tingling ticklish sensation, then something seems to be falling on me, over me, a curtain of rain or light. Shock pulls my breath out of me. . . . A light is all around me—so intense it could be white or black or at that juncture where extremes turn into their opposites. . . . I collapse into myself—a delicious caving into myself—imploding, the walls like matchsticks softly folding inward in slow motion. (73)

In the extract above, she brings together sensuous and spiritual experiences, and vividly portrays her concept of “a yoga of the body” mentioned in the previous chapter. In her spiritual borderland, not only the constructed boundaries between the body and the spirit diminish, but also the dualistic thought is transcended, as the colors “black” and “white” merge together. Thus, in her symbolic spiritual experience, it does not matter what color is the “light.” Since even “the extremes” have the potential to turn into “their

opposites,” there are no clear distinctions; she experiences them as one while the internal and the external rejoin and “collapse” together.

Anzaldúa’s perspective has parallels with the spiritual vision of the French philosopher, cultural theorist, sociologist, psychoanalyst and feminist Luce Irigaray who extends Jung’s views through a feminist revision. For Irigaray, each individual “is made of matter” and “breath” (ix *Between East and West*). The “breath” is Irigaray’s term for the spiritual dimension of the body. Like Anzaldúa, Irigaray argues for a “spiritualization of the body and the senses” (ix) that the Western culture has ignored. Thus, Irigaray’s work reflects the influence of Eastern spirituality, as she describes her learning to “breathe” under the guidance of yoga teachers. For her, breathing also signifies the first step toward an autonomous identity and is necessary to eliminate the obstacles, restrictions and to shatter illusions. She argues that the acquisition of a spiritual awareness through bodily sensations helps one to overcome pain, anguish and maladies. Likewise, Anzaldúa thinks that through spirituality and by confronting her unconscious she can heal, overcome her dismays and nightmares, and finally emerge out of *Coatlicue* as a transformed subject. For Anzaldúa, “conocimiento” begins by “opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding its symptoms” which will enable one to break “out of mental and emotional prison.” It allows one to look at the world other than the “official and conventional ways” (542), just as Irigaray in “learning to breathe” conceived of the possibility of living “another life,” the opportunity “to live altogether otherwise than [she] had been taught, than what [she] could imagine” (Irigaray 6).

Anzaldúa’s conceptualization of “the divine within” or her term “*Antigua, mi Diosa*” can be examined from the perspective of Irigaray’s understanding of the concept of “divine women.” In *Je, Tu, Nous*, Irigaray argues that in the transition to the patriarchal social order, women have lost a dignified identity. She raises questions about the conventional representations of “the divine” through the established religious iconography; as she expresses her rejoice at seeing a statue of a woman who looked like Virgin Mary with a female child in a museum at Torcello Island in Venice. Irigaray explains that when she saw the statue, she “felt freed from the tensions of that cultural truth-imperative which is also practiced in art: a virgin-mother woman and her son

depicted as the models of redemption we should believe in” (26). She tells that as she stood before that statue “representing Mary and her mother, Anne” she felt re-connected to her “body,” her feelings, and her “history as a woman” (*Je, Tu, Nous* 25). Hence, Anzaldúa and Moraga, Irigaray interprets the myths by directing her attention to “the unsymbolised mother-daughter relationship which has been bypassed, since the Greeks, in favor of the mother-son relationship” (Hauke 141).

Therefore, Irigaray posits an alternative view in thinking through spirituality by connecting it to her own experiences as a woman. For her, mysticism has the function of re-discovering and embracing her true identity, not the constructed “other” of a patriarchal male discourse. In her article, “Woman as God, God as Woman: Mysticism, Negative Theology, and Luce Irigaray,” Ann-Marie Priest explains that “Irigaray writes ‘woman’ as the mystic writes” of the divine: for her, both are viewed “as the unknowable . . . the absolute other,” and misrepresented, diminished, “suppressed,” or “denied” by “the patriarchal symbolic order” (3-5). According to Priest, Irigaray views mysticism as “‘a place’” where “subjectivity” is perceived and constructed in a different way, as it enables the mystic to unlearn “all attributes,” “to give up her name,” and therefore to go beyond the “phallic economy” of language as well as the patriarchal constitution of her identity (20).

Like Irigaray’s mysticism, Anzaldúa’s spiritual perspective in *Borderlands/La Frontera* enables her to free herself from the binding attributes attached to her by the dominant Anglo culture and by her own community. It provides her with an opportunity to think through her identity beyond the accustomed cultural paradigms or perspectives, and to develop what she calls “*la facultad*.” *La facultad* refers to a special mental skill whereby an individual sees beyond the external or superficial aspects of objects and events to reach at deeper meanings. Anzaldúa’s narrator describes *la facultad* as an “acute awareness” reached through “instant ‘sensing’” and communicated by means of “images [or] symbols” (60). For Anzaldúa, images function as signs of emotions, they are mental/psychic representations that describe the feelings hidden behind them. *La facultad* enables the individual to interpret those images and symbols through which the psyche conveys its messages. According to Anthony Lioi, Anzaldúa’s definition of *la facultad* “could be used as a cannon of literary hermeneutics,” for it “sound[s] like

interpreting a text” (92). In Anzaldúa’s viewpoint, such an ability or perceptive skill, “increases awareness,” allows one “to pay attention to the soul”, and thus to “the self.” Hence, *la facultad* causes a rupture in “everyday mode of consciousness” opens up “the depths” and delivers one from “ignorance” (61).

Anzaldúa’s narrator also points to the function of *la facultad* as a “survival tactic” developed by those people who live amidst multiple borders and under the pressure of a multiplicity of oppressions, for it assists them in foreseeing and protecting themselves from danger. She explains that those who feel unsafe are more prone to develop this special faculty, and that she is one of them, because *la facultad* is what makes her more aware, attentive and cautious in order to shield her self from external threats. It is also what arouses the desire to see the depths of her consciousness, “the chthonic (underworld)” (61). Consequently, *la facultad* is ultimately related to “the *Coatlícue* state,” as both lead her toward a wider perspective of her selfhood. To describe her acquiring a greater awareness, she tells, “in descending to the depths I realize that down is up” (96), which resonates with Jung’s argument that “[t]he descent into the depths always seems to precede the ascent” (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 19).

In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga’s narrating subject reflects on the experiences she goes through in the depths of her own self. She refers to her inner self as the “darkness,” the “she-knowing” in her which “has been [her] deepest prayer” (206). Moraga’s term, the “she-knowing” is analogous to Anzaldúa’s “*Antigua, mi Diosa*,” her “god-woman.” For Moraga, it is her female identity, her brownness which has been her savior in her most difficult times. She argues that a prayer coming from that place where her “she-knowing” resides can inspire compassion and activism against the brutalities. Hence, like Anzaldúa’s, Moraga’s spiritual vision is formed as a response to the maltreatments she has suffered as a woman of color; it involves a return to the indigenous Mexican heritage and is aimed at redeeming herself from her colonized status.

In the brief section entitled “Return,” Moraga’s narrator mentions that she reads Buddhism in order to calm herself, yet she says, she does not “feel the land under [her] feet on those pages,” instead, she embraces “the earth,” calling herself an “earth-worshipper” (206)—like the ancient Aztecs who showed reverence to the earth before



they became a patriarchal state. While Anzaldúa adopts elements both from Eastern spirituality and Aztec cosmology; Moraga creates her spiritual vision through a combination of influences from indigenous Mexican culture and her Catholic upbringing. She explains that “as a Chicana who grew up in a very religious household,” she “learned early on to respect the terrain of the spirit,” and tells that “the spirit world” which includes her “dreams,” “fantasies” and “prayers” “is very rich for” her (122). Even though she rejects it when she was eighteen (212), throughout the work she demonstrates her ambivalent relation to Catholic faith. While she questions “its sexism and homophobia,” she views Mexican Catholicism as “a cultural and ethnic marker;” and thus, balances “critique and embracement” (Anderson 5).

In “Introducción to the First Edition,” the narrator conveys the memory of her first visit to a Mexican basilica. At the basilica, beneath the altar of la *Virgen de Guadalupe*, she observes women on a moving platform paying homage to the Virgin. She mentions that despite inconveniency caused by the platform, the “women . . . clung to the ends of the handrailing of the moving floor” that “tried to force them off and away” (ix). Witnessing the women’s devotion, she leaves the basilica in tears, as she realizes that she has become “white” in disregarding the relation between her ethnic identity and Catholicism. Thus, the women’s reverence for *la Virgen de Guadalupe* represents, for her, the unifying force of spirituality among women and a reinforcement of the Chicana identity. Thus, while the narrator re-evaluates religion from a Chicana feminist perspective, she at the same time views Catholicism as part of her cultural heritage.

In “A Long Line of Vendidas,” Moraga’s narrator reflects on the constrictive aspects of Catholicism, explaining how institutionalized religion has become a disciplinary power that labeled dissent and sexual liberation as “sinful.” She remembers being taught by the Irish nuns at school “to seek the love and forgiveness of the Father,” yet she says “[a]fter confession,” she “went straight home to [her] Mexican mother . . . knelt before her” to ask for the mother’s forgiveness of her “sins against her” (110). Thus, she subverts the patriarchal aspects of Catholicism and instead projects it in her relations to her own mother by presenting a women-identified re-interpretation of it. Describing Mexican Catholicism as “female-centered,” she underlines the notable place of the Marian cult within Chicana/o culture. Furthermore, she contrasts Mexican Catholicism

with “the disembodied Euro-American Church” (111) telling that the contradiction between the two disconcerted her during her adolescent years. As she remembers a religion class conducted by a nun when she was in junior high school, she realizes that for a long time she remained uncertain about whether or not “there was a god to be touched,” explaining that “Whoever He was, was becoming increasingly remote as the touch of men began to fall hungrily and awkwardly upon my body” (111). During the class, she pictures herself having a surgical operation on a table and around her people like doctors who wear white uniforms. She thinks of the vision of her adolescent years as a disclosure, a foreshadowing of the oppressions that she will encounter as a maturing Chicana. The nun’s lecture on the subjects of “being doubtful about the existence of God” makes her perceive how Chicanas are controlled by the myth that God is “white” and “male.” Hence, she realizes the ways in which religion is utilized by those in power in a way that benefits them at the cost of the subjugation of females, homosexuals and minorities.

Towards the end of the book, in the brief section entitled “La Lección,” Moraga’s narrator conveys her views on spirituality in a conversation with her little son Rafael who asks her whether or not God is stronger than Batman. Realizing that her son equates “power” with the male heroes in popular culture and cartoons, she tells him about the “power of the heart, the power of the spirit” and adds that “God is . . . neither male nor female but all energies simultaneously” (210). In line with her “indigenismo,” she also explains that “God exists in all things,” as she desires to make Rafael aware of the existence of “the universe” within him “as in the flower” (211).

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator conveys a similar perspective as the one articulated in Moraga’s “La Lección;” yet, as Anderson notes, unlike Moraga’s narrator who mentions that she learned to revere the spiritual realm as a result of her upbringing in Catholic values, Anzaldúa’s narrating subject suggests that Catholic doctrines fall short of expounding her own spiritual experiences (5). In the brief section entitled “the Presences,” she conveys her critique of not only Catholicism but also institutionalized religions in general for their establishment of rigid boundaries between the material and spiritual realms and their contempt for the body as well as for the shadowy side of human existence. For Anzaldúa, institutionalized religions foster

discredit and “fear” “of life and the body;” they urge a split “between the body and the spirit” and “totally” disregard “the soul” by encouraging “us to kill off all parts of ourselves” (59). Instead, like the ancient Mexican natives, Anzaldúa’s narrating subject thinks of everything including nature as infused with spirit and recognizes the connection between the human and non-human.

To describe her experiences with the spiritual realm, the narrator conveys her memory of encountering a red snake in the woods and observing its movements and colors. She tells that at that instance she felt that the serpent, the trees and the wind were all speaking to her. She remembers listening to the sound of the wind when she was a child and understanding what the wind was saying and mentions how during the afternoons, the movement of the wind through the house made everything vibrate. Thinking of those moments as “otherworldly events,” she presents the contrast between “the ‘official’ reality of the rational” (58) that western culture posits and the indigenous Mexican culture that gives priority to the world of the instincts and to the soul. She conveys the clash of the two worldviews within her by telling that one of her eyes is “the tongueless magical eye” and the other one is “the loquacious rational eye” and that the gap between the two is difficult to bridge (67). Thus, Anzaldúa presents her critique of Western culture which “in trying to become ‘objective,’” actually “made” “‘objects’ of things” and stigmatized indigenous beliefs as “pagan” or “witchcraft” (59). She insightfully concludes that by the dichotomous Western thought system and its rational/objective mode of perception: “We’ve been taught that the spirit is outside our bodies or above our heads somewhere up in the sky with God. We are supposed to forget that every cell in our bodies, every bone and bird and worm has spirit in it” (58).

Anzaldúa’s exploration of spirituality highlights her vision of a unity among all entities, yet as Keating explains, in emphasizing the presence of an all-encompassing spirit shared by all, Anzaldúa “does not ignore the importance of color, class, gender and other identity markers, [but rather] she puts these classifications into a more holistic perspective,” for her aim is not to erect “walls” but to build “bridges” (62). Anzaldúa’s envisioning of such a unity is not “synonymous with sameness,” since her understanding of “commonalities are heterogeneous and multifaceted” (Keating 63). Anzaldúa thinks of “each person” as “part of a larger whole—a ‘cosmic ocean, the soul,

or whatever” (Keating 62). In line with Jung’s concept of “mystical participation” (277 *Psychology and Religion*), she thinks of her own self as a small replica of the universe, thus, through the self she connects to the whole. Like Anzaldúa, Jung views “the human personality, as a part of nature” that “reflects the macrocosm (the larger universe)” (Progoff 78). Progoff argues that, for Jung, “the universe reflects itself in all its parts, and that is why every separate entity is a symbol of the pattern of the universe as a whole” (89). Throughout her work, Anzaldúa pictures this “pattern” and her Self as the darkness. In “Entering Into the Serpent,” she describes her being devoured by the snake or her descent into dark, by asking “Why do I cast no shadow? / Are there lights from all sights shinning on me? / Ahead, ahead” (56). In these lines, she dismantles the binary opposition between “light” and “dark;” for her darkness is also “the light.” Thus, as she unearths or rediscovers the spirit, she not only becomes one with the spectacle that surrounds her, but also brings together her observing subject and the object of her inquiry, her personhood. Hence, she desires to cure the fragmentation of her identity through “*participation mystique*” (*Psychology and Religion* 277) that becomes an integral part of her transformation process.

The narrator’s achievement of a sense of wholeness can also be viewed in the light of what Jung calls “individuation.” Jung uses “the term ‘individuation’ to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological ‘in-dividual,’ that is a separate, invisible unity or ‘whole’” (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 275). At the end of the chapter “La herencia de Coatlicue / The *Coatlicue* State,” the narrating subject describes her process of becoming individuated:

And suddenly I feel everything rushing to a center, a nucleus. All the lost pieces of myself come flying from the deserts and mountains and the valleys, magnetized toward that center. *Completa*. Something pulsates in my body, a luminous thin thing that grows thicker every day. Its presence never leaves me. I am never alone. That which abides: my vigilance, my thousand sleepless serpent eyes blinking in the night, forever open. And I am not afraid. (73)

In the excerpt above, she portrays her achievement of the totality of “the self” which in Jung’s theory, is a “central archetype in the collective unconscious, much as the sun is the center of the solar system” (*A Primer of Jungian Psychology* 51). According to Jung, “the archetype . . . is the nucleus of a complex” and function “as a magnet

attracting relevant experiences to it.” After it becomes united with the experiences that it draws towards itself, the archetype becomes a complex which finally enters into one’s consciousness, and therefore connects the unconscious to the conscious (*A Primer of Jungian Psychology* 43). In the midst of her individuation, Anzaldúa’s narrator goes through the process identified by Jung, as she mentions that her “repressed energy rises . . . [and] connects with conscious energy” (71). Thus, in recognizing her unconscious power, she bridges the gap or split between her numerous multiple selves. She realizes that the presence of her inner self always accompanies her in her journey. Her “serpent eyes,” once they are opened, initiate her self-awakening process by convincing her that she needs not to be afraid of the dark/of the night any longer. Thus, the narrator’s individuation process is marked by her identification with the external phenomena or with nature, as she re-collects her pieces from the “deserts and mountains and the valleys” (73).

Anzaldúa’s narrator depicts the process of individuation and her “communication with the Divine” (91) by means of poetry and by “invoking art” (88). She thinks of the poet as a communicator who uses words that carry images to convey her messages and bridges the upper world “*topan*” with “the underworld” “*mictlán*” (91). In “*Ni cuicani: I, the singer*,” she pictures the poet as follows:

Poet: she pours water from the mouth of the pump, lowers the handle then lifts it, lowers, lifts. Her hands begin to feel the pull from the entrails, the live animal resisting. A sigh rises up from the depths, the handle becomes a wild thing in her hands, the cold sweet water gushes out, splashing her face, the shock of nightlight filling the bucket. (91)

In the extract above, Anzaldúa provides a definition of the poet as she who connects to the source of her knowledge and brings forth the hidden truth. Through the medium of images and words, she makes the water flow from its source and lets her “live animal” emerge from its secluded place. The handle in her hand is her poem which, as the water “gushes out,” becomes an autonomous entity beyond the poet’s control. It instantly discloses the “nightlight,” the darkness within the poet. Thus, her poems make free her “Shadow-Beast,” since “Picture language” and images which “are more direct than words” bring her “closer to the unconscious” (91). They reveal her repressed emotions and thoughts and bring about the liberating effect of her poems. Anzaldúa’s narrating

subject, thus, becomes a singer who sings the song of her hidden self or the untamed rebel in her. In doing so, she makes use of the images stored in her unconscious as “liberating archetypes”—a term that appears as a subtitle of Demaris S. Wehr’s critical work *Jung & Feminism*. Since Jung puts a great emphasis on the significance of myths in psychoanalysis, feminists like Anzaldúa re-evaluate Jungian psychology as they explore the mythological stories to analyze oppression and women’s social station. Besides, “Jungian psychotherapists are known for using myths and folk stories . . . not only to resonate with psychological material and imaginary but also to examine women’s position” (Hauke 141), as the archetypes in the mythological stories reveal how social roles are reinforced.

In *Jung & Feminism*, Wehr focuses on the function of images and symbols in structuring “thought systems” and examines Jungian psychology which “concerns itself largely with the power of images” (22). Wehr suggests that since images precede verbal expression, they are an effective means to communicate psychic experiences and compares their function with the power exerted over subjects through internalizing oppression by pre-rational, unconscious means. As a result, most feminists make use of Jung’s concept of “collective unconscious” and archetypes which offer an insight in thinking through the force of collective symbols in women’s lives. Yet, unlike Jung who examines symbols from an “apolitical” viewpoint; feminists endow political meanings to them by taking into account their social context (Wehr 14-22). Hence, they offer a re-reading Jungian psychology by combining psychoanalysis and feminist theory as Anzaldúa does in *Borderlands/La Frontera*.

In the second part of her work which consists of poems, Anzaldúa elaborates on the themes that she has introduced in the essays of the first part. In “Poets Have Strange Eating Habits,” a poem which appears in the section entitled “the Crossers,” Anzaldúa’s poetic voice describes the process of writing her poems just as she does in the brief excerpt examined above. In the poem, “she likens writing to a wild ‘nightride’” on “horseback” “over the edge of [a] cliff” (Keating 37). In the first stanza, the poet tells that across the dark sky of the night, she directs the mare toward an edge. “The night sky” represents her shadow and the mare is the vehicle, her poem that drives her toward it. The poet depicts the sky as “windowless” darkness to suggest that she is not

observing the vast expanse from a distance, but rather she is inside it and there are no barriers/borders between her and the sky. At the end of the stanza, she mentions that the body of the mare “caves into itself through the hole,” the poet’s “mouth” (162). It is the “strange eating habit” that the title of the poem refers to, for she devours her poem or it is the other way around, her poem/the mare devours herself.

In the second stanza, the poet thinks of jumping “down the steps of [a] temple and offering her heart “to the midnight sun,” (162) for she thinks that writing requires such a sacrifice which prepares her for the confrontation with her Self. In the rest of the poem, she depicts her “plunge” to the depths of her consciousness when she leaps over the cliff and initiates the process of her fall “into faceless air” (163). For her, “jumping over cliffs” is a repetitious, since she constantly feels the need to renew herself and make meaning out of her anguish by reaching beneath the surface of her experiences. Hence, writing enables the poet to achieve what Jung calls the archetype of “rebirth” that resides in the collective unconscious of humanity (*A Primer of Jungian Psychology* 41).

Like “Poets Have Strange Eating Habits,” most of Anzaldúa’s poems in the section entitled “*Cihuatlyotl*, Woman Alone,” draw on Jungian psychology and express the poet’s re-acquaintance with her inner self/anima as well as the releasing of her Shadow-Beast. *Chiuatlyotl*— often spelled as *Cihuacoatl*— is “the sexual goddess of childbirth” in Aztec mythology, and is considered an “antecedent of *la Llorona*,” the Mexican Weeping Woman (Saldívar-Hull 11). Anzaldúa makes use of the mythical figure as a representation of her giving birth to a new self which she explores in her poems.

In “I Had to Go Down,” she describes her psychological and metaphorical journey to the downstairs of her home at night. She tells that she “hardly ever set foot on the floors below” because of her fear of “the wild animal kicking at its iron cage.” The poet wonders what propelled her to “go down” without waiting “till morning,” since “the stairs” were all “dark.” She first goes down to the second floor and cleans up the room by pulling “down curtains,” scraping the “caked tears from the windows” and stripping the bed sheets (189). Symbolically, such an act represents the cleansing of her psyche on the way to the formation of a new self and the curing of the wounds of her past. “The caked tears” she cleanses are her own tears that left behind the stains on the windows. Yet, as she explains in “the *Coatlucue* State,” she recognizes that “Our greatest

disappointments and painful experiences—if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are” (68). In re-interpreting her disillusionments and anguish; she lifts “the lid from her eyes” (71), pulls down the dirty curtains. Then, carrying “the bundle,” she goes down to the first floor. There she hears a noise like “footsteps” from the basement, and thinks that it is the sound of “raindrops” or “the wind” (189). In the yard, she stands “among the winter trees” watching the infinite sky and gathers wood to light a fire which fills “[t]he house with smoke.” Wondering whether or not she kept “the washer and dryer in the basement,” she finally resolves that she cannot linger on any longer. Once she becomes determined not to shun going down, her descent into the basement, into the dark abyss occurs in an instant; as the stairs disappear and she makes herself fall to the ground. In the gothic ambience of the basement, she brushes off the spider webs from the windows and in the act lets the moonlight fill the room. Looking around she finds “no machines,” but instead sees the remnants of her past including a “broken chair” with a fading dress upon it, “bedsprings” and “headboards” (190). In an instant, her foot stumbles upon something in the ground and she soon realizes that it is the root of a “growing tree” that has “broken through / into the belly of the house.” The young tree flourishing in the dark, in the “nightsun” (191) is her own budding self; it is a projection of her identity. With this association in mind, she again hears footsteps; yet recognizes that it has been her own footsteps that she has heard all along and that she was afraid of the sounds coming from inside her.

In going down, she comes across the animal in her, which she describes in “that dark shining thing.” In the poem, she portrays her process of re-birth as she sets free her “Shadow-Beast:” “. . . I remember / he/me/they who shouted / push Gloria breathe Gloria / feel their hands holding me up, prompting me / until I’m facing that pulsing bloodied blackness” (193-194). In “the *Coatlilcue* State,” the narrator refers to this process when she tells that “It is a dry birth, a breech birth, a screaming birth, one that fights her every inch of the way” (71). Yet, as the poet mentions, when the pain is gone, she opens her eyes “one day” and sees “the numinous thing” (194). The word “numinous” is Jung’s term that he uses to describe the “unconditional, dangerous, taboo [and] magical” (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 28). It is related to Jung’s concept of anima which is “a magical feminine being” that makes “[e]verything



[it] touches . . . numinous” and enables one to “enter into the realm of gods” (Jung 24). For Jung, the archetype of anima refers to “the feminine side of male psyche,” whereas *animus* is “the masculine side of feminine psyche” (*A Primer of Jungian Psychology* 46). Yet, Anzaldúa’s narrator adopts the anima concept as a representation of her inner self. Some feminist critics have criticized Jungian psychology for being essentialist and have maintained that “Jung’s feminine” is “one more way of alienating women from their own selves (Wehr 4). Nonetheless, Anzaldúa sees in Jung’s theory the potential to dismantle gender distinctions or borders between what is deemed “feminine” and “masculine,” and re-reads Jung’s concept of “numinous” as a liberating anima.

In Anzaldúa’s poem “the numinous thing” stands for the anima she embraces, it represents the core of her selfhood or her “woman-god.” Once she sees it, she realizes that it has her name; and when she talks to it, it speaks back to her. It tells her that “I am that beast that circles your house / peers in the window;” for the poet, it is a matter of “*vida o muerte*, life or death” (194) to establish contact with it, which is a point of no return and marks the threshold to the beginning of a new life.

Central to the narrating subject’s transformation process is Anzaldúa’s concept of *Nepantla* “which is a Nahuatl word for the space between two bodies of water, the space between two worlds” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 237). *Nepantla* is the border or the threshold between the narrator’s old and new selves, a space of “transition” (237). In “now let us shift . . . the path of conocimiento . . . inner work, public acts,” Anzaldúa’s narrator defines “nepantla” as a “birth-canal” which enables her to “ascent” from the depths, from Coatlicue; and thus provides “a way up, a way out” (554). It is the place where different worldviews “come into conflict,” where one questions “the basic ideas, tenets and identities inherited from” one’s “family” and culture (548). In *nepantla*, the transforming subject begins to realize the inefficiency of her old perspectives and like a serpent that sheds off its old skin she senses that “yesterday’s mode of consciousness pinches [her] like an outgrown shoe” (549). To cross *nepantla* requires one to let go of one’s former identity as Anzaldúa’s poetic subject describes it in “Letting Go.”

In the poem, the poet tells that crossing over necessitates opening up oneself constantly. It means recognizing repressed feelings and dispensing with one’s negative self-image. The poet describes this process as follows: “You must plunge your fingers / into your

navel, with your two hands / split open, / spill out the lizards and horned toads / the orchids and the sunflowers, / turn the maze inside out. / Shake it” (186). She once again makes use of bodily images to portray her internal experiences which she externalizes by bringing them to the surface. Then, she tells herself that “You have crossed over. / And all around you space. / Alone. With nothingness” (187). Thus, she realizes that she is alone in this journey, since an affirmation of her true identity leads to her isolation from the mainstream and enables her to reach “beyond the horizon” (549) of the accustomed scene of her past, her former self.

In “*Cihuatlyotl, Woman Alone*” which is a brief poetic piece that appears at the end of the section, Anzaldúa’s narrator ponders on the relation between her newly formed selfhood and the Chicano community. She realizes that since she has gone against the values of her own culture, she has become a “woman alone.” On the other hand, her re-adoption of indigenous legacy makes her conscious of how she is still connected to that community. Thus, without denying collective identity, she affirms her unique/individual selfhood, as she concludes the section by proclaiming that “I remain who I am, multiple and one of the herd, yet not of it. I walk on the ground of my own being browned and hardened by the ages. I am fully formed carved by the hands of the ancients . . . But my own hands whittle the final work me” (195). She leaves random spaces between words to indicate the stagnations in her flow of consciousness and to put more emphasis on certain words. The narrator’s conclusion clarifies that she uses the phrase “woman alone” in a positive sense, for it represents her maintenance of an authenticity of identity and self-autonomy within a given collective.

Crossing to new states of awareness and re-embracing her individual/ethnic identity propel her to communicate her experiences through writing. In “now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner work, public acts,” she mentions that “the desire for order and meaning prompts [her] to track the ongoing circumstances of [her] life, to sift, sort, and symbolize [her] experiences and try to arrange them into a pattern or story that speak to [her] reality” (345). Hence, writing appears to be one of the stages on “the path of *conocimiento*,” for it not only enables her to re-interpret her life, but also to publicize her “inner work.”

In “*Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink*,” Anzaldúa’s narrating subject conceives of inscribing her life story both as a reclamation of her indigenous identity and as a process of psychological healing. The narrator opens the chapter by focusing on the storytelling tradition as an integral part of Mexican culture, for the stories she grew up hearing reflected the Mexican folk beliefs. She remembers the *cuentos* that her grandmother and father told her about rabid coyotes devastating the grandmother’s house and a giant phantom dog that appeared suddenly by the side of the father’s pick-up. In addition, she notes that when she was a child, she told the stories she had made up to her sister Hilda at nights, since her sister threatened to inform their mother about her insomnia if she did not tell her a tale. The narrator mentions how during those nights, she liked reading “in bed with a flashlight under the covers,” preferring “the world of imagination to the death of sleep.” From then on, she says, she has associated “working with images” and “writing” with night (87).

In “Invoking Art,” the narrator conceives her “stories” as “acts encapsulated in time,” for they are “enacted” when “spoken aloud” or “read silently” (89). She thinks of each art work as containing a living identity and as reflections of the forces in nature. Unlike Western aesthetics that view art crafts as inanimate objects, she notes that the tribal cultures conceive of them as communal performances related to everyday processes of life. In *Art as Experience* (1934), John Dewey conveys a similar viewpoint, as he argues that

When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operations of experience, a wall is build around them . . . . Art is remitted to a separate realm where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other human effort, undergoing and achievement. (3)

Anzaldúa’s concept of “invoked art” parallels Dewey’s conception of aesthetics as an interactive and perceptive process, for it refers to the communal art or “ethno-poetics” of indigenous Mexican people who bring together “the religious, social and aesthetic purposes” in rituals (88).

Drawing on ancient Aztec beliefs and their conception of artistic creativity, Anzaldúa’s narrator conceives of producing art works and writing stories as shamanistic performances, and defines the writer as “a *nahual*, a shaman” (88). She believes in the transformative power of stories to change both the teller and the listener into new

subjects. Thus, she thinks of herself as “a ‘shape-changer’ who uses language’s performative effects to re-invent herself, her readers and her world” (Keating 32).

In the subchapter entitled “the Shamanic State,” Anzaldúa’s narrating subject describes the process of creating her stories. She explains how she first contrives the stories in her mind with the help of images which make her enter into a trance. Inscribing her mental pictures enables her to make meaning out of painful experiences. She tells that since those images are remnants of traumatic experiences writing them down help her cure internal wounds. She describes her creation and inscription of stories in “a sensory-deprived state” by putting a “black cloth” on her “eye-shades” and plugging “up her ears” (92) so as to become more enclosed in her imagination without being perturbed by external stimuli. Thus, in her world of imagination, she is placed amidst shifting realities where it is possible to change genders and to alter thoughts. The narrator concludes the subchapter by declaring that “I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become” (93). She uses the word “myth” not in the sense of a fictitious story but as a personal and social reality. In the personal sense, myths are related to her inner/psychological condition as explored above. As noted earlier, personal myths are reclaimed and re-adapted to mirror psychic states and to eliminate the barriers imposed on an individual’s consciousness. Social myths, on the other hand, are revised; for they function as devices of perpetuating the patriarchal order and have constituted Chicana women’s social reality. Keating explains that Anzaldúa’s “revisionist mythmaking” has “a distinctively feminist component” (21). Keating’s statement is also true for Moraga, for her work demonstrates how patriarchal myths are deeply ingrained in “Mexican/Chicano collective psychology” (93).

In *Loving in the War Years*, in the essay entitled “Traitor Begets Traitor,” Moraga’s narrator focuses on the mythical and historical figure of Malintzin Tenepal. She examines how the patriarchal interpretations of colonial history led to the stigmatizing of Malintzin—an Aztec native woman who worked as a translator to the Spanish colonizer Hernán Cortés and “bore his children” (Alarcón 59)—as a traitor to her own community. The narrator argues that “Malintzin—also called “Malinche” and derogatorily named as “la Chingada” or “la Vendida [Sold-out]”—has been blamed for the defeat of the Aztecs by the Spaniards and “the ‘bastardization’ of the indigenous

people of México” (91). She points to the ways in which the Chicano and Mexican cultures have turned Malintzin into a stereotypical representation of “historical/sexual ‘transgression’” to reinforce the “myth of the inherent unreliability of women” (92-93). Moreover, she emphasizes the similarity between the myth of *la Malinche* and the biblical Eve, indicating that the distorted interpretation of Malintzin’s role reflects the influence of the “European-Catholic” worldview passed onto “the mestizo people” by the Spanish colonizers (93).

In line with Moraga’s analysis, in an article entitled “Traddutora, Traditora [Translator, Traitor]: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism,” Norma Alarcón focuses on *la Malinche* as an analogous figure to Eve, as she explains that like the Biblical Eve, she is considered “as the originator of” her own people’s “fall from grace,” thus “the ‘procreator of a ‘fallen’ people” (58). For Alarcón, Malintzin’s double-role both as a translator and mother of Cortés’s children, the *mestizas/os*, caused her to be stigmatized as a “treacherous” woman. Referring to her role as a translator, the Spaniards called Malintzin “*la lengua*” which means “the tongue” in Spanish (Alarcón 59), since she used language as the medium of communication between the Spaniards and Mexican natives with the help of her ability to translate. Yet, as Alarcón argues, “the act of translating,” when it is “perceived to be going beyond” a community’s established cultural narratives and symbolic system, “is liable to be implicated in treachery,” for it “introduces different concepts and perceptions . . . and may even do violence to local knowledge” (62). Hence, the power of language to alter what a given community “perceives to be the ‘true’ and/or ‘authentic’ concept, image or narrative,” (62) is one of the reasons why Malintzin is mistakenly considered to be a betrayer of her own community. Besides, since Malintzin was speaking on behalf of herself both as a translator and as a woman, she went beyond her culture’s definitions of womanhood based only on maternal function. As a result, she was dismissed for not obeying her culture’s patriarchal values and dictates.

Like Alarcón, in her above-mentioned essay, Moraga presents revised interpretations of Malintzin’s story by Chicana feminists. She explains that when Cortés arrived in Mexico, the Aztec empire had already subdued most of the native populations. Their purpose was to sacrifice the victims of war to *Huitzilopochtli*, the sun-god.

Consequently, most of the Native tribes cooperated with the Spaniards in order to overthrow the Aztecs. Thus, Alarcón suggests that it was not Malintzin who brought about the downfall of the Aztec civilization, but rather with their imperialist projects and exploitive politics the Aztecs “decreed their own self-destruction” (92).

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator conveys a similar perspective. She explains how the subjugated tribes suffered under the rule of the Aztec regime due to the sexual harassment of the women and heavy taxation. She tells that the enemies of the Aztecs aided the Spanish colonizers in order to subdue them. Therefore, according to Anzaldúa, the fall of “the Aztec nation” took place not because “*Malinali* [Malintzin]” became an interpreter and mistress to Cortés; but rather it had its roots in the emergence of a misogynist culture that “subverted the solidarity between men and women” and the establishment of a class system that brought about the gap “between the noble and commoner” (56).

Furthermore, in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga presents the perspective of the Chicana feminist theorist Aleida Del Castillo regarding the myth of *la Malinche*. According to Del Castillo, *Malinche* helped Cortés “because she understood him to be Quetzalcoatl,” “the feathered serpent God” who—according to Aztec records—was envisaged to “return from the east to redeem his people” (Moraga 92). After she presents a revised interpretation of the mythical-historical story, the narrator analyzes its effect on how her identity as a Chicana lesbian is conceived by the Chicano culture. In “A Long Line of Vendidas [‘Sold-Outs’],” she depicts her mother and herself as “modern-day Chicana Malinche[s]” in the eyes of the patriarchal Chicano community, as she argues that,

Malinche has sold out her indio people by acting as courtesan and translator for Cortéz, whose offspring symbolically represent the birth of the bastardized mestizo/mexicano people. My mother then is the modern-day Chicana Malinche marrying a white man, my father . . . Finally, I—a half-breed Chicana—further betray my race by *choosing* my sexuality, which excludes all men, and therefore most dangerously, Chicano men. *I come from a long line of Vendidas.* (108)

The narrator’s conclusion comments on how her sexual identity and radicalism oppose the social codes of women’s passivity. By rejecting the gendered paradigms of the

Chicano culture she avoids the status of *la chingada*—a derogatory term used to describe the sexually “manipulated” woman. She repudiates the notion that Malintzin is accountable for her “violation,” and presents a critique of the Mexican poet and author Octavio Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) in which Malintzin is depicted in a stereotypical way as *la chingada* who is “used” by the male or the *chingón*, Cortéz (109). Reflecting on the misogynist component of the myth; she tells that in order not to be viewed as the passive abused body or the *chingada*, she first preferred to “become pure spirit—bodiless” in line with the religious doctrines during her “early adolescent years” and then “the *chingón*” (111-115). Therefore, she suggests that her choice to “become the *chingón*” is related to her concern to defend herself from sexual usurpation or being turned into an inert/submissive victim.

Like Moraga, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa focuses on the negative impact of the myth of *la Malinche* on Chicana women by tracing the emergence of the “good woman/bad woman” dichotomy in both Pre-Columbian and colonial history. In “Entering into the Serpent,” Anzaldúa examined the ancient Aztec goddesses of the pre-patriarchal period by exploring how these indigenous female icons represented balance and harmony. As has been mentioned above, the goddess of *Coatlicue* symbolized the concord of the “opposing” components or forces of the universe. Yet, the harmony symbolized by *Coatlicue* was destroyed when the Aztec patriarchy dismissed the goddesses of the Earth and prioritized the male deities. They divided *Coatlicue* into the numerous aspects that comprised her; a process which was furthered by the Spanish Catholics (49). Eventually, the fragmentation of *Coatlicue* culminated in the birth of dichotomous gender paradigms that define womanhood on rigid terms. Thus, through her study of the influence of archetypal figures or goddesses on women’s identities and social roles, Anzaldúa engages in “semiotic archeology” and “spectral analysis” by moving from the whole to the fragments as if observing “a white light split by prism into its component colors” (Lioi 78).

The narrator initially focuses on the diverse aspects of *Coatlicue* represented by a tetralogy of goddesses: *Coyolxauhqui*, *Tonantsi*, *Tlazolteotl* and *Cihuacoatl*. *Tonantsi*, also called as *Tonantzin*, was the benevolent Mother of the Nahuas (Lara 100). She became “the good mother” as contrasted to the above-mentioned deities when the Aztecs

separated her from the darker aspects of *Coatlicue*. The cult of *Tonantsi* was resumed by the Totonac tribe, since—according to their belief system—she favored tiny animals like birds as sacrificial victims instead of human beings. For the Nahuas, *Tonantsi* was the goddess who tended the crops and who introduced to Mexican people the cactus plant (Anzaldúa 49). In contrast to the conceptualization of *Tonantsi* as the good and meek mother; *Tlazolteotl*—“an alternative embodiment of *Coatlicue*” (Hartley 42)—and *Cihuacoatl* or the “Serpent Woman” (Lara 101) came to be considered as vicious deities. *Coatlicue* was placed at the opposite side of *Tonantsi* who later was transformed into the Christian *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, the Mexican and Spanish version of the Virgin Mary.



The Statue of *Coatlicue*

**Source:** 09 Feb. 2013. <<http://classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com/54781/flashcards/877942/jpg/statue-of-coatlicue.jpg>>.



*Tonantzin*

**Source:** 09 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.mexicolore.co.uk/images-551022.jpg>>.

After the Spanish Conquest *Tonantsi/Guadalupe* was split and desexualized by the Church and turned into chaste virgins whereas *Tlazolteotl*, *Cihuacoatl* and *Coatlicue* became dark goddesses. Between the binary of *Guadalupe* and *Coatlicue* is situated *Coatlalopeuh* who becomes a mediative and a central figure linking Chicanas/os to their



Native heritage. She appears as a symbol of the Mexican Catholicism that Chicanas/os and Anzaldúa's family have practiced. Anzaldúa translates the Nahuatl word "*Coatlalopeuh*" as "She Who Has Dominion Over the Serpents" (49) which appears as the title of a subchapter in "Entering Into the Serpent." According to Lioi, *Coatlalopeuh* and Anzaldúa's usage of serpent metaphors recall "stories [of] Virgin Mary" and "one European version of [her]" as "the Queen of Heaven," "crowned with stars and stepping on a serpent while standing on the moon" (82). Yet, in Lioi's interpretation, *Guadalupe* does not pulverize the serpent, but rather she herself is the serpent representing knowledge and wisdom. Thus, although the narrator specifies that she is not a Catholic,



*La Virgen de Guadalupe*

**Source:** 11 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.google.com.tr/search?hl=tr&site=imghp&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1051&bih=501&q=Guadalupe+and+the+serpent&oq=>>.

throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, she employs symbols of Catholicism in an "anthropological-functional sense" by intermingling European and indigenous perspectives with "the concept of 'feminist' or 'women's spirituality'" (Lioi 76-82). After she describes the the fragmentation of Aztec female deities, Anzaldúa conveys a

Mexican folk story regarding the emergence of the cult of *Guadalupe*. According to the mythical tale, *Guadalupe* first appeared to a poor native named Juan Diego in 1531 while he was crossing Tepeyac Hill where the temple of *Tonantzin* was located. The apparition of *Guadalupe* told Diego that she was *Maria Coatlicauhtli*. After his encounter with *Guadalupe*, Juan Diego leaves an image of her “painted on his cloak,” and from then on *Guadalupe* becomes the central religious figure and the national symbol of México (50-52). Thus, the story depicts the conversion of indigenous “goddesses into versions of Mary” who took up the roles of earlier Aztec Earth deities (Lioi 83). Anzaldúa conceives of *Guadalupe* as a symbol of the new *mestiza* consciousness—as a “synthesis of the old world and the new” (52). Besides, she is a representation of aspirations, dreams, hopes and strength, since she ensured the continuity of Mexican Native population against cultural subjugation. For Anzaldúa, *Guadalupe* is the mediator,

. . . between the Spanish and the Indian cultures (or three cultures as in the case of *mexicanos* of African and other ancestry) and between Chicanos and the white world. She mediates between the humans and the divine, between this reality and the reality of spirit entities. [She] is the symbol of ethnic identity and of the tolerance for ambiguity that Chicanos-*mexicanos*, people of mixed race, people who have Indian blood, people who cross cultures by necessity possess. (52)

Chicanas/os’ “tolerance for ambiguity” as represented by *Guadalupe* refers to the balancing of conflicting cultural messages that the *mestiza/o* receives. Emphasizing *Guadalupe*’s role as a negotiator, Anzaldúa both embraces the figure of “the dark virgin” as a symbol of ethnic identity and develops a critical perspective toward the establishment of dichotomous gender categories that have labeled Chicanas either as *Guadalupes* (“good women”) or as *la Malinches/la Chingadas*—denoting those who transcend the strict gender norms of the community.

Apart from the mythical narratives of *la Virgen de Guadalupe* and *la Malinche*, the myth of *la Llorona* (the Weeping Woman) is another notable story that both Moraga and Anzaldúa explore. In *Loving in the War Years*, in the section entitled “Looking for Insatiable Woman,” Moraga’s narrator recounts the tale of *la Llorona*’s tale noting its extensive influence on her as a writer. She narrates the story as follows:

One traditional Mexican version of *La Llorona* tells the tale of a woman who is sexually betrayed by her man, and, in what was either a fit of jealous rage or pure retaliation, she kills their children by drowning them in a river. Upon her own death, she is unable to enter heaven because of her crime. Instead, she is destined to spend all eternity searching for her dead children. Her lament, “Mis Hijos [My Children]!” becomes the blood-chilling cry heard along irrigation ditches and country creeks, warning children that any misbehavior (staying too far from camp for example) might lead to abduction by this female phantom. (142)

The narrator becomes acquainted with *la Llorona*'s story while working as a waitress in a restaurant where she befriends a woman named Amber. She feels close to Amber when she notices the books that she brings into the restaurant each evening and thinks of her as family. Amber tells the narrator a story about a lesbian named Jay for whom she has done prison support work. The story reminds the narrator of *la Llorona* myth, as she learns that Jay has been in prison as “a child-killer,” in other words, “a contemporary *La Llorona*” (143). Yet, as the story unfolds, it is revealed that Jay was not the only one who was guilty of the crime, for Jay's lover—the children's biological mother—was also involved in it. Even though they were both guilty for driving the kids toward the cliff in a fit of derangement and drunkenness, the biological mother was acquitted when she testified that Jay had forced her to do it while the pressure of the public has kept “the lesbian . . . behind bars” (144). Moraga's poem, “the Voices of the Fallers,” which is examined in the previous chapter, refers to this story, as the poet hears the voices of the falling kids in her mind while she imagines the fall of her own body and the fall of the lesbian.

The narrated incident above stimulates the narrator to reflect on the legend of *la Llorona* whom she thinks of as a sister. She re-interprets *la Llorona*'s story as symbolical of the woman's wish to eliminate patriarchal definitions of motherhood. Thus, for Moraga, the myth is suggestive of the fact that motherhood and womanhood have always been delineated by men. As a result, *la Llorona*'s cry echoes the cry of all Chicana and Mexican women who search not for “dead children,” but for their “lost selves,” their “lost sexuality,” “spirituality” and dignity (147).

The story of *la Llorona* is also related to the myth of “the Hungry Woman” in Aztec mythology. According to this creation myth,

In the place where the spirits live, there was once a woman who cried constantly for food. She had mouths in her wrists, mouths in her elbows, and mouths in her ankles and knees. . . . Then to comfort the poor woman [the celestial spirits] flew down and began to make grass and flowers out of her skin. From her hair they made forests, from her eyes, pools and springs, from her shoulders, mountains and from her nose, valleys. At last she will be satisfied, they thought. But just as before, her mouths were everywhere, biting and moaning . . . . Sometimes at night when the wind blows, you can hear her crying for food. (*The Hungry Woman: Myths and Legends of the Aztecs* 23)

According to Moraga, “the Hungry Woman” represents Chicanas’ constant quest for identity, and the voicing of yearnings or unfulfilled desires. Thus, in exploring the stories of *la Llorona* and “the Hungry Woman,” the narrator reveals how mythical stories are shaped by and shape women’s experiences.

Likewise, in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrating subject ponders on the impact of Mexican myths on Chicanas’ identity construction. She notes that the myths of *Guadalupe*, *la Malinche* and *la Llorona* have been perverted and used in a way to keep women passive and tolerant. Tracing the original narratives behind those myths, she considers the Aztec deity of child-birth, *Cihuacoatl* (“Serpent Woman”) as the predecessor of *la Llorona*. She situates *Cihuacoatl* in her childhood memory of a superstitious belief intermingled with a sense of identification with place. The narrator tells that in the small Texas town, Hargill, where she was raised, there was an abandoned church down the lane. It was believed among the Chicanos that if anyone followed the road to the church at night, she/he would see a ghost woman in a white dress looking out of the window. She was called as “*la Jila*” (57) or thought be *la Llorona* by some whereas Anzaldúa’s narrator prefers to think of her as *Cihuacoatl* in her wish to give back *la Llorona* her native identity. Yet, she interprets the superstition as another patriarchal myth aimed at keeping girls from meandering away. She relates the folk belief about the ghost woman to the “ancient Indian tradition of burying the umbilical cord of an infant girl under the house so that she will never stray from it and her domestic role” (58). Thus, by revealing the social codes ascribed to Chicanas behind the cultural narratives, myths and traditions carved into the contemporary Chicano imaginary; Anzaldúa uncovers the historical continuum of women’s oppression beginning with indigenous customs and carried onto the present.

In her poem entitled “My Black *Angelos*” which appears in the second part of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa embraces the *Llorona* figure who is referred to as an “angel” in the title. Throughout the poem, the poet “incorporates and transforms La Llorona as part of her project of refusing dualistic dichotomies in the production of *mestiza* consciousness,” and fancies “La Llorona as one of the aspects of Coatlicue, the re-pressed dark force” (Bergmann 195-196). She imagines that *la Llorona/Coatlicue* approaches her whimpering at night and enters into her body: “Taloned hand on my shoulder / behind me putting words, words in my head / turning her hot breath / . . . / she crawls into my spine / her eyes opening and closing, / shining under my skin in the dark” (206). She internalizes the image of the Weeping Woman and the Lady of the Serpent-Skirt as a part of her identity, thus she becomes *la Llorona* or *Coatlicue* herself, and in her mind all of the above mentioned Aztec deities “are one” (72).

Through the portrait of Aztec goddesses and Chicano myths, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* both engages in inner reflection and combines Aztec worldview with Spanish/Catholic customs, which is epitomized in her poem entitled “Holy Relics.” The poem tells the story of a prominent Roman Catholic Spanish saint named Teresa de Ávila whose body was disinterred and dismembered several times after her death in order to be consigned to churches for use in religious ceremonies. The poet identifies with Teresa who was thought to be a rebel, “suspected of Jewish *converso* roots” (Lioi 95). The poet conceives of Teresa’s dismemberment as representative of the condition of the Chicana women, as she obscurely links Teresa’s story to the Aztec myth of *Coyolxauhqui* by intermingling “Aztec and Spanish history, Catholicism and indigenous religion” (Lioi 95). The title of the poem refers to Teresa’s scattered pieces or “relics” which are personified as the speaking remains of a woman in the following lines: “We are the holy relics, / the scattered bones of a saint, / the best loved bones of Spain. / We seek each other” (176). The bones of the saint function as a synecdoche for women who feel fragmented and, as Lioi notes, the “we” in the poem contains both Teresa and Anzaldúa in “a feminist communion” (95). The dispersed bones and women search for connections to each other, and for their missing parts.

Just as Anzaldúa’s narrator relates to the non-conformist historical figure of Teresa de Ávila; in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga’s narrating subject identifies with a

contemporary “mad prophetess” (Bow 9). In a brief narrative titled “Salvation, Jesus and Suffer,” she conveys her memory of an insane woman with a rosary entering into the restaurant where she was having her dinner. Standing at the center of the ground, the woman tells everyone that all of them should leave the place right away, because Jesus is coming. From that moment on, the narrator begins to reflect on madness as a sign of authenticity of identity and alienation from the mainstream; for she realizes the woman’s insanity, her outsider status is a “token of her existence” (Bow 9) and concludes that “She’d be nobody if she weren’t a crazy woman” (59). She recognizes how she and the woman share the same marginality—she as a Chicana lesbian and the woman as a “mad” person who is outside the definitions of mental “normativity.” In spite of her identification with the mad woman’s condition, however, the narrator realizes that unlike her, she is not noticed by the people in the restaurant. The woman disguises her non-conformity through madness which gives her a noted/recognized identity within the religious discursive space she creates whereas the narrating subject’s existence as an outcast lesbian of color remains unperceived. Thus, contrary to the deranged woman who subverts reality by hiding her dissent behind the safety of religious discourse, the narrator appears to be an invisible subject without any secure means of articulation. Through her focus on madness as a way to express divergence from preeminent codes of social conduct, Moraga presents a revision of “the societal conceptions of mental breakdown by citing its role in the development of political consciousness” and “[re-inscribing] difference as positive” (Bow 9).

In her poem entitled “For Amber”—dedicated to her acquaintance named “Amber” mentioned above—Moraga offers a portrait of her Anglo grandmother and the deterioration of her mental faculties as a result of old age. She mentions that the grandmother was once a vigorous woman, like a “gypsy” sitting “in a white Cadillac convertible . . . her bleached blonde [hair] / blowing” (75) in the wind. Yet, the grandmother’s free manners and splendor are contrasted to her unexpected speechlessness that occurred in the process of her turning senile. Both her silence and senility, however, become vehicles of self-expression which is observed in the last two stanzas of the poem: “My grandma turned baby / and by the toilet I’d sit with her / she picking out designs in the linoleum / saying this one looks like a man / in a tub, scrubbing his back / with a brush, / and it did” (76). The grandmother’s imaginative

envisioning is depicted as a positive outcome of her proceeding old age. By sharing her vision, the poet “reverses negative associations with senility” and offers a celebration of “madness” or “being outside the norm” (Bow 9). Furthermore, she depicts “difference” as a feature that enables one to look critically at the ways in which conformity constructs fake subjectivities and causes a loss of identity. Hence, the poem and title of the chapter—“the Road to Recovery”—complete the theme of healing the injuries received in the metaphoric war years described throughout Moraga’s work.

Preceding “the Road to Recovery,” Moraga introduces images of injured women in the previous sections, particularly in “Like Family: Loving on the Run” which opens with a poem entitled “Pilgrimage.” In the poem, the speaker refers to herself as “she” and by using the third person singular, she examines or looks at her own wounds from an omniscient perspective. In the first stanzas, she describes how she first became acquainted with the idea of “subservient” Chicana womanhood as a socially accepted or approved gendered model of deportment through her mother’s words: “‘En México, las mujeres crawl / on their hands and knees / to the basilica door. / This proves their faith’” (12). Reflecting on her mother’s statement, she pictures herself as one of those women who are in the midst of a symbolic toilsome journey, a “pilgrimage” that represents the struggle for liberation and equal rights. She imagines herself as a woman with wounded knees in this excursion and asks “where in the journey / would the dusty knees begin / to crack, / would the red blood of the women / stain the grey bone of the road” (12). Her “dusty knees” and “the red blood of the women” denote the pain related to womanhood as well as the curse of patriarchal domination.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa’s narrator describes that curse as “Cultural Tyranny” which refers to the so-called unquestionable, unchallengeable, reigning “paradigms” of a “culture . . . made by those in power—men” (38). For Anzaldúa, most women are the unconscious transmitters of man-made cultural codes and customs which are institutionalized through family and religion that insist on women’s subservience. The narrator explains that within her culture, women are expected to be self-effacing, for self-centeredness is particularly rebuked and criticized in women, not in men. Moreover, in the subchapter “Intimate Terrorism: Life in the Borderlands,” she mentions how male-dominated cultures deprive women of the ability to act in the name

of providing protection. Yet, even though she acknowledges that the world is an unsafe place, she rejects the stance of adopting the role of a victim by putting all the blame on the society and family to evade responsibility. Thus, rather than accepting the passive role attributed to women, Anzaldúa claims a dissident identity and her Native heritage, as she explains that her “Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman’s history of resistance” (43). She interprets Aztec women’s mourning rites as a sign of defiance against the emergence of a warrior culture, a male-dominated social order and the disruption of equality between men and women. Besides, she relates the *la Llorona* myth to the “wailing” of the Native women, the “only means of protest” (43) that they were able to manifest.

In “The Wounding of the *india*-Mestiza,” a subchapter that appears at the end of Chapter Two, Anzaldúa re-claims her Native side by rejecting the commonly held misconception that “the Indian” in the Chicana/*mestiza* is the “betrayal” (44). As she rejects the conventional association of Malintzin’s name—and the “Indian” that name represents—with degradation, she discloses the “Cultural Tyranny” over women of color and over herself as lesbian who is casted aside, disclaimed by her own people. Yet, although she suffers, she perceives the possibility of renewal in “her bruises” and does not quit seeking “a piece of ground to stand on,” a space where she can connect to her “rich ancestral roots” (45). Hence, she takes up the task of a *curandera*, a Mexican “folk healer” (Saldívar-Hull 12) in her poem “*La Curandera*” that appears in the section titled “Animas” (198).

Saldívar-Hull interprets “*La Curandera*” as a “dramatic allegory” that tells the story of the healer who “enters into the serpent and emerges with the knowledge, the healing yerbitas (herbs), which contribute physically, psychologically and intellectually to strong communities” (12). The narrator of the poem presents a symbolic tale that describes how she became a *curandera* with the help and apprenticeship of a *Mexicano* named Juan Dávila. In the first stanza, she describes her sickness that manifests itself through a strange symptom—a spreading whiteness on her leg. In order to help her recover from the illness, her companion Sobrino asks Juan Dávila whether or not he knows a healer. In response, Juan Dávila tells him about a *curandero* that resides in Mexico and resolves to go there himself in order to bring him. When Dávila does not



return, Sobrino goes after him only to find that the *curandero* is already dead. Sobrino soon becomes afflicted with the same illness as his leg begins to turn white and eventually passes away. Juan Dávila decides to bury him in Mexico in spite of the Border Patrol's statement that the body should be taken to the other side of the border. Yet, Dávila ponders that underneath the Earth it does not matter "which side of the border [one] is in" (198). Through Dávila's reasoning, Anzaldúa once again conveys her understanding of the border as an artificial construct, as an "open wound" (24) that needs to be healed. When Dávila returns, he finds the narrator in pain and begins to feel the same physical discomfort when he sees the pain approaching towards him and realizes that his leg is becoming white. The symptom of the sickness is symbolic of a loss of cultural/ethnic identity signified by the color "white." Thus, all of the characters in the verse tale bear the same anguish brought about by the same identity crisis or conflict. Yet, both Juan Dávila and the narrator manage to overcome the illness with the help of a revelation from the serpents which suddenly appear in their room. The serpents covering the walls and the windows tell the narrator that they are her "healing spirit guides" (200). They advise her to gather some plants that will cure the ailment. In response, she and Juan Dávila go into the fields where they find a small plant among the weeds that have so far prevented its growth. When the narrator tells that the plant needs space, the weeds move back slowly and provide enough room for it to flourish while the Earth comes to life. From then on, the narrator says, she has "been a *curandera*" and Juan Dávila "has been [her] apprentice" (201). Through the fairy-tale like verse narrative, Anzaldúa depicts both the shamanic process of psychic recovery and a metaphorical journey back into the Mexican Native heritage.

In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga conveys a similar concern in a brief prose narrative titled "Feed the Mexican Back Into Her." In this concise memoir, the narrator presents her memory of her cousin, Teresita when they were children. She remembers taking the hand of her cousin into hers and going to the grocery together. She ponders how in those days they were more Mexican than they are now as she recollects Teresita's childhood image wearing a striped t-shirt and pants with suspenders. By describing Teresita's childhood appearance, she articulates her desire to re-claim that (self)-image which, for her, represents what being a Chicana means. She communicates her will to encourage Teresita to embrace that identity again by "[spitting] the white words out of

her” and urging her to be “black angry” (135). She wants her cousin to quit the passivity which she associates with pretending to be “white.” According to Allatson, Moraga “strives to goad her cousin’s rage against the discursive legislations of their skins” and “attempts to dispense with “the difference between” her and her darker-skinned cousin (276). Thus, she places both Teresita and herself within the “collective rubric” of the *mestiza* (Allatson 277). Thus, for the narrator, feeding “the Mexican back into” her cousin is an act of building bridges that span across time and miscellaneous cultural spaces.

In “View of Three Bridges,” which appears prior to sections “the Road to Recovery” and “Lo Que Nunca Pasó por Sus Labios,” Moraga conveys her vision of establishing connections between the conflicting social spheres she inhabits. The bridges she perceives function as a metaphor for the joining up of experiences to arrive at self-definitions. In the poem titled “Raw Experience” which opens the section, the poetic voice describes her process of self-discovery and self-investigation in order to come to terms with the identity conflict she faces. She desires to reach a “particular destination” or to get to “someplace” by searching for “clues” and inhabiting her “body / again” (41). In the midst of her transformation, she recognizes that recovery depends on conceiving the bridges that enable one to connect together one’s private and public selves along with the overlapping dimensions of sexual-cultural identity. In the poem, each of the “three bridges” she views represents the bridging of generations and the unison of three cultures—Anglo, Mexican, Native—that forms her *mestiza* identity.

Moraga’s method of harmonizing conflict appears as a cognitive course that refurbishes “Chicaneness” and reinstates the indigenous in Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In “*Un Agitado Viento [An Agitated Wind]: Ehécatl, the Wind,*” Anzaldúa initially presents dramatic scenes from the lives of Chicanas/os who bear the exploits of Anglo colonialism, sexual usurpation as well as the loss of ancestral lands; and then depicts the recuperation process whereby “*La Pérdida [the Loss]*” is re-compensated and Chicana identity is recovered through an affirmation of *mestiza* consciousness. The title refers to “the Aztec wind god,” *Ehécatl* who as “the most important aspect of the . . . god of air Quetzalcoatl,” represented “fertility,” “human breath” and the creative “life force” invoked by constant movement; the deity “was credited with” “blowing life into the

earth” and “creating the present race of human beings” (*Dictionary of Nature Myths* 67). The “agitated wind” in the title, thus, represents the revival of a “lost”-“suppressed cultural history” marked by an understanding of the earth “as a living presence . . . that refuses hierarchies of ownership” (Adams 135).

In the first poetry section entitled “*Más antes en los ranchos* [Long ago in the ranches],” Anzaldúa presents a “trio of poems”—“White-wing Season,” “Cervicide” and “horse”—that deal with the theme of white men’s “alienation from the world of animal/nature/spirit” (Adams 135) as contrasted to Mexicanas/os’ harmonious and intimate relationship with the land. In “White-wing Season,” the poet narrates the story of a poor Chicana farmer who seems to have no other recourse but to accept the money offered by the Anglos in order to “feed her family” and reluctantly “allowing them to shoot the white-wing doves on her land” (*Borderlands/La Frontera* 10). When the plumes of the doves fall over the fields and the roof of her home after the shots of hunters, she feels disdain over her lack of agency in the face of such a devastation; since her economic dependency on the white men makes her compelled to endure witnessing the destruction of the environment. At the end of the poem, the poet conveys the woman’s feeling of guilt at her cooking a meal with the two doves that the hunters have dropped “on her washboard,” “On their way back / to the midwest” (125). Thus, recognizing her helplessness, she feels torn between her conscience and having to sustain her family’s life.

Pursuing “White-wing Season,” in “Cervicide”—a word that denotes “the killing of a deer” (127)—the narrator presents a dismal anecdote about a girl named “Prieta” and her young deer, a tiny fawn she calls “Venadita.” Prieta is forced to kill the animal due to the approaching threat of the game warden and his hounds searching for deer. The narrator mentions that according to the state law at that time, the “penalty for being caught in possession of a deer was \$ 250 or jail” (126). Not having enough money to pay for the penalty and knowing that neither hiding the animal nor letting her free in the woods is the solution—for the guardian’s hounds would find Venadita’s hiding place and if they set her free, she would soon return home—Prieta and her mother decide that they have no other choice but to put an end to Venadita’s life. Yet, since the game warden’s pickup is approaching, they speculate that he will hear the shot. As a result,

they are left “to choose between a knife or hammer—relatively unwieldy and likely more painful means” (K. David 331). As the mother is unable to take on the task, Prieta reluctantly kills the deer that they have looked after and fed with bottle since she was only a new-born when they found her alone—her mother having been shot by a hunter. After slaying Venadita, Prieta hides her dead body by burying it under the shed in order to erase the traces of her existence and to prevent *su papi*, her father from being put into jail. When the game warden arrives, his hounds begin sniffing around the shed until he forces them out and then drives away.

According to Adams, in both of the stories above, “Anzaldúa places the Chicana on a border, navigating between the law of white power and a love of a living landscape to which her life is tied, to which she looks for the survival of those who depend upon her and are a part of her” (135). In both occasions, the farm woman and Prieta are coerced to destroy their solidarity with nature due the threatening presence of Anglo colonizers. In “Cervicide,” however, the story becomes more than a tragic tale about the unwilling killing of Venadita, as Anzaldúa imbues the narrative with a symbolic component. At the end of the poem, in a footnote, she offers an explanation of the term “Cervicide,” and tells that “In archetypal symbology the Self appears as a deer for women” (126). Hence, the killing of the deer becomes an allegory of “Self-murder,” as the phonetic harmony between the names “Prieta” and “Venadita” suggests that Prieta is Venadita – “the two are one” and “only the Self [Prieta] can kill the Self [Venadita],” not anybody else (K. David 331). Consequently, Venadita appears to be a representation of Prieta’s self that she is forced to repress. Throughout the tale, the narrator presents clues that direct the reader to make the connection and color is one of them: “‘Prieta’ is a nickname for ‘one who is dark-skinned’ while Venadita’s fur is ‘tawny’ and ‘spotted,’ ‘the most beautiful thing Prieta had ever seen’—no other characters in the poem have color” (K. David 332). Furthermore, in her depiction of the murder, Prieta and Venadita appear as reflections of each other and feel the same pain:

In the shed behind the corral, where they’d hidden the fawn, Prieta found the hammer. She had to grasp it with both hands. She swung it up. The weight folded her body backwards. A thud reverberated on Venadita’s skull, a wave undulated down her back. . . . Though Venadita’s long lashes quivered, her eyes never left Prieta’s face. (126)

In the excerpt above, Prieta's and Venadita's experiences merge together, Venadita's eyes are Prieta's eyes; it is her own body, her own personhood that Prieta kills. Thus, Venadita is depicted as the anima of Prieta—who is the *persona* that feels obliged to conceal or bury the inner-self. Since Prieta is not allowed to “possess a self” by the dominant culture—as represented by “the game warden and his hounds”—she is left “motherless, dependent, domesticated and suicidal” (K. David 333). Therefore, as K. David notes, the symbolic meaning of the story reinforces an argument that Anzaldúa conveys in the second chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera* (333):

Shutting down. Woman does not feel safe when her own culture, and white culture, are critical of her; when the males of all races hunt her as prey. Alienated from her mother culture, “alien” in the dominant culture, woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self. (42)

Prieta/Venadita, thus, becomes the victim of a culture that disclaims her and makes the individual powerless. Yet, in spite of the seeming killing of the self, throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa's narrator demonstrates that “self-murder” is an illusion, for her real identity or “Shadow-Beast” is not eradicated but remains buried or disguised until she faces it, which constitutes tumultuous transformation process explored above.

In “*Más antes en los ranchos*,” Anzaldúa's aligning of identity/self with the environment in which Chicanos live is further explored in the poem titled “horse.” Unlike “Cervicide” which focuses more on the inner struggle of Prieta through allegory, the poem “horse” offers a close look into the communal conflict between Anglos and Chicanos. In the anecdote, a number of Anglo adolescents brutally torture a horse without any interference from local authorities and the sheriff to prevent them. Contrary to the apparent Anglo ignorance of the incident, Chicanos become disturbed by the event and feel sorrow for the horse's pain. When a wealthy Anglo patriarch offers some money to them for reparation, they reject it and “turn away [the] rich father” with “their faces” “shut,” staring “at the ground” (128-129). Hence, the poem juxtaposes the rampant materialism in the Anglo community with the ethical responsibility the Chicano community feels toward non-human beings that the mainstream society views as mere commodities.

In the ensuing section entitled “La Pérdida [the Loss],” Anzaldúa explores the outcomes of the loss of communally shared lands and the disruption of the equilibrium between nature and human beings. In the opening poem “*sus plumas el viento* [her feathers, the wind],” Anzaldúa presents a story about a Chicana field worker named “Pepita” who is sexually exploited by the field boss. Thus, she is not only compelled to withstand the toilsome field work in the heat but also the continual threat of sexual violence in order to retain her means of subsistence. Furthermore, having been raped, she encounters the scorn of Chicanos who think of her as a “Malinche” and “spit on the ground” (138). In response to the abuses she has faced, Pepita begins to imagine a way of escaping. She hears a “sound of hummingbird wings / in her ears” as she recalls “the hummingbirds from her grandmother’s gardens” (139) and desires to be like one of them in order to be able to escape. Looking up the sky, she wishes the wind could “give her feathers for fingers,” yet the wind throws “her spit back in the face” (140). Thus, nature shatters her fantasy and the security or harmony represented by the gardens of her grandmother is destroyed.

Similar to the story of Pepita, the poem “A Sea of Cabbages” depicts a Chicano peasant laboring in a field of cabbages and describes his hopes for a better life and future. The poet thinks of the cabbage field as a sea and the Chicano worker as a worn-out swimmer who keeps struggling against the adversities he encounters on his way. Like Pepita, he nurtures dreams of getting away or breaking out as his eyes like “unquiet birds” constantly observe “the high paths” trying to catch “the white plumes in the sky” (154). However, he is unable to evade “his own . . . faith,” as his search proves to be unfruitful when “the earth . . . slums his face,” “The sun, a heavy rock on his back” (155). Hence, the sea, traditionally signifying emancipation, becomes his captor. Consequently, “Ehécatl, the [agitated] wind,” which first inspires both the Chicano worker and Pepita to fancy freedom, eventually betrays their yearnings. *Ehécatl* poems, thus, are not only stories about the Chicana, but also about the Chicano who shares in the borderlands experience. Thus, “the wind” is about both being fragmented, scattered, down-trodden, disillusioned and renewal, revival, replenishment.

Following “A Sea of Cabbages,” in “We Call Them Greasers,” Anzaldúa conveys a bitter story about a Chicana rancher raped by an Anglo tax collector. The term “greaser”

is a derogatory word that refers to a Mexican or a person of Latin American origin. The poem is narrated through the words and perspective of the tax-collector who has a contemptuous attitude toward the Chicana/o population whom he describes as follows: “I found them here when I came. / They were growing corn on their small *ranchos* / . . . / Weren’t interested in bettering themselves, / why they didn’t even owned the land but shared it. / . . . / Wasn’t hard to drive them off / . . . / them not even knowing English” (156). The last stanza depicts the offensive rape incident in which the narrator (the tax-collector) physically and verbally expresses his scorn for the Chicana woman while her spouse is forced to observe them from a distance having been tied to a tree. At the end of the poem, the tax-collector approaches to the place where the Chicano is tied, spits “in his face” and orders “the boys” to “lynch him” (157). Hence, “We Call Them Greasers” dramatically depicts the displacement of the Chicana/o who is treated as “less than human” under patriarchal, racial, cultural supremacy.

In the “Animas” section, which appears later in order than “La Pérdida,” the poem “*Cuyamaca*” reiterates the theme of dislocation through a reference to “the Kumeyaay [Behind the Clouds]”—the name of “a nearly extinct tribe” (204). The narrator of the poem is situated as a witness, as she observes the lands that are to be traded in for sale as she drives down the road on a canyon near a mountain. She tells that driven off the land the Native population is confined in reservations or the ghettos in urban areas. During her excursion on the outskirts of the mountain, she comes across a Native woman named “Til’pu [Roadrunner]” from the Kumeyaay tribe whose “homelands were located in Southern California”—including “present day Indiana and San Diego counties” (*Kumeyaay* 4). The narrator describes Til’pu as a woman with sun-tanned skin with “a tattoo on her arm / pricked by cactus thorns” (204-205). In her mind, Til’pu becomes a representation of the surviving “Indian” who is turned into an “exotic other.” At the end of the poem, she imagines her behind a glass in a museum and connects that mental picture with the predicament of Native and Chicana women trapped within patriarchal, racial hegemony.

Similar to “*Cuyamaca*,” in *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga’s “Entre Nos [Between Us]” deals with the theme of the diminishing landscape that had once nurtured the lives of indigenous populations and upon which stories had thrived. Like Anzaldúa’s poetic

voice, the poem's narrator is situated as the "witness to the story / of the dirt / and the trees / and the land / before [a] road / [is] built / through the mountain" (151). The title of the poem refers to the sharing of "the story" between the poet and an "Indian" woman whose identity is not clarified. Hence, the poet appears to be a participant in a shared experience or dialogue between her and the Native woman as a keen observer and knower.

At the very end of *Loving in the War Years*, in "LA VE P' ATRAS: *SHE WHO LOOKS BACK*," Moraga's narrator clarifies that her aim as a writer is to look back towards her Native ancestors and "colored" mothers to create a new future. At a conference she attends in New York City, she turns her body back away from the crowd while she is on the stage in order to visually illustrate her standpoint. Looking behind her, she conveys her belief in the power of recalling and learning from one's history which becomes a force in the present and future.

Therefore, both Moraga's and Anzaldúa's works re-enact return to the *mestiza's* legacy without hinging on nostalgia and escapism for which Moraga's ideas have been mistaken. In the section entitled as "the Return"—which appears in the last chapter of *Loving in the War Years*, "A Flor de Labios [A Flower of the Lips]"—Moraga's narrating subject ponders "how far back is Return? What radical action does Return require?" (204). She conceives that looking back enables one to recognize the errors, missteps and neglects in the past. In addition, she relates returning to the idea of home and constructing family.

The title of the final chapter, "A Flower of the Lips," is taken from the opening poem "Canto Florido [Full of Flowers]" which introduces the notion of return conveyed in the above-mentioned section. In the first part of the poem, the poet indicates that she aims to communicate what is not remembered or discerned lucidly, as she tells, "I do not sing / what resides always / on the tip of the tongue / la ausencia [the absence] / contenida en la cuna [reserved in the cradle] / de cuerpo [of body]" (140). "The absence" refers to the silences contained within the body of the poet; it is not readily available to be turned into speech, since it is not "on the tip of the tongue," but in a cradle. Hence, what is not articulated is only recalled fleetingly as a flower. For the poet, flowers are representations of words grasped from brief moments of recollection. She describes the



precipitation of memories into the form of words as petals that fall from her teeth, which marks the moment of her re-claiming voice to express her desires and love.

At the end of *Loving in the War Years*, the narrator offers a prayer to a pueblo, to the Chiacana/o community by referring to the arduous process of building a nation, family, and a home. It is a prayer to undo the effects of “Susto” (196), a folk belief denoting a kind of sickness defined as “fright or magical fright” resulting in “a loss of spirit or even a loss of soul” (*Healing with Herbs and Rituals: A Mexican Tradition* 14). Remembering her neurotic response to her mother’s ulcer which was mistakenly diagnosed as cancer, she associates “susto” with a fear of death, a fear of being alone. From a wider perspective, “susto” can be viewed as a symbol of a cultural sickness—adopting the norms of the mainstream culture and forgetting one’s own self, soul, and spirit along with one’s cultural inheritance.

Like Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years*, both the essay and poetry parts of Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* close with “*El Returno*” (110, 215). The final essay chapter is entitled as “*La conciencia de la mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness*” in which Anzaldúa conveys her notion of return along with a detailed exploration of the concept of the “new *mestiza* consciousness.” The first sub-chapter, “*Una lucha de fronteras / A Struggle of the Borders*,” opens with a poem which explores the poet’s in-between condition as a *mestiza*: “. . . I, a *mestiza*, / continually walk out of one culture / and into another, / because I am in all cultures at the same time” (99). Inhabiting the border—the point of juncture between clashing cultural domains—results in a mental confusion or an inner struggle. To Anzaldúa, resolving the conflict emanating from uncertainty necessitates acquiring a wider perspective toward one’s identity and social relations; as she argues that,

. . . it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence. . . . All reaction is limited by, and dependent on what it is reacting against. Because the counter-stance stems from a problem with authority—outer as well as inner—it’s a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life. At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank . . . so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. (100-101)

Leaving the opposite side where one stands and possessing the eyes of an eagle and a serpent suggest that the *mestiza* consciousness enables a person to interpret events from a variety of viewpoints rather than being trapped into one's own. Even though Anzaldúa adopts a critical attitude toward racist, sexist and homophobic ideologies, she also desires to overcome controversy by promoting mutual understanding. For her, being a *mestiza* means having "a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity," (101) since the *mestiza* has to find a way to become a constant mediator; to be a Native, a Mexican, a Chicana and an American from a variety of viewpoints. As a result, she, the marginalized Chicana feminist lesbian, participates in the creation of a new culture, "a new story to explain the world and [humans'] participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect [people] to each other and to the planet" (103). The new *mestiza* consciousness is not formed by a mere combination of the separate parts of one's identity, but by erasing the borders between those parts through a continuous effort to break down any rigid dogma, any final answer. Thus, the synthesis produced by alchemical healing is more than "the sum of its severed parts," as the new *mestiza* discovers that only being "flexible" and making herself "vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing" secure her survival (101-104). Relinquishing the accustomed thought structures triggers her to find out new routes for a re-envisioning of identity and to discover that she is a small particle of the spirit of the whole universe. Hence, a consciousness of the borderlands consists of constantly deconstructing and constructing anew without arriving at a closure.

For Anzaldúa, the endeavor of the *mestiza* to eradicate prejudices between individuals "is above all a feminist one," since the curing of "our psyches" is not possible without restoring the balance and equality between sexes (106). In the subchapter entitled "By Your True Faces We Will Know You," the narrator combines her feminist perspective with the Chicana/o struggle to re-acquire dignity and self-respect by uncovering "true faces" (109). The act of self-disclosure, the unearthing of the roots situated in the depths is made complete with "*El Retorno*" in which she celebrates her coming back to the land of her ancestors/her hometown and expresses her attachment to the landscape, the borderland where she grew up:

I have come back. . . . My land. . . . This is home, the small towns in the Valley, *los pueblitos* with chicken pens and goats picketed to the mesquite

shrubs. . . . How I love this tragic valley of South Texas. . . . This land has survived possession and ill-use by five countries: Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the U.S., the Confederacy, and the U.S. again. It has survived Anglo-American blood feuds, lynchings, burnings, rapes, pillage. (111-112)

The narrating subject thinks of her homeland as an extension of her identity. She and the land are both *mestizas*; they complement each other, since they have both experienced the clash of cultures on their bodies.

In the last poetry section titled “*El Returno*,” the poem “To Live in the Borderlands Means You” provides a summary of the themes that Anzaldúa has explored throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*. For Anzaldúa, inhabiting “the borderlands means” that one is situated at a “battleground where enemies are kin to each other” (216). In order to survive the battle, the poet tells that “you must live *sin fronteras* [without borders] / be a crossroads” (217). Since borders are human constructs that lock one into strict boundaries and cause conflicts, Anzaldúa’s solution is to demolish the concept of a border as a rigid division within one’s psyche or mind.

Paralleling Anzaldúa’s depiction of the border consciousness in “To Live in the Borderlands Means You,” Moraga’s “Riverpoem,” which appears in the section “Lo Que Nunca Pasó por Sus Labios,” offers a vivid portrayal of the new *mestiza*. In the poem, the poet imagines herself as “*a river cracking open*” (134). Before she becomes the river, she has been just thin lines of water separated from each other. Yet, after she notices the point of unison which can bring together all those seemingly isolated parts, she decides to gather them to make the river flow. Her turning into a river represents her becoming a *mestiza*, as she embraces and connects the diverse aspects of her identity—Anglo, Chicana, feminist, lesbian—together.

To conclude, Cherríe Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* explore the consolidation of sexuality, ethnicity, personal and collective history through a combination of poetry and prose. Both authors conceptualize the physical border between the United States and Mexico as a metaphor for the condition of Chicana women who live in multiple worlds. By revealing their personal experiences with patriarchal and racial domination, they reject and revise the cultural myths of male “supremacy.” In the process of self-transformation, they turn the

pain of living in geographical, cultural and psychological borderlands into a source of strength, and “look at the symbols of the indigenous as a form of resistance and cultural reaffirmation” (Arrizón 37).

## CONCLUSION

*Accidents may happen and there is nothing we can do. But don't be so quick to call something good or bad. There are balances and harmonies always shifting, always necessary to maintain. . . . It's a matter of transitions you see; the changing, the becoming must be cared for closely, you would do as much for the seedlings, as they become plants in the field.*

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977)

*What is most true is poetic because it is not stopped-stoppable. All that is stopped, grasped, all that is subjugated, easily transmitted, easily picked up, all that comes under the word concept, which is to say all that is taken, caged is less true. Has lost what is life itself. Each object is in reality a small virtual volcano. There is a continuity in the living . . . . All that advances is aerial . . . uncatchable . . . .*

Hélène Cixous, *Hélène Cixous Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (1997)

Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* and Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* both communicate the experience of occupying geographical, cultural, gendered and mental borderlands where the seemingly "monolithic" identity categories dissolve and intersect to form the culture(s) of the new *mestiza*. In each of the two life writings, the border is contextualized not as a rigid boundary of separation, but as a relational space of comingling and identification: The physical borderland is where the two countries—United States and Mexico—and communities face/encounter each other. The cultural borderland is thought of as a collage, a meeting place of multiple ethnicities—Native, Spanish, Mexican, Anglo; and the sexual borderland appears as a site of resistance against patriarchal, heterosexist norms, it is where Moraga and Anzaldúa situate themselves outside the social constructs of sexuality by adopting a lesbian identity. Within the queer borderland, both authors eradicate the gender borders and reconstitute a place of hybridity through an androgenous blend of what is considered to be "feminine" and "masculine." Finally, the mental/psychological/spiritual borderland refers to "a state of being" in which boundaries of any kind and the dualisms produced by those boundaries are understood to be "unnatural" (González 51).

In envisioning the borderland as "an indigenous feminist utopia," Moraga's and Anzaldúa's works reveal a revisionist understanding of culture as opposed to

assimilationism and accommodationism (González 49-50). Assimilationism refers to an essentialist view of culture which posits that there are fundamental differences between cultures that can be easily distinguished and classified. An assimilationist perspective views cultural norms as stable and unchanging; it believes that a person can make distinct choices between the conventions of the diverse cultures she/he inhabits—often by favoring or privileging one over another. In literary works, assimilationist characters mostly conceive one culture as superior and devalue “the other” in an attempt to pass into the mainstream society. Assimilationism is based on the repression of one’s ethnicity or “culture of origin” and adopting the characteristics of the dominant culture (González 34-35).

Contrary to the assimilationist standpoint, accommodationism wishes to bring together or balance elements from a variety of cultures by avoiding hierarchical orderings. Yet, similar to the assimilationists, accommodationists still believe in the stability of cultures and cultural variations without eliminating the boundaries. For instance, when an accommodationist Chicana adopts values from both Mexican and Anglo American cultures, she continues to place them in separate categories; however unlike the assimilationist she does not dismiss the “minority” culture. Thus, she “may acknowledge [Anglo American individualism] in the public sphere and [a Mexican concept of] *familia* in the private sphere (marriage and intimate relationships)” without disregarding either of them (González 35).

Unlike the accommodationist, a revisionist, on the other hand, combines the constituents of diverse cultures in such a way that it gives birth to a new hybrid borderland culture which is more than the totality of its segments. For the revisionist, culture is a subjective, constantly evolving process rather than a compound of strictly defined customs, values, creeds and significations. Hence, revisionism consists of the assumption that cultural meanings are “not intrinsic” or essential, but are “constantly under construction” and transformation; it focuses on the third “space beyond dualities” explored by Anzaldúa in her life writing (González 49).

Throughout *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa enacts revisionism by contributing to the formation of a *mestiza* culture which conveys the readers the message that there is more than one way of being. Anzaldúa rejects essentialist perspectives on identity

which, for her, cannot be fully understood through the essentialist term “mixed blood.” Her term “mestizaje (mestiza)” not only refers to individuals who are of mixed Anglo American, Mexican and Native American origins, but also points to a specific cultural positionality that deconstructs exclusionary identity categorizations.

According to Anzaldúa, the revisionist “new mestiza consciousness” becomes a survival strategy for women living in the borderlands, since it enables them to overcome conflict as they face the constant problem of adapting to different cultures. Thus, Anzaldúa’s concept of *mestizaje* alludes to the coping mechanism that those who live in the borderlands necessarily develop. Hence, the term signifies both ethnic/racial hybridity and the indefinite/ambiguous, culturally composite margin of the Chicana/o caught between clashing worlds.

Both Anzaldúa’s and Moraga’s works, thus, consist of a stylistic and thematic exploration of a *mestizaje* perspective. By combining numerous genres and languages, *Boderlands/La Frontera* and *Loving in the War Years* offer a challenge to the accustomed definitions of identity/culture/ethnicity/gender on monolithic and binaristic terms. In both life writings, language appears to be the most effective means to communicate the new *mestiza* consciousness. While Moraga combines Spanish and English to reconcile her Mexican and Anglo roots; Anzaldúa employs the variations of these languages in addition to the Chicana/o dialect, Spanglish and Nahuatl to emphasize the diversity of tongues that *mestizas/os* have to use in different places and situations. As both authors switch from one language to another, they reveal their ties to multiple communities, histories and cultures. Besides, Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s codeswitchings divert the hegemonic and patriarchal view of language-use, and function as a device for recovering the fissures in Chicana identity and returning to *mestiza* origins.

In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga traces her emergence out of an assimilationist stance to her adoption of a revisionist one, as the narrator’s persona, Cecilia, begins to ponder on the ways in which she has passed into the mainstream society by means of her “light skin privilege” and her Chicana mother, Elvira’s attempts to Anglocize her children. Cecilia gradually realizes that in adopting her Anglo father’s culture, she has denied or disregarded her Mexicanness, her *mestiza* identity. She recognizes how she

has masked her personality behind an Anglo inheritance, yet in the act, has become a stranger to herself. Once Cecilia's illusory world world shatters with this recognition, with the "pesadilla [nightmare]" of an American reality founded on racial/sexual violence, she becomes a transformed subject; and Cecilia eventually turns out to be Cherríe Moraga herself.

At the beginning of *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga documents her working-class upbringing in a conventional patriarchal family. She reveals the ways in which she was indoctrinated with Anglo values while she describes her encounter with the sexism and heterosexism rampant in the Chicano community. Through autobiographically oriented stories, poems and essays, Moraga's narrator explains how she was considered a traitor to her own people for choosing a Chicana feminist lesbian identity. Before conveying her Chicana feminist politics, Moraga, at first, focuses on the relations within her *mestizaje* family and describes her feeling of resentment at the lack of understanding/communication between her and her Anglo father. Meanwhile, her desire to compensate for that absence enables her to connect with her mother who appears as a representative of the Chicana community she desires to be included in. Adopting a feminist body politics and disclosing her lesbian orientation through a sexual identification with her mother, Moraga's narrating subject begins to think of the family as an extension of her *mestiza* queer identity. Yet, her place within that *familia* is plagued by gender roles as she articulates her rage at her brother's domineering attitudes toward her and her sister, Jo'Ann. She conveys her memory of how she and Jo'Ann were expected to serve her brother and his friends during her adolescent years, and points to his more privileged status in the family. Thus, her relation to the Chicano community/*familia* is problematized by patriarchal norms that place Chicanas, particularly queer Chicanas on a subordinate social rank. Rejecting that secondary position, Moraga's narrator re-constitutes the concept of *familia* on her own terms through a consolidation of her sexuality and ethnicity.

Along with the prose sections of her work, Moraga's poems explore the theme of queer love within a predominantly heterosexual and biased society. Despite the fact that Moraga is at the margins of a patriarchal homophobic social circle, she places her sexuality and feminist outlook at the center of her cultural identity. After she discloses



her personal experiences, Moraga goes on to discuss the social and political underpinnings of her ideas within the larger framework of Chicana feminism. Hence, she brings together personal insights with a political vision to combat oppression on the basis of race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender.

Like Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* mirrors the narrating subject's process of self-discovery in her feminist struggle. Both Moraga's and Anzaldúa's narrators depict the course of working through a fragmentation of identity brought about cultural collision and the multiplicity of oppressions they have faced. By uniting the fragments and recovering from the split state of being, they unveil the true inner self which has been nurtured behind the mask of an adopted persona. Within *nepantla*, the transitional space/period, they each begin to see themselves in a different way, unlike how they have viewed themselves before. Transforming into a newly embraced identity becomes both an inward and outward experience, as it changes self-definitions along with the narrators' way of evaluating and structuring social relations.

In *Loving in the War Years*, Cecilia's—the narrated persona's—self-awakening and transformation leads to the formation of a Chicana feminist/*mestiza* consciousness as articulated by Cherríe Moraga's "narrating I" in the later sections of her work. Thus, Cecilia's coming into awareness is depicted as part of the consciousness raising Moraga aims to engage in. Thus, Moraga discloses the path of knowledge beginning from the personal and leading to the collective. In other words, through her life writing, Moraga depicts her journey from an acculturated Anglo identity and a concealed sexuality toward the divulgence of her Chicaneness, feminism and lesbianism.

Much of Moraga's focus in the later sections of *Loving in the War Years*—as contrasted to the more personal stories and poems of the earlier parts—is predominantly on the basic tenets of Chicana/third-wave feminism which she explores through essays written in a serious and straightforward tone. In her essays, Moraga presents a critique of middle-class, white women's feminism which, for her, has disregarded the cultural differences between women from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Moraga's narrating subject suggests that most Anglo feminists have claimed to be speaking for all women without recognizing their racist and classist assumptions. By pointing to the flaws in

Anglo feminism, Moraga conveys her view that women's movement should be based on a collective effort that embraces differences and establishes a common ground for women by bridging those differences.

In a section entitled "Tired of These Acts of Translation," Moraga situates herself as a mediator/a translator between Anglo women and women of color while at the same time she notes that "White women's feminism did little to answer [her] questions" (116-17). She points out that "many feminists" have failed "to approach feminism from any kind of materialist base" (118), since they have largely focused on a theoretical discourse that has disregarded the bodily experiences of women-of-color. Thus, Moraga sees the promise of third-wave-feminism with its focus on "the concept of 'the simultaneity of oppression'" that previous movements have largely ignored (119).

In "Bringing the Strains Together," a title taken from Barbara Smith's description of "Third World feminism," Moraga draws an analogy between African American feminism and Chicana feminism, as she argues that "Chicana feminism did not borrow from white feminists to create a movement. If any direct 'borrowing' was done, it was from Black feminists." For Moraga, the "Black Feminist Statement" conveyed by the Combahee River Collective in 1977, also reflects the concerns of Chicana feminism through its focus on a feminist politics emerging directly from African American identity. After reading "*Capitalist Patriarchy: A Case for Socialist Feminism*, edited by Zillah Einstein," Moraga's narrator mentions that she has come to an awareness of "what might be considered the *psycho-sexual* oppression of women of color," while realizing the vitality of an "expressed solidarity [amongst "Third World" women]." She conceives that in order to find a remedy to the problems she as a lesbian and other women of color face, she "no longer [has] to postpone or deny any part of [her] identity" (123).

Regarding her sexuality as a way to understand and struggle against repressive systems, Moraga associates her desire for freedom with a desire to choose her sexual identity (124). Furthermore, she connects her lesbianism with her ethnic identity, as she tells "I am a lesbian. And I am a Chicana . . . These are two inseparable facts of my life. I can't talk or write about one without the other" (132). In line with this logic, in "My Brother's Sex was White. Mine, Brown," Moraga's narrator proclaims that "the love of

the Chicana, the love of [herself] as a Chicana” is the “self-evident truth” upon which she constructs her “womanhood” (86).

Apart from emphasizing the link between sexual and ethnic identity, Moraga connects the feminist struggle to spiritual vision. As has been mentioned in the second chapter, Moraga envisions the third-wave feminist movement as both “a material and metaphysical” (123-24) struggle for freedom. While she emphasizes the need for realistic analysis of and “solutions to the present-day inequities” (120), she also acknowledges the influence of spirituality on people uniting for a common cause.

Like Moraga, in *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa mingles historical, realistic and materialist perspectives with philosophy, psychology and personal, collective myths by creating an evocative composite of factuality, imagination and dreams. The narrator’s self-transformation is depicted as a process of arriving at a new *mestiza* consciousness beginning with an exploration of borderlands history, a feminist analysis of Chicana’s socio-economic condition within an exploitative system and a culture produced by patriarchal ideology. Pursuing the mytho-historical analysis, the narrator depicts her psychological journey triggered by her personal experiences and marked by her entrance” into the serpent” (47), into “the *Coatlicue* State” (63). Serpents and the goddess *Coatlicue* signify her acquisition of self-knowledge along with the initiation of her decolonization process. Within the transitional space of psychological and spiritual borderlands, she embraces her non-conformist side, her “Shadow-Beast” (38). By facing her “shadow,” the term that Jung uses to denote “the personal unconscious” (20), she unearths the repressed parts of her self and makes her identity complete.

Anzaldúa’s depiction of an inner journey is enriched by her re-mythmaking and a recovery of indigenous heritage as well as mestizas’/Chicana women’s erased history. Searching for a lost identity and legacy, Anzaldúa retrieves the Aztec mythology and female deities such as *la Coatlicue*—who represents unity and harmony—in order to restore the balance or bridge the conceptual gap between binary oppositions created by western dualistic thinking which she thinks of as the root of all biases. Furthermore, by recovering Aztec goddesses—*Tonantzin*, *Coatlalopeuh*, *Cihuacoatl*, *Tlazolteotl*—she connects them to the contemporary Chicano myths and points to the ways in which the Aztec patriarchy and Spaniards transformed and divided the identities of those female

icons in such a way that gives rise to the “good women/bad women” dichotomy. Thus, Anzaldúa re-interprets history and mythology from a Chicana feminist perspective as she deconstructs and revises the myths of patriarchy and Anglo supremacy.

Both Anzaldúa and Moraga subvert the conventional myths as they re-appropriate the mythic figures and narratives within a psycho-social context that challenges the underlying misogynist assumptions. They re-assess the stories of *Coyolxauhqui* (the Aztec Moon goddess), Malintzin Tenepal (the translator and mistress of the Spanish conqueror Cortéz) and *la Llorona* (the Weeping Woman). Rejecting the patriarchal/stereotypical constitution of these legends, Moraga and Anzaldúa re-embrace them as reflections of *mestiza* women who seek their individuality and dignity.

Through a combination of personal and communal history, *Borderlands/La Frontera* and *Loving in the War Years* convey the story of the dispossessed and “the forgotten” (Moraga 213). Both life writings mirror the experiences of their writers who as Chicana feminist lesbians feel out of place within the Chicano and Anglo cultures that deny them the right to define themselves outside gender roles and dogmatic assumptions that limit women’s space. Yet, as Moraga and Anzaldúa repudiate the oppressive doctrines, they also create new values in a process of dismantling and re-composing. The formation of an alternative culture affirms the Chicana lesbian selfhood and the *mestiza* consciousness which rejects the static notions of identity. Hence, both authors expose the “Cultural Tyranny” (Anzaldúa 38) produced by patriarchal norms that perpetuate women’s subordinate status.

To conclude, crossing and transcending beyond the restrictive social codes, Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s narrating subjects realize and develop a critical attitude toward the forces that have partitioned their identities. Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s narrating subjects embark on a journey into the depths, seeking for roots and the sources of bodily pain and psychological conflict. Once they initiate the process of convalescing from the condition of being split and re-occupying the so-far oppressed and denied body; they discover who they are by identifying with the Chicana community through personal experiences, memories as well as the ancient narratives, histories and traditions of *mestizas/os* within a shifting world of constant transition. As the above-mentioned epigraphs from the works of Hélène Cixous and the Native American author Leslie

Mormon Silko indicate, life writings which comprise poetic insights defy the idea of any closure, since identity is a construct that is always in the process of becoming or moving forward. Thus, the maintenance of a coherent/unified self depends on preserving the harmony or balance between binary oppositions—just as Anzaldúa claims it to be. By revealing the transitory process of transcending rigid dualisms and focusing on the diversity of experiences from a myriad of cultural standpoints, both Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* and Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* urge an active reader participation in the sharing of experiences. Within the borderlands, Moraga's and Anzaldúa's narrators discover the power of life stories told to trigger transformation, recovery and to create the necessary tools for an effective social interaction.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The Statue of *Coatlicue*. 09 Feb. 2013. *Google Visuals*.

<<http://classconnection.s3.amazonaws.com/54781/flashcards/877942/jpg/statue-of-coatlicue.jpg>>.

*La Virgen de Guadalupe*. 11 Jun. 2013. *Google Visuals*.

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