

LA FRONTERA, BORDERS and TRANSBORDERS.
REFLECTIONS of the BORDERLANDS in CHICANA LITERATURE
(early 20th-21st c.)

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Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction	1
1- Narrating the West, Creating <i>la frontera</i>	25
2- <i>Fronterizas</i> Calling out from the Southwest.....	82
3- Surviving the Border, Inhabiting the Borderlands	185
4- Queering the City, Rewriting <i>Chicanidad</i>	281
5- Conclusion	388
Works Cited	410

Esker onak

Lehenengo eta behin, eskerrak emon nahi deutsedaz nire tesi zuzendari izan den Amaia Ibarraran Bigalondori. Hasieratik, eta ni ezagutu barik, bide luze honetan laguntzeko prest agertu zalako eta, alkarregaz, aspaldi hasitako bidea amaitzea posible egin dabelako. Urteotan erakutsi dozun pazientzia eta umoreagaitik, eskerrik asko. Baita Euskal Herriko Unibertsitateko Ingeles eta Alemaniar Filologia departamentuari, tesia burutu bitartean arlo ezberdinetan emandako laguntzagaitik. Bestalde, Berkeley-n irakasle den Genaro M. Padillari be eskerrak zuzendu nahi deutsedaz, bihotz-bihotzez, ikerketa egonaldian nigaz erakutsitako eskuzabaltasunagaitik. Chicanoen eskarmentua paperetik errealidadera ekarteagaitik eta berbarik berba lanari ekiteko gogoak berpizteagaitik. Gainera, Urbana-Champaign-eko Richard T. Rodríguez irakasleari be eskertu nahi neuskio tesi honen hazia, jakin barik be, ereiteagaitik.

Bestalde, lan hau neure aita eta amari eskaintzen deutset nigan neuk baino gehiago sinisteagaitik sarritan, eta makaldu nazenean “akuiluegaz” hantxe egon zarielako. Baita eskerrik asko neure ahizta Olatz eta Eiderreri zuen laguntasun eta euskarriagaitik. Ahaztu barik koadrilako lagunak be aipatu nahi dodaz, batez be azken txanpan, nigaz euki dozuen pazientzia itzelagaitik.

Azkenik, liburu artean pozik galtzeko aukera ederra eskaini deusten Austin-eko eta Berkeley-ko unibertsitateak eskertu nahi dodaz, eta, batez be, liburutegiko Adrian Johnson eta Lillian Castillo-Speed beren laguntza guztiagaitik.

Introduction

A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravésados* live here.
(Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera*)

Borders, political and conceptual, have regained centrality in our globalized world and their meaning has changed together with the economic demands of the times. The 19th century marked the establishment of clear political national borders, which directly defined the agenda of nationalisms all around the world. In the following centuries, improved technologies eased the rapid increase of “free” transnational exchange, which depended on the geography of a borderless commerce. In the last years, however, national borders have acquired complex and contradictory implications. While the economy of most of the nations depends on the constant flow of goods, the movement of a certain type of individuals is discouraged and criminalized. For that purpose, some national borders, which block human migration, have been built, while worldwide economies survive on the premise of multinational exchange. The case of the U.S.-Mexican border is a clear example of such contradictory interpretation of borders. This geopolitical site is at the center of current North American politics; hence, in order to understand its repercussions, it is necessary to study its history as well as its role in the collective experience of the Mexican American population in the U.S. What is more, the border and its many conceptualizations have been central to the progress of a political

Mexican American identity. In this context, it is among one of the aims of this dissertation to study the different interpretations of this *frontera* as the means to analyze the development of border Chicana literature throughout U.S. history.

On February 2, 1848, the U.S.-Mexican border was established with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Although this U.S. Southwest-Mexican border runs along a 1,950-mile area, this dissertation will pay special attention to the case of the Texas-Mexico stretch, as most of the literary works gathered in this study are located in this borderland. For this purpose, the particularity of this area is essential in order to understand the drastic socioeconomic and ideological changes brought by this political construct. The Treaty forced Mexico to yield great part of its northern states, which are now known as California, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Texas, to the U.S. In this new geopolitical context, the original Mexican inhabitants were offered the possibility of moving back to Mexico or staying in the U.S. territory with the assurance of acquiring full citizenship. Most of them chose to stay in their homeland with the hope of reestablishing their lives as they were before the war. However, the new political reality brought severe social, economical and cultural changes that directly contradicted the spirit of the Treaty.

The sociopolitical relationships that were established after the agreement revolved around a key element: the land. The source of these acute social changes, then, must be located in the new settlers' greedy disposition in relation to acquiring valuable lands. Anglo newcomers were well aware of the strategic importance of the Rio Grande as the means to establish a highly profitable commerce, which would connect the north Mexican trade with the rest of the world. This is why the land delimited by the Nueces River and the Rio Grande

was the source of many conflicts since 1836 and until the beginning of the Mexican-American War a decade later. The advantageous economical possibilities offered by the control over the Rio Grande show the crucial role played by land ownership, which also secured the access to water, natural resources, and claims over cattle and sheep. In this trend, the forceful expropriation of land-related wealth from Mexicans paved the way for the forging of an overt discriminatory ethnocentric ideology spreading throughout the U.S. Southwest.

Nationalist discourses revolve around the notion that there is a legitimizing connection between community and a demarcated extension of land. In this sense, this dissertation also aims to analyze the different processes of identity construction acquired through different geographical appropriations present in the historical and literary narratives of the U.S.-Mexican border. In order to do so, diverse conceptualizations of the U.S.-Mexican Borderland will be presented and studied. U.S.-Mexico Border Studies claim that since the Treaty, various understandings of this Borderland have been present in relation to the development of the Mexican American identity. More specifically, this thesis focuses on the particular case of the creation of a Chicana identity, as it has been reflected in border Chicana literature.

The role that the hegemonic discourse played in the discrimination of the Mexican population throughout the U.S. is highly important. Narratives of past events and memories of frontier battles ingrained and strengthened the Anglos' distrust towards the original inhabitants of the area. Different battles from border history were included in prejudicial narratives, where biased accounts of historical events justified Mexican discrimination. The real fact and the more

ambiguous instances of history were dismissed, and, instead, a self-celebratory and non-controversial version was accepted as the real report. These stories proved to be widely effective in promoting and maintaining unequal social, economical and ideological divisions between the Anglo and the Mexican population. Thus, the relevance of site-specific narratives in the establishment of the relationship between the communities is paramount. Following this line, the centrality of land (of its ownerships or of the lack of it) was absolute in the development of the Mexican identity during the previous years to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. One's land conveyed a birthright and, thus, a lifestyle that defined the way Mexicans identified themselves. This value system corresponded to the fact that they either owned land or did not own it (as was the case of *rancheros*, *peones* or *vaqueros*). In other words, land property defined the notions that formed the Mexican identity. After the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, their conceptualization as individuals and as a community was dramatically altered. Becoming "Americans" made them victims of the dispossession of their land-related notion of identity, and the several social and economical changes introduced by the newcomers turned them into aliens in their own home.

Anglo settlers viewed land as a material possession that secured a profit, so they did not grant as much attachment or ideological value to it as Mexicans did. From this perspective, the American Southwest, as delimited by the Treaty, was regarded as an exciting and profitable venue by the Anglos. Hence, their ideological conceptualization as the new settlers of these deserts was indeed related to the land, which was conceived as the means that secured an economical improvement. While Anglo settlers defined themselves in relation to

money, Mexican identity construction was regulated by their land-related lifestyle. The new border, thus, provoked the cultural estrangement of the original inhabitants of the U.S. Southwest. These opposing viewpoints are at the base of the structural changes implanted throughout the Southwest, and which resulted in the complete transformation from a rural landscape to an urban one. The narratives of the Frontier, as created and propagated by Anglo settlers at the time, justified the dissimilar conditions differentiating the Mexican and the Anglo community. By describing the U.S. Southwest as a Frontier, these accounts dispossessed this geographic area from its past. Besides, Anglo authors and historians' portrayal of an empty and wild space in the outskirts of civilization served them to promote an Anglo nationalist discourse. Through the introduction of the image of the Frontier, and the repetition of this Anglo conceptualization of the West, the non-Anglo communities were presented as either threatening or ignorant. Such portrayal facilitated and naturalized a hierarchical society, where Anglo new settlers placed themselves above the non-Anglos. Bearing in mind this deliberated systematization of ideological and economical discrimination, the establishment of the U.S.-Mexico border and the symbol of the Frontier cannot be construed as objective land-related concepts, but as the origins of a biased ideology towards Mexicans in the American Southwest. Moreover, the U.S.-Mexican border and the concept of the Frontier became the basis for an Anglo national discourse, which legitimized the Anglo's superiority over the Mexican and other non-Anglo population. Disturbing as it might sound, this conceptualization of the American West is still ingrained in current U.S. mainstream discourse; a fact that proves the tenacity of land-related symbols in the processes of identity formation.

Although some efforts to challenge this generalized prejudice against the Mexican American population were made during the 1930s, it was not until the 1960s when an organized and unified political challenge succeeded. The origins of this activism can be traced back to two dramatic events in the history of the U.S.: World War II and the Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, the structural changes related to the economic system also propelled the weakening of discrimination towards the Mexican Americans. That is, the industrialization and urbanization that prompted a new class order, merchants and middle-class consumers instead of the farm growers and laborers, were also central in calling into question segregation. Once again, the importance of space was decisive; that is, the increase of towns and urban settlements became interwoven with the changes in the populations' perception of themselves as individuals and as part of a community. Mexican American soldiers who returned from World War II became one of the main sources of political activism. When arriving home, these veterans demanded the legitimacy and equality they had enjoyed during the war. Besides, the GI Bill of Rights, a law that secured several economical advantages for returning World War II veterans, facilitated male Mexican Americans' access to an education, which was denied to them before. These veterans, in possession of higher education and pensions for their services, formed a Mexican American middle and skilled working class that had been non-existent before. In this new context, they were able to improve their social and economical position within the U.S. society. However, the differences between urban and rural situations were strikingly obvious. While segregation in urban contexts was weakening, rural societies needed at least another decade to begin overturning it.

With the Civil Rights Movement, the African American population in the U.S. demanded the end of racial segregation. By claiming their U.S. citizenship, they requested basic social and political rights denied to them, such as the right to vote. Inspired by this African American activism, the Mexican Americans gathered as a political community and carried out their own activism outlined by *El Movimiento*. Cultural specificity became crucial for the celebration and pride of their Mexican and indigenous past. This first step became the basis for a nationalist activism through which Mexican Americans, Chicana/os as they renamed themselves, asserted their legitimacy as the original inhabitants of the American Southwest. By appropriating this identity label, these activists celebrated not just their political commitment but, also, their intent on recovering their historical and cultural past as the means to overcome the discrimination they had suffered under Anglo domination. *El Movimiento* encouraged a cultural and political unity as the only way to successfully confront discrimination. It was the alliance between middle and working-class Chicana/o activists that secured the success of the Movement.

El Movimiento also favored the vindication of a culturally relevant homeland, Aztlán, as the means to empower its political goal. This symbolic concept and political plan represented the Chicana/o community's long history in the U.S. Southwest. It was in 1969, during the National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference organized at Denver, Colorado, when the symbol of Aztlán became embedded to the rhetoric and value systems of *El Movimiento*. This mythic image, recovered from the Aztec past, allowed a culturally appropriate connection between their past and the existence of a present and future Chicana/o nation. Thus, the political and cultural concept it stood for was

defined as a strategy that would help liberate Chicana/os, and, also, to legitimize their right to full U.S. citizenship. Aztlán also provided a land-based concept that Chicana/os as a community could relate to, and which also included cultural and historical connections that presented positive and revolutionary antecedents to their present situation. Aztlán embodied the ideological conceptualization of *El Movimiento* and was pivotal in the design of their political activism. This activism's agenda was presented in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* which established the group's ideology, organizational goals and actions. Its nationalistic approach challenged the abuses suffered by the Chicana/os as the result of different religious, political, class, and economic confines throughout U.S. history. Nevertheless, despite the call for the centrality of family, home and brotherhood, little was said about the need for gender equality and the way in which tradition maintained Chicanas' triple oppression as working, colored women. It was in order to overcome this void that Chicana feminists began to reinterpret and produce their land-based symbology and theory.

Some Chicanas struggled to find their place within the Chicana/o community and to fulfill their gender-related needs, which often moved away from the discourse of *El Movimiento*. Chicanas were actively engaged in the Movement, and they shared its goals of ending the racist and classist discrimination suffered in the U.S. society. However, Chicana feminists considered that the discourses defined around the mythic Chicana/o homeland of Aztlán perpetuated the inequalities present in every nationalist politics. In other words, the Movement's nationalism was based on a patriarchal value system, which placed the traditional family at the center of its activism.

Consequently, gender inequalities were perpetuated and compulsory heteronormativity became the only acceptable sexual choice as it secured the perpetuation of the community. Some Chicana/os believed that *El Movimiento* should adapt to modern times, and, that only by overcoming these gender inequalities, would the community be able to fight united. As a result, their feeling towards *El Movimiento's* agenda was conflicted.

Chicanas, on their part, celebrated their first national conference, *La conferencia de mujeres por la paz*, in Houston, Texas, in 1971. This conference placed Chicana feminism in a public realm within *El Movimiento*. Its acknowledgment, however, depended on the personal choice of different Chicano leaders who either ignored or discarded it. At this conference, Chicanas presented an explicitly feminist discourse which referred to their particular needs as women and which affected their political activism in the community. Among other issues, they requested free legal abortion and the availability of safe birth control methods within the community so as to avoid the long history of forced sterilizations and unsafe medical interventions suffered by Chicanas in the hands of a racist medical system and culturally unsympathetic professionals. They also demanded childcare networks that would facilitate women's participation in the Movement and would also provide a culturally nurturing environment for these children. In this trend, they also encouraged marriages within the community as the best way to ensure a culturally conscious and fair companionship that would raise future generations to pride in their Chicana/o culture. Furthermore, as a necessary step for future generations to become active participants in the U.S. society and equals to their male colleagues, higher education was also promoted for Chicanas.

These feminists claimed their voice in the community and they succeeded in making it public through the act of writing, strengthening their cause as more Chicanas joined the project. Literature, thus, became a political tool for feminist Chicanas. It was from this moment on, that many literary works were produced and encouraged in order to denounce their triple oppression as working-class, colored women in the U.S. Picking up the pen and creating a feminist Chicana literary space invited the narrative reflection of new conceptualizations of feminist Chicana identities that went beyond traditional gender and sexual identities. Queer *chicanidad*, which described non-heterosexual practices and political activism, turned out to be a very prolific source of feminist Chicana literary production. One of the most popular voices in presenting a feminist Chicana interpretation was *tejana* theorist Gloria Anzaldúa. In her search for an appropriate theoretical land-based homeland that would include the Chicanas' particularity as working-class, colored women, she reinterpreted the concept of Aztlán by locating her alternative homeland in the U.S.-Mexico border. Unlike the Anglo settlers' portrayal of the border as an uncivilized area to tame and possess, Anzaldúa presented *la frontera* as an in-between space where cultures cohabited, mingled and negotiated. Her concept of the Borderland as the home of the Chicana feminist dismissed a constraining understanding of traditional nationalisms, and, instead, she promoted a *mestiza* conceptualization of the border. With Anzaldúa, Chicana culture was defined as a celebratory coexistence of Anglo-European, Mexican and indigenous backgrounds; and, thus, traditional notions of single alliances and national purities were dismissed. What is more, she defended the productivity of different identity positions of Chicanas, as multiethnic, working, colored women,

could offer and called for this *mestizaje* to become the core of border Chicana feminism. The geographic site of Anzaldúa's *frontera* introduced an alternative historical and cultural conceptualization of Chicana identity through her reinterpretation of Aztlán. Besides, the Borderlands became her theoretical and conceptual ground from which to denounce the diverse sources of alienations in the U.S. society, in general, and the Chicana/o community, in particular. Anzaldúa's suitable description of the U.S.-Mexico border as "una herida abierta" (*Borderlands* 25) represented Chicana/os' long history of violence, and the conceptual borders, which limited these womens' everyday life. In other words, internal borders, as represented by the Borderlands, became as central to the Chicanas' experience in the U.S. as the physical U.S.-Mexico border. It was in this challenging interpretation of the border where many feminist Chicanas found a suitable home.

Feminist Chicana literature did not only include innovative images and subjects in their works, but the genres they chose also proved their legitimacy as political activists and artists. They included their experiences as discriminated subjects within their community, as well as their objectification as sexual and labor bodies on the part of Anglo power. Although critical with the more traditional trends of the Movement, these Chicanas still believed and promoted a culturally conscious and active collectivity as the best means to fight ethnocentrism, sexism and classism in the U.S. It was with this goal in mind, that Chicana feminists did not only produce new literary works, but encouraged a rereading of history and literature that would empower Chicanas as women and as ethnic Mexican Americans. Therefore, a revision of Aztec culture and Mexican history proved critical in order to, similar to what it was done by the

Chicano nationalists, readapt and retrieve positive images for Chicanas so as to recover their rightful place in history. In other words, remembering also became a source of political activism to overcome the biased narratives of the official records both Anglo and Mexicano/Chicano. This project consisted on both voicing those who had been silenced in the past, and also rewriting the narratives that had erased their presence. Hence, the actions of remembering and writing were deeply embedded in Chicana feminists' activism. However, because these writers were intent in amending the biased discourses and in legitimizing their contribution to history, they questioned the very core of these nationalist narratives based on specific conceptualization of geographies. That is, feminist Chicana writers reappropriated and rewrote the American West as it was narrated by Anglo settlers, and they also readapted the Chicana/os' mythic homeland, Aztlán.

In order to attain a comprehensive study of border Chicana literature, the inclusion of different literary productions, which reflect the particularity of *fronterizas'* experience throughout history, is necessary. Unfortunately, Mexican American women's general discrimination in U.S. history limited their chances to enjoy the required literary skills, along with the spare time, privacy and economic means indispensable for its production. Thus, when reclaiming border Chicana literary instances previous to *El Movimiento*, it is imperative to adopt an inclusive understanding. In this dissertation, I present my own alternative interpretation of the development of border Chicana literature by choosing literary works written during different historical periods and by Chicana/o authors who belong to divergent class, gender and sexual identities. By gathering authors from such a diverse array of identity positions, this study

defends the notion that the border Chicana experience is not limited to the definition of the “Chicana” as it was outlined in the 1960s, that of a working-class Mexican American woman. In my use of this term, I attach a longer tradition and a more inclusive understanding of the Chicana identity than that limited to *El Movimiento*’s conception.

This thesis is composed of four chapters that focus on different authors whose experience and literary production is entwined to the place they dwell in or set their works in. As explained earlier, the importance of space and how it relates to the construction of identity are at the center of most of the literature placed in the U.S. Southwest, either by Anglo authors or Chicana/os. The connection between the conceptualization of home and identity construction has been crucial to the political activism of Chicana/os, in general, and border Chicana feminists, in particular. Therefore, locations, and more specifically, the different conceptualizations of the U.S.-Mexico border, structure the border Chicana literature included here. Thus, the chapters included in this work are divided accordingly.

The focus of the first chapter is to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of a feminist Chicana identity which will part from the traditional constraining notions of race, class, gender and sexuality. This section provides a general introduction to the key notion that landscape is central in the developing of identity. More specifically, this dissertation aims at evaluating the way in which spaces have been narratively produced and appropriated by different communities. Therefore, the first chapter deals with the many land-based symbols, mentioned earlier, that have been highly connected with the way in which Chicana/o history and culture has been erased, first, and claimed

and strengthened, later on. In order to do so, it aims at exposing the different ways the American West has been described and theorized as a concept, and the biased narratives and historical reports presented in connection to this landscape. Among others, the Anglo settler's depiction of the American West and the figure of the Frontier are introduced. The narratives that resulted from this point of view served to perpetuate Anglo domination over the original inhabitants and, also, to create a glorifying Anglo nationalist discourse.

On a more positive reading of this space, through an alternative depiction of the geographical areas of the U.S. Southwest, many *fronterizas* empowered their political stand through a land-based literary production. During and after the 1960s, and as the activism of the Chicana/o community gained momentum through *El Movimiento* and the plight of Chicana feminism, new geographic symbols appeared with their own distinct conceptualization of home, Aztlán and the Borderlands. Following these more inclusive trends, the New West Studies, a postmodern reading of the West, also focused its intellectual activism in the recovery of previously silenced voices. This chapter, hence, travels the long route through which border Chicanas have struggled, approached, reconciled and, ultimately, celebrated diverse geographies. Therefore, it provides a theoretically informed introduction that emphasizes the importance of *loci*, through its specificity or its abstract nature, in the development of a border Chicana feminist literature. In this literary project, border Chicana literature is connected with both, the spatial experience of its authors and their portrayal in their work. This engagement is always structured around a politically conscious activism that challenges traditional, ethnocentric, and male-centered understanding of literature and historical accounts. Therefore, in the case of

border Chicana feminists, writing becomes the means to recover a forcefully silenced past, and the landscape represents the witness of these voices and experiences. In other words, the literary spaces created by border Chicana writers, somehow, seek to compensate for the lack of access to actual public spaces.

In the pursuit of recovering the Chicana literary and historical past, the second chapter studies the lives and major works of three *fronteriza* women from the early 20th century who, until recently, have not been considered relevant in the construction of border Chicana identity. Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niggli are the focal point of this chapter along with their most renowned works *Caballero* (1996), *The Rebel* (1994), and *Mexican Village* (1945) respectively. I believe that these early *fronterizas* should be considered the foremothers of modern Chicana feminists because their works are representative of an early feminist political discourse set at the U.S.-Mexico border. Consequently, González, Villegas de Magnón and Niggli are central to bridge early 20th century Chicana literature with 21st border Chicana feminists.

Although these early *fronterizas* belonged to a privileged class and, thus, were located far from a modern conceptualization of working-class Chicanas, I believe that this matter does not justify their dismissal from the Chicana literary corpus. I believe that, in order to achieve a complete and comprehensive understanding of modern Chicana feminist literature, their works are crucial. The fact that these women lived way before the term “Chicana” was coined should not, in my opinion, prevent us from labeling them as Chicanas. However, naming them so, does not weaken the importance of the act of naming oneself

as it was defended during *El Movimiento*. On the contrary, it is an attempt to claim the legitimacy of post-60's Chicana feminists as the continuance of a political activism that was in its way long before the Civil Rights Movement. Besides, labels should be inclusive, flexible, and prompt to adapt to individuals that might traditionally be deemed inappropriate. That is, by naming these early 20th century *fronterizas* as Chicanas, it is not my intention to obscure Chicana/os' political particularity, but to celebrate the term's ability to conjure realities beyond restrictive temporal and spatial limits.

The feminist traits of González, Villegas de Magnón and Niggli are unquestionable in their work and in the way they led their lives. Bearing in mind the socio-historical conditions of the time they were writing in, and pursuing their active professional careers, has made me consider the appropriateness of including their biographies to an extent that the authors on the following chapters will not have. Hence, it is necessary to include the context where González, Villegas de Magnón and Niggli lived in order to pursue a more careful reading of their work and to grant the appropriate value to the subtle instances of political challenge found in them. Besides, these women's lives are exceptionally diverted from what might be expected from women living and working at the U.S.-Mexico border during the early years of the 20th century.

In this sense, not only do their life experiences and choices bridge these authors with modern Chicana writers, but also the topics and subjects included in their works. Issues related to the way gender, class, sexuality and race were established through tradition, and biased political and social establishments are denounced in the works *Caballero*, *The Rebel* and *Mexican Village*. What is more, the presence of powerful female characters is worth studying. Besides,

these works, similar to later Chicanas', emphasize the importance of portraying everyday life as the means to highlight the presence of discriminatory practices in early 20th century U.S.-Mexico Borderlands. Moreover, and certainly placing the importance of space in the construction of Chicana identity at the forefront, González, Villegas de Magnón and Niggli promoted the idea of hybrid and binational identities. The centrality that the border or its absence had in their personal experiences, turn these *fronterizas* into the perfect example of border Chicana feminists.

Furthermore, the value of their works surpasses their content, and is also related to the genres they wrote in. Taking into account the constraints that as women from early 20th century they must have suffered, these writers got beyond such restrictions by retorting and redefining to their purposes, literary genres that were considered less valued: a historical novel, a memoir of the Revolution and a novel that might be read as a series of independent short stories. Their appropriation of these genres parallels the audacity shown by their content. Consequently, the thematic and formal choice, as well as their biographies turned Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niggli into the ultimate *fronteriza* writers that precluded modern Chicana writers and, thus, they should receive the attention they rightfully deserve.

In the third chapter, the theoretical contextualization of *El Movimiento's*, in general, and the Chicana feminists, in particular is presented. This section aims at identifying the conditions that provoked the emergence of the Chicana/o activism and more specifically the rise of a Chicana feminist trend. This section will include the topics, the context and the struggles that Chicana feminists endured in order to claim the gender and sexual-related rights that had been

overlooked for the maintenance of a less problematic cultural and political community-based activism. In other words, this chapter will focus on the alternative activism that Chicana feminists promoted in order to create their own literary space; a space which allowed particular actions of recovery and remembering of the Chicana/o past. Furthermore, historical and economical agendas, which directly affected the living and working conditions on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, such as the Bracero Program (1942), the Border Industrialization Program (BIP, 1965), and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, 1994) will be analyzed. Despite these economic agreements' centrality to the U.S. economy, its connection with the opening of the border is continuously silenced in mainstream media. What is more, their negative effects have often been used to spread discriminatory discourses against the Mexican American population that form the bulk of it. Thus, particular attention will be offered to this purposeful misuse of the facts, which has engendered not only negative prejudices against Mexicans and Mexican Americans, but it has also hidden the actual human exploitation taking place in these profitable businesses set at the border, such as immigration, border prostitution and ecological contamination.

The novels included in this chapter are Lucrecia Guerrero's *Chasing Shadows* (2000), Ito Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge* (2000) and Richard Yañez's *El Paso del Norte* (2003). Each of them has been chosen as examples of 21st border Chicana literature where the aforementioned border conditions are dramatically portrayed. Regarding their formal features, these literary works are structured in a series of short stories or vignettes that compile and complete a novel. Although these stories can be read as independent short stories, some of

the characters reappear in different instances and, thus, knit a thread that connects and composes these border novels. The fact that I have chosen authors of both genders responds to my idea that Chicana literature should not be limited to Chicana authors only. In other words, it is my understanding that any Chicana/o literary work written around female characters, and which includes a careful and detailed portrayal of the Chicana experience should be catalogued as Chicana literature. That is, similar to the way in which the class positions of Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niggli should not prevent their work from being included in the corpus of Chicana literature, the fact that two of the authors included in the chapter are male does not make their work less relevant to the study of border Chicana literature. In my opinion, Chicana literature should not belong or be understood as the sole purview of working-class Chicana writers in as far as the Chicana experience embodies a more varied and complex case than its 60's traditional definition. Moreover, Romo and Yañez's portrayal of Chicanas and their sufferings and discrimination as embodied individuals should prove their activism as artists in the struggle to end Chicanas' subjugation.

Similar to the works included in the second chapter, *Chasing Shadows*, *El Puente/The Bridge* and *El Paso de Norte* are based and evolve around the apparently uneventful everyday life of individuals living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. However, this deceitful commonality hides a violent and repressive value system which targets modern *fronterizas* on both sides of the Río Grande. As a result, it is through day-to-day practices that the women in these Borderlands challenge constraining notions of womanhood, nationalism and *chicanidad*. These three novels graphically denounce the violent and

complex social, economical, and environmental conditions at the border brought by late 20th century economic and political commerce. These works, hence, are set on the ruins that border over-industrialization and over-militarization have created and are played by 21st century *fronterizas* in surprisingly beautifully intertwined stories as sole witnesses of the desolation and misery forced upon Mexican and Mexican American population on both sides of the border.

Samples that represent the centrality of the theoretical frame regarding queer studies are at the center of the fourth chapter. In this last section, another further step is taken in this personal genealogy of border Chicana literature and I include the study of queer Chicana literature as part of a broader border Chicana literary corpus. The chapter focuses on the literary works of queer Chicana author Felicia Luna Lemus and her only two novels, *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties* (2003) and *Like Son* (2007). This analysis will ground the field for the specific study of queer *chicanidad*. The particularity of this chapter lays on the fact that Felicia Luna Lemus is the sole author analyzed in this section, and that her novels are removed from the U.S.-Mexico border. The inclusion of these novels as border Chicana literature is based on the belief that internal and conceptual borders are as crucial to understand the evolution of feminist Chicana identity as the physical U.S.-Mexico border is. In other words, echoing Anzaldúa's theoretical conceptualization of *La Frontera* and Cherríe Moraga's queer *chicanidad*, where sexuality and race are at the core of queer Chicanas' personal and political identity, this chapter will focus on the way queerness has criminalized and persecuted Chicanas within their cultural community as well as away from its literary body.

The choice of including the works of Chicana author Felicia Luna Lemus answers to her daring way of introducing crucial conceptual challenges to traditional understanding of Chicana identity. In her novels, Lemus presents queer and transgender characters in their search to attain a culturally and politically active identity. Although the Chicana/o community is not presented as the ideal setting, what is more, in both novels it is described as a place to get away from, it is true that her characters, Leticia, in *Trace Elements*, and Frank, in *Like Son*, seek for their true identity through their appropriation and dismissal of elements from their original communities. In both novels, Leticia and Frank's communities represent a past that constrained and oppressed them as queer Chicana/os, and, hence, through their struggling process of making amends with this past they try to remap a community where they can enjoy a positive queer Chicana/o identity. Because both novels evolve around the account of both protagonists' life, I believe that these works might be interpreted as queer Chicana *bildungsroman* or ethnobiographies, where the main characters' ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality rule and define their lifetime. It is through Leticia and Frank's active remembrance of their past and their constant interaction with dissimilar communities that they succeed in coming to terms with the reality they live in and to determine the future they are willing to fight for.

Through the introduction of these queer Chicana/o protagonists, this dissertation expects to question limited understandings of Chicana identity as they have been represented in more traditional literary corpus. In the second chapter, the exclusivity of class allegiances when dealing with anything Chicana/o were questioned through the inclusion of middle-class *fronteriza*

authors Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niigli. Chicano writers Ito Romo and Richard Yañez, in the third chapter, present an accomplished contribution to the literary representation of border Chicana identity and experience despite belonging to the opposite gender. In this last chapter, the sexual identity of the author, and her characters' queer and transgender identities challenge yet another aspect of what has been understood as representative of traditional Chicana/o literature. In other words, in this last chapter, diverse theoretical studies regarding individuals' sexuality and gender are presented in order to back up the viability of queer Chicana Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's theoretical framework regarding the particularity of queer Chicanas. What is more, the centrality of the body, and the way it is written and read becomes essential in order to understand queer Chicana identity. Once again, as in the previous chapters, the importance of location in the process of identity formation is central to comprehend the way in which a particular identity evolves. Consequently, by presenting a queer reading of specific sites, such as the city of Los Angeles and the U.S.-Mexican border, this last chapter hopes to conclude a personal theoretical and literary reinterpretation of border Chicana literature. In this section, the way in which an individuals' sexuality is constructed and adapted as a response to particular location is explained. The case of the city of Los Angeles is particularly interesting because of its ability to gather diverse communities along racial, class and sexuality axes, which interact and redefine its citizens' identity in non-traditional ways. The U.S.-Mexican border, on the other hand, has become an amorphous site where identity issues, in general, and sexuality, in particular, are specially monitored and policed. What is more, the border's recent over

militarization has increased its power to mark and reinforce border-crossers' sexuality in ways that gives away its constructedness. When policing (im)migrants, border enforcers rely on the physical appearance and body language of the individual before assessing their "appropriateness." As a consequence, a preestablished definition of correct gender and sexuality is imposed by border controls. Following this line of thinking, by overcoming confined understandings of sexuality and that of a more traditional comprehension of Chicana/o identity and literature, this section presents a more inclusive, dynamic and celebratory interpretation of queer Chicana identity and literary production.

Finally, this dissertation hopes to present an alternative study of Chicana literature by focusing on the centrality of the U.S.-Mexican border, *la frontera* and transborders in this literary corpus. Although very diverse scholarships regarding the particularity of Chicana literature exist, I attempt to present a more inclusive understanding of this literary body. The fact that the U.S.-Mexico border has deeply conditioned the development of the Chicana/o identity has inspired this dissertation to challenge some of the more traditional definitions of what Chicana literature is. Hence, although it might sound ironic, the border becomes the very key that opens the dialogue between the divergent literary works included here. I believe that the way different Mexican American individuals experience the border and its Borderlands should be what defines a literary work as Chicana. Therefore, admitting the centrality of this geopolitical site serves as the means to connect authors from early 20th century with those of 21st, middle-class *fronterizas* with working-class Chicana/os, female authors to male ones, and deserts to metropolises. Echoing Gloria Anzaldúa's positive

appropriation of a symbol, which has caused Chicana/os' long history of discrimination, I have also structured my methodology around a more productive comprehension of border *chicanidad*. This is why the "border" is invited as an adjective which describes the essence of these authors and their works rather than as a verb that excludes them. Besides, rigid definitions of Chicana/o identity based on singular notions of race, class, gender and sexuality axes can only provide an incomplete interpretation of dynamic social geographies. By this, it is not my aim to dismiss the distinct path of Chicana/os in modern U.S. history, but to present a personal genealogy of border Chicana literature which provides a new critical contribution based on the acknowledgement of the variety included within any cultural community.

Chapter 1. Narrating the West, Creating *la frontera*.

My boundaries. El Río Bravo was once a life-giving stream that my ancestors crossed to travel north or to journey south. Back and forth, completing cycles. The river was not a boundary. *Gringos/as* built boundaries, fences, for themselves while they invaded our space our boundaries. The boundaries that I draw to sustain my sanity. We cannot be friends as long as you think you know every part of who I am, as long as you think you can invade my space and silence my language, my thoughts, my words, my rage. *Mi sitio y mi lengua*.

(Emma Pérez, "Sexuality and Discourse")

In her groundbreaking work, *For Space*, social scientist Doreen Massey states that imagining spaces is "not an innocent manoeuvre" (4), but is part of the process through which places, people and cultures become intimately interconnected. In other words, producing an ideologically relevant understanding of space has a direct effect in the way people perceive themselves as individuals as well as the places they inhabit. The British social scientist also asserts that conceiving spaces is not limited to an individual mental exercise, but that it leads to social and political consequences. Therefore, she advocates for the recognition of space as the outcome of different relations among its inhabitants and the way they interact with their surroundings. That is, she supports the notion that spaces are produced by varied sources and as the result of a constant interplay among different constituents. Such understanding of the space, one where constant cultural multiplicity is not only necessary but essential for its existence, secures and celebrates cultural diversity.

This philosophy becomes obvious in the narratives written about the United States of America, in general, and the West, in particular, where the reality of this multiplicity mentioned by Massey becomes obvious in the varied, and sometimes contradictory, conceptualizations of the area. Echoing writer William Eastlake's words in his article entitled "The Failure of Western Writing," "[a] writer should develop his characters out of a long familiarity with place so that place becomes part of his unconscious, that part of the brain where all good writing comes from" (94). Unfortunately, just the opposite occurred in most of the writings by the new Anglo settlers which have survived and have yet been presented as the official history of the American West. Besides, the politically biased consciousness, its Anglocentrism and *machismo*, is noteworthy in the narratives of the Anglo newcomers who became the official historians and writers of this geopolitical space.

Writer and scholar Patricia Price, as well, analyses the politically conscious pattern that is blatant in the narratives that Euro American immigrants designed when describing the West and which presented a sharp contrast to that experienced by the native communities. As Price states, tales became the means to claim ownership and entitlement to the land; and, thus, a history that would justify the newcomers' actions was created. Following this idea, Price denounces the effects of the foundational myth presented by the Anglo expansionists in their westward advance during the 19th century, and which still affects and frames modern American narratives and ideologies in a society where citizens and non-citizens alike are criminalized along their race, class, gender and sexuality. The scholar stresses the repression that such tales of emptiness involved for the native communities; that is, she describes the

extent to which the expansionist myth became obsessed with depicting the West as a smooth space where difference was present, but did not disrupt the advance of the new settlers. In other words, Price denounces that “emptying” the Western landscape secured the expansionists’ claim to this space, culture and history, as well as their rhetorical survival for future generations at the expense of the natives’ erasure. Moreover, she defines this rhetoric of emptiness as “a particularly important mode of landscape construction” (39) where Manifest Destiny was perfectly staged. In other words, “emptying” the landscape was a necessary rhetorical strategy to present the idea that the space itself was the perfect setting, hence, that it had been divinely chosen to grant Anglo Europeans the chance to found a god-fearing society that would surpass the sinful Europe. Price asserts that such narratives provided the certainty that Anglo Americans sought to believe in their exceptionalism as people and of their expansionists’ mission, too. What is more, this sense of excellence is still ingrained and considered as part of the American spirit and character.

In fact, and according to scholar Mary Louis Pratt in her work *Imperial Eyes*, the Europeans’ rhetoric of an empty West followed the tradition set by previous discourses produced during the 16th and 17th centuries when Europeans began their literature of America. In these discourses, equating America with Nature responded to the willingness of the explorers and expansionists to present themselves as the creators of American civilization. In order to achieve this position, the narrators erased or discarded native communities and cultures, or, in some cases, misrepresented them in order to assert their own legitimacy. Pratt states that presenting “America as a primal

world of nature, an unclaimed and timeless space” (126), colonizers claimed their right and responsibility to establish a civilized society and to produce history. This “civilizing mission” (153), following Pratt’s analysis, is constructed based on a capitalist ideology by which alternative systems found in the native communities are deemed as uncivilized and backwards; and, consequently, in need of being corrected. Therefore, by “naturalizing” the West in their tales, 19th century expansionists rhetorically appropriated the landscape and the original inhabitants, and turned them into a “civilizing” project that would later be presented as the original and only history of this land. In other words and following Pratt’s study, these narratives displayed Anglo expansionists not only as successful capitalists in their wealthy Western enterprise, but also as their moral saviors.

Pratt lists three common means around which the Victorian discovery rhetoric was structured, and which can also be found in the literature associated with the American West. First of all, she mentions the estheticizing tendency by which landscape is described as a painting from the privileged perspective of the seeing expansionist (204). By estheticizing the space behold, everything becomes one with the landscape and, thus, no qualitative difference is made between the site and the living beings that inhabit it, be it the native people or the animals. In a different way to what the Victorian travelers did, I believe that the aesthetic value of the view was not in itself the greatest desirability of the West, but the promise of the wealth that could be achieved through its taming and possession. The second feature in Victorian discovery rhetoric mentioned by Pratt is the “density of meaning” (204) by which the landscape is provided a materialistic and semantic wealth in that it is described using references which

“translate” these new spaces to the audience’s immediate experience. In other words, the landscape is not described only in terms of colors, but in terms of recognizable notions and economic value. Finally, the third strategy present in Anglo expansionists’ throughout the West, is the “relation of *mastery* predicated between the seer and the seen” (204). Such approach, which is displayed from the very first strategy in the Victorian discovery rhetoric and the Western expansionists’, is what guides and delimits the reality that is perceived and included in the narration that will later become history. The mastery of the sight and the voice is a privilege that the passive seen and the written is denied. Therefore, the agentic seeing and writing belongs to the privileged colonizer and it is him who decides who is seen and read in history. In Pratt’s words, the “seeing man,” then, would be not only the “European male subject of European landscape discourse” (7), but he would also represent the 19th century Anglo American expansionist. A man who, while travelling to and through the Southwest, not only saw and told his history, but had to modify and silence the history of the original West for this purpose.

Back to scholar Patricia Price’s analysis, the idea of a Manifest Destiny that guided Anglo expansionists westward was strengthened by the directionality of the advance; that is, it was no accident that they followed a westward direction. What is more, the author claims that this orientation would be part of a long historical cycle in which human beings have followed their way toward the setting of the sun. Such westward movement, in Price’s opinion, followed the belief of some kind of natural law that every being on earth answered to. Therefore, the Anglo expansionists, convinced of their divine mission to teach and improve the Southwest, “smoothed” (41) their way along

through their supporting narrative. Price describes such rhetoric of emptiness as a privileged choice of the beholder; although she does consider that, to some extent, the act of seeing is partly an unconscious result of the way people are trained and directed to regard and articulate their surroundings. Nevertheless, she is certain that there is always a choice to be made and that those westward expansionists, in fact, made it. It is, thus, by narrating their advance as a divine order, that they turned the landscape of the Southwest and their violent appropriation of it into the symbol of the West and the American spirit. As Price states, “[m]yth and reality, as these coalesce around the slippery entity of the West, bear such a close relationship to one another that trying to separate the two would prove infinitely frustrating” (56). What is more, it could be argued that it is impossible to do so bearing in mind that from the very beginning the expansion was presented in inaccurate and biased ways; and that the process of “smoothing” the West made it hard to find alternate accounts to the official narratives that would be helpful in discerning reality from fiction. Furthermore, Price claims that it is precisely the difficulty of asserting the certainty of concepts such as space and time that has turned the West into such a powerful symbol. Besides, she affirms that despite the West’s geographic allusion it is “an immanently *displaced* region” (56). This is why its timeless presence and effect continues being relevant in modern society and in its collective ideology with its deep divisions in terms of race, gender, class and sexuality.

In his work, *The Cultures of the American New West*, Cultural Studies scholar Neil Campbell focuses on the dynamic nature of the West and discusses the difficulties involved in defining this area due to the constant revision and redefinition of its meaning. As he defines it, the West represents

“many ‘systems of meaning’” (2). In other words, it would be inaccurate to try to constrain its essence into a single and static notion because it is the very multiplicity of spaces that defines it. Campbell continues describing the West as basically a mixture of all the cultures that have inhabited the region. Clearly, the British scholar recovers and includes the voices of those that had previously been disdained and ignored by official narratives and, thus, becomes an active force in the “unstable signifier” (2) that the West represents. This instability is central to his perception and reading of the West as a dynamic multilayered space in which different cultures interact and coexist. That is, multiplicity and fluidity are necessary concepts in order to achieve a complete comprehension of the West from the modern perspective. Following this line of study, Campbell echoes the works of authors such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and Michel Foucault in that they provide a more fluid and interconnected understanding of culture and identity that goes beyond the association to a place. Campbell reads these authors as presenting a more dynamic comprehension of culture that would result from the continuous exchange, mixture and relation among people. What is more, he brings attention to Foucault’s postmodern conception and intention of defining space as parting away from the traditional belief of space as a limited, meaningless and empty signifier. Campbell presents Foucault’s perception on space as “heterogeneous, multiple, and textured, telling many histories across sites of relations and networks of meaning” (13). Such understanding would include alternative thoughts of this geographic area that would directly affect the traditionally constrained ideology aroused from newcomers’ interpretation of the area.

Furthermore, this new conceptualization is mastered by scholar Henri Lefebvre for whom, in Campbell's reading of his work, space is produced through different processes that are connected: the mental space, on the one hand, and social realities, on the other. Campbell agrees with Lefebvre and Edward Soja's certainty that, contrary to traditional understandings that perceived space as an ahistorical setting, its ideological potential is crucial to its study. In other words, they defend the notion that spaces are social and politicized. Consequently, Campbell comes to the conclusion that, bearing in mind Lefebvre and Soja's insight of space, it would be inaccurate to define the American West as one and should, hence, be researched and conceptualized as multiple; that is, as the Wests where meanings interrelate, contradict and sustain each other. The reason for such complexity originates, according to Campbell's reading of Lefebvre, in the way each subject experiences the West differently depending on his/her particular characteristics within the hierarchy of society; that is, this experience is contingent upon the gender, class, race and sexuality of the individual. Campbell, hence, concludes that space "is not adequately defined by such statements as 'real, material, space' or 'imagined, illusory space', because our experience of it is precisely a combination or dialogized mixture of these effects" (21).

Accordingly, it is necessary to bear in mind that the variety and interrelation of the ideologies defining space, in general, and the American West, in particular, derived from the different class, race and gender experiences conforming it; and, thus, oftentimes, these perceptions contradict each other. According to Campbell, contemporary critical trends, such as postmodern and postcolonial critiques, have allowed a revisionist perspective in

relation to the “the speech of the other” (99) existing in the official narratives and narrators of history and, which has altered the exclusionary “master-narrative” (99) by including alternative experiences and voices. Consequently, and as the scholar states, Foucault’s alternative way of understanding space as manifold and varied, as opposed to the traditional linear and reductive historical account, introduces the possibility of including new stories and narratives. Following this line of thinking, then, the American West becomes redefined by these alternative narratives, which invite different realities and traditions that have long remained silenced into conversation.

In this particular landscape that conforms the American West, the desert is an especially rich space in terms of connotative matters. In the long history of the West’s violence and its legitimizing narratives, the focus on the desert becomes truly meaningful from the new revisionist perspectives. That is, in postcolonial and postmodern studies, the desert is analyzed and its traditional understandings redefined to such extent that this *locus* becomes especially significant for the New West studies. According to scholar Patricia Price, “the desert provides a final example of a smooth landscape par excellence” (43-44). In other words, the desert becomes the perfect symbol for traditional Western narratives as the means to empty the spaces through discourses and, thus, to portray them void in order to justify the expansionists’ righteousness to take possession of such space. As a consequence, the desert represents by its characteristics the ultimate example of the “smoothed” space by the conquering forces that presented it -a space which had witnessed the presence of Spanish and later Mexican cultures-, as empty, arid and meaningless. Later studies have discovered and encouraged the particularly liberating possibilities that the

desert, as a landscape, has provided to women, in general, and to Chicanas, in particular. In their article “Angles of Vision: Enhancing our Perspectives on the Southwest,” critics Janice Monk and Vera Norwood state that landscapes have contributed to release women’s creativity. These feminist scholars explain that the metaphor of nature as a woman is very present in women’s art as it was in traditional male-centered narratives. Notwithstanding, unlike the latest, this Nature-woman overcomes the constraining Virgin/Mother dialectics to represent the embodiment of the complexity and power of women. In addition, the landscape provides, thus, a source for sexuality where women develop into agents. Similarly, this landscape emerges as a refuge from sexual repression. In this trend, however, Monk and Norwood warn about separating Anglo women and ethnic women’s experiences based on simplistic differentiation, as their attitudes towards the desert landscape have varied depending on the length of their experience in such space. That is, according to Monk and Norwood,

although outsider Anglo women were instrumental in formulating a tradition of the Southwest landscape as exotic and awe-inspiring [...] Anglos who lived in the region developed landscape attitudes similar to the longer-dwelling Chicanas and Indians. (43)

In other words, these authors state that Chicanas have developed a particularly enriching and fruitful relation with the wild landscape and, especially, the desert, where they have been able to overcome and challenge the restrictions set upon them on different grounds, such as class, race and gender. Moreover, it is important to recover Monk and Norwood’s statement, where they describe the special nature of the relationship between women and landscape. This

interaction, as described by these critics, differs from the Anglo male relationship and perception of the landscape. Therefore, it is important to include instances, which will link contemporary Chicana writers with earlier Hispanic women writers in order to establish a meaningful historical link. This association will help to strengthen the acknowledgement of the alternative historical and literary narratives that have long been dismissed.

It is one of the purposes of this dissertation to recover the literary grounds of Hispanic tradition in the American Southwest which opened the way for later Chicana literature. Such connection has actively been ignored from different audiences, both Anglo and Chicano, in order to sustain interested views when defining what American literature is in contrast to Chicana/o literature; and also what an American is in contrast to what a Chicano/a is. Consequently, in order to establish a more inclusive Chicana literary genealogy, this study will cover evolving interpretations of what space is, and more particularly, what the Southwest is as an enriching option of connecting and rooting an alternative Chicana literary history to that offered by mainstream discourse and some contemporary Chicana/os. The importance of space is crucial in the very definition of what a Chicana/o is and, this can be inferred from the fact that the history of this community has long been determined by different spatial connections. Moreover, it is not surprising that the landscape and the barriers used to delimit them or their very absence becomes central in the Chicana/o literary production. As feminist theorist M. Jacqui Alexander states in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, which I will return to later in this study, “[l]and holds memory” (284). Therefore, it only seems fit to present this personal Chicana literary genealogy focusing on the different landscape notions that have long

defined Mexican American identity and Chicana literature. By doing so, it is among my aims to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of a Chicana identity which would move beyond the traditional constraining notions, such as race, class, gender and sexuality.

One of the spatial symbols that proved to be crucial for the definition of the American West was the Frontier. It is important to draw attention to the constructedness of the narratives of the West as they were presented by the Anglo settlers in their creation of a myth that founded the very notion of the Anglo American nation. This nationalistic narrative grew and strengthened around an image of the Frontier which would lead all along the westward advance to justify the Anglo's greed for land, wealth and self-serving history.

The idea of an American frontier that defined the character of the American nation as Anglo conquerors understood it, sprung from the writings and narratives of a specific historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, who became central to later understandings of what an American nation was and what the American character was. Literary critic Patricia L. Price calls him "the raconteur per excellence of expansionism" (38), because Turner used the very act of narrating and storytelling to present a biased and self-interested depiction of the Southwest. That is, his historical narratives introduced specific conceptualizations regarding this area and its inhabitants, which would later influence the way the West was understood as well as the manner in which the native communities, such as the Native Americans and the Mexicans, would be portrayed and considered. In *Dry Place*, Price presents Turner's obsession in describing the West as a source for free land, wild nature and wealth. Turner created a "rhetoric of emptiness" (38) that was sustained on the grounds of

enforcing borders; that is, by proclaiming the borderlessness of the American West, he was, in fact, supporting external and internal borders. The idea of “free for all” that Turner claimed to exist in this area was only possible by an active suppression and disregard for the previous inhabitants of the Southwest. That is, the original communities’ historical claim to the land they lived in and the culture they developed and implanted among their communities was totally discarded as unimportant, not worth mentioning or irrelevant to the forceful acquisition of the Anglo settlers. It is precisely this ideological and value distinction that Turner’s account enforced among the Anglo new settlers and the original Native communities, which created the Frontier he so often returned to in his accounts.

Patricia Price underlines the importance that outlining a geopolitical border with Mexico to the South brought in, enforcing the Anglo control over the area. According to the critic, establishing a barrier in relation to Mexico eased the establishing of the Other which, at the same time, promoted a contrasting definition of distinct characters: the one positively portrayed regarding the Anglo settler who became the narrator, and the negative portrayal defined by the lack of certain features, deemed as genuinely American, by Turner and his supporters. The process of naming which Price states is “the power to possess” (46), shows that having the power to name empowers the speaker to take possession of that which s/he has named. Hence, the “discursive violence” (45) was fundamental in the expansionist mission of the Anglo Americans throughout North America, and especially, in their westward adventure. As Price states, “the border between savagery and civilization invokes a border in the larger sense” (38) that Turner’s narratives established, and his colleagues

perpetuated, until it became a palpable Frontier that originated in an ideological and cultural sense. Through their narratives, Turner and his predecessors turned a metaphorical and value-defined border, into an economical, physical and social one, which became stronger the more the borderlessness was referred to.

Literary critic Arrell Morgan Gibson states that the importance of an author's literary production regarding this geographic area is key in the process of making meaning. In other words, what the collective U.S. consciousness has understood and perceived as the Frontier landscape and its inhabitants, is in a great part the result of the outsiders' literary creation. Therefore, Gibson concludes that this area's dependence on literary representation and evaluation surpasses any other (25). Furthermore, he also stresses the importance of being aware of the difference between the Hispanic and the Anglo American's contrasting understanding of the Southwest in terms of their directionality; that is, on the one hand, the Hispanic population understood the Southwest as the result of a south-to north "discovery" of the Iberian colonists, while the traditional Anglo American advance from the continent followed an east-west direction. Furthermore, and according to critic William Eastlake, the West was read and believed to be what specific literature claimed it to be. What is more, he reduces the average citizens' knowledge and understanding of the West to what was said by the fiction provided by New York publishers who presented a false portrayal that, then, frustrated them. This fake West, as the scholar remarks, "had no time for the artist. The fake myth was good for business" (92). Therefore, it is fair to state that the construction of the West was since its first narratives filled with political and economic interests that had no place or

interest in the faithful and actual landscape and its cultures. Such position, thus, was shared from the expansionists down in the Southwest to artist all over the country and the businessmen in the East Coast. On the contrary, and obviously, the Mexicana/os living in the Southwest, as Chicano literary author Rudolfo Anaya states, did not share with the Anglo newcomers their myopic vision and conception of the West and their Hispanic culture, but he adds that in their “soul and memory resided not only Western European thought, Greek mythology, and the Judeo-Christian mythology and religious thought, but also the thought and mythology of Indian Mexico” (114).

In her groundbreaking work, *Imperial Eyes*, literary critic Mary Louise Pratt presents different concepts that are very relevant to the analysis of this dissertation. First of all, Pratt studies the situation in colonial realities and defines the relation among the individuals sharing the same space, but coming from very different historical and social backgrounds and experiences. These concepts can be transferred to the Frontier narratives that are being studied in this section; that is, the similarities between the colonial and Frontier realms share the figure of the powerful against the powerless. The first concept that Pratt mentions is the so-called “contact zone” (4). This term refers to “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (4), and where uneven connections arouse among the inhabitants. Bearing the Frontier area in mind, it is useful to take such concept and to apply it to the very extraordinary contact zone the American Southwest became into when the Anglo settlers began their expansion westward. As Pratt states, the asymmetrical relationships established by the different groups would be based on the hierarchization arranged after the colonial system. That is, the relation

between the Anglo settlers and the original inhabitants of the West would most often be that of the master and the slave. Therefore, such unequal relations would be maintained through violence and through the setting of a value system that would hierarchically benefit the newcomers and degrade the original dwellers. Pratt does include a synonym for the term which would be “colonial frontier” (7), but which she admits is based on the European expansionist circumstances which are the ones analyzed here. However, the original term “contact zone” would represent a more global and inclusive term, applicable to the numerous such cases around the globe. The purpose of such concept is to, on the one hand, point out to the “spatial and temporal copresence of subjects” (7), which belong to different places and historical trajectory. On the other hand, it also expresses the confrontation that necessarily rises from such spatial and temporal cohabitation. This clash, however, is often disregarded by the dominant narratives. Pratt also points out to the fact that such intercommunication takes place even despite the extremely unbalanced power position of the people involved. Furthermore, she also assigns agency to the oppressed communities in terms of assimilation; that is, she claims that although the powerless does not have any saying in what originates among the dominant value system, s/he decides up to different degrees what s/he appropriates as her/his own.

As the result of the transculturation Pratt deems a fact in contact zones, there is another concept that is pertinent to this genealogy of Chicana literature. When Pratt introduces the term of “autoethnography” or “autoethnographic expression” (7), she refers to the literary production through which the subjugated individual appropriates the discourse of the oppressor and, thus,

portrays herself/himself as the Other with the very tools and for both audiences, her/his own, and those on power. Consequently, these narratives are often bilingual and bicultural as their discourse reflects the contact that has resulted from colonization. Because the oppressed borrows the oppressor's tools, means, and addresses his audience, Pratt states that they are not ordinarily considered as authentic modes of self-representation. Nevertheless, the scholar defends that this apparent alliance with the oppressor must be considered the result of association and assimilation processes. Furthermore, another term must be included in this line of thinking that implies some of the features mentioned by Pratt, but, at the same time, also highlights the intention behind what is written and the complexity of contributing a written trail for a deeper examination. The term I am referring to is "discursive duplicity" (34) and is included by literary critic Genaro Padilla in his *My History, Not Yours* (1993) where he rereads the apparently autoethnographic or complacent texts written by early Mexican American female writers. This term is used in an attempt to reach beyond the alleged appropriation of the oppressor's tools in order to search for a rebellious endeavor to denounce him. Nevertheless, the interpretation of such writings by both scholars does not differ as much as it might appear at first and I believe both concepts and interpretations are valid when reading and studying the early *fronteriza* writers as the means to unravel what is said and what is meant by the authors.

Remembering and writing the past so that a written trace of their experiences is left is the purpose of most of the so-called autoethnographic literatures. The importance of remembering is certain for any community in order to strengthen its history and culture, and to design the future path. This

importance heightens even more in the case of oppressed communities and cultures, who seeing that their right to raise their voice is taken away and their cultures alienated, turn their urgency to remember drastically. In relation to this topic, feminist critic M. Jacqui Alexander describes the need and the many ways in which remembering can take place. As she states “[r]emembering is different from looking back” (276) in the sense that remembering itself as an active and optional choice might respond to different interests or situations. Therefore, according to her, not all remembering involves “recovering” the things the way they were; but they can provoke a partial remembering which, if tinged with nostalgia, might incite fascism. On the other hand, Alexander also analyses the sources and effect of forgetting as well, which might be the result of different facts. It might happen that the person has never known or acquired that knowledge, but it can also be that the forgetting itself is so dramatic that the individual or the community is not even aware of having forgotten. In Alexander’s words, the act of remembering is an individual enterprise and a collective one too, that can be something the subject looks for or does due to an external situation.

In her article “Hispanic Women Writers of the Southwest,” feminist literary critic Tey Diana Rebolledo lays the ground to explore the connections between the Hispanic women writers of the Frontier land and era, and the contemporary Chicana writers, both in symbolic and contextual terms. Rebolledo comprehends the kinship between these writers who write about the land they inhabit, and the culture they both are trying to preserve against total erasure. The possibility of contemporary Chicanas to write and raise their voice is, according to the scholar, the result of a revalorization of the racial mixture of

Indian and Spanish history, the importance and interest in maintaining the culture through an appreciation of the language that resulted in a trend in favor of bilingualism and biculturalism. In other words, during the '60s Chicana/os encouraged a national pride based on their long history and, hence, their literary production increased greatly. Therefore, Rebolledo continues, women who wrote during the politically conscious era dedicated their narratives to social and political issues, and through these writings, they struggled to define and revise their identity as female ethnic writers. As a consequence of this female awareness and active positioning, the Chicana critic declares that "female tradition and women-to-women relationships, particularly among family members, became accentuated" (53). This grouping among women within the family context and also in generational terms is very important to also discover a new directionality within the traditional Chicana/o *familia*. The Civil Rights Movements, however, and the new professional opportunities for women, eased the consciousness of the need to challenge a male-centered perspective and education in the Chicana/o community. Traditions were questioned, and alternative attitudes and interests were enlivened. Accordingly, echoing Rebolledo's analysis, Chicana writers continued some traditions to later include a personal variation that would somehow alter the custom and serve their personal needs. Although they kept examining their connection to the landscape and the land, they also went beyond traditional rural landscapes and wrote about new settings such as urban ones. This innovation directly shows Chicanas' new position that located them beyond previous rigid viewpoints, but, at the same time, committed to their cultural community.

Therefore, the literary space became, as Chicano scholar Bruce-Novoa states in *Retrospace*, “a retreat momentarily from the chaos that is profane life” (124). Nevertheless, he also warns that this retreat allows for only a temporary withdrawal that artists need in order to organize and take some perspective of their life, but not an escape. In the Chicana writers’ case, as well, literature emerged as an alternative space that became easily available for them and where they poured their experiences, worldviews and demands. However, it is imperative, echoing Bruce-Novoa’s analysis, to understand the experience of this literary location as coming into contact with intertextuality. That is, this literary space brings together and puts in conversation different texts and realities that will help the artist to comprehend her position and perceptions better. This is exactly one of the aims of this dissertation, to present a personal literary scope that will promote a conversation between different Chicana literatures and theories that have oftentimes been studied and perceived as disconnected and, even, as opposing each other. Bruce-Novoa, however, encourages the understanding of literary space as “dynamic, constantly shifting, and [...] [with] an insatiable appetite for anything with which it comes into contact” (158). Thus, the literary space should be regarded as debordered and in a constant redefinition. This would encourage new interpretations and, even contradictory ones to be in constant conversation. Consequently, favoring literature to criticism, he also demands a similarly dynamic and comprehensive literary criticism that must not restrict the literary production, as it is an element of the very same literary space. Furthermore, he supports the idea that the text, more than criticism, becomes the ideal space to present and generate culture; and, therefore, Chicana/os have acquired the access to a stage that was denied

before and which will greatly help to examine, advocate and appropriate their culture as never before, especially in the case of Chicana feminists. Moreover, the critic also believes in the power of the literary space to turn a reader into an agent when he claims that in this space “one goes for symbolic action, which then [...] can be transformed into other forms of praxis” (165).

During the '60s then, and with the strengthening of national cultural ideology among Chicana/os, the concern about national space and cultural space became a central topic among Chicana/o authors. As critic Monika Kaup describes, the Chicana/o activists affirmed their claim as the original inhabitants of the American Southwest. This demand related to the centrality and importance that the “*mexicano* borderlands of Southwest” (1) embodied not as a decentered and marginalized space resulting from the American history, but as the witness and proof of the preexistence of non-Anglo communities that were absent from historical narratives. However, Kaup, echoing the studies of Teresa McKenna, Ramón Saldivar and José Limón, also mentions that in their literary depiction of South Texas’ geopolitical opposition to the irruption on the U.S. border, the iconic Chicano authors Paredes and Hinojosa kept portraying a resistant Chicano community, which was defined and perpetuated by a patriarchal system disguised in “gender universality” (80) that preserved the invisibility and silence of the Chicana subject. Furthermore, she also introduces the fact that many female precursors were disregarded, such as Jovita González, a *tejana* like Paredes and Hinojosa themselves, and one of the *fronteriza* scholars and authors included in this dissertation. This is why, and in view of recent studies, the need to fill such discriminating gaps have inspired this study where *fronteriza* precursors of Chicana/o literature, in general, and

Chicana feminists, in particular, have been given their deserved space. Women writers such as Jovita González, Josefina Niggli and Leonor Villegas de Magnón should not be ignored in any attempt to analyze the corpus of Chicana/o literature and its central position in the American literary history. Besides, Chicana literature, since its *fronteriza* precursors, has included new perceptions and symbols that are relevant and coherent with their particular experiences which differentiate them from the traditional male Chicano literary production.

In his work *The Cultures of the American New West*, scholar Neil Campbell claims that “[t]he ‘natural’ has always been ‘cultural’ and so it is through representation –speech, writing, art, photography – that we perceive landscape” (31). Therefore, it is clear that different subjects will perceive and represent space in varied ways in relation to their own lived experience. In other words and still following Campbell’s analysis, Chicana writers’ interpretation and reading of space will reflect an alternative analysis that will be caused and originated by their particular position within their society and community. It is not surprising then, that the new voices and their redefinition, rewriting and alternative portrayal of the West, have challenged the traditional biased portrayal of this area and have, in contrast, presented it not only as an inhabited space, but as a culturally diverse and rich one. Therefore, these new voices prove that the “landscape was not an objective truth ‘out there’ to be surveyed and recorded but historical and dynamic, full of unfixed, contradictory meanings” (Campbell 44). In addition, the way different communities perceive and interact with the land is so basic to the identity formation of the civilized subject that what literary critic Raúl Homero Villa defined as the most tragic aspect of the

Chicana/o social identity comes as no surprise (1). In his work *Barrio-Logos*, Villa describes many instances, which reflect the complex experience of Chicana/os with the land, or better said, the lack of land. Because it is the “land loss, shifting and porous national borders, coerced and voluntary migration, and disparate impacts of urban development” (1) that tragically constrains and alienates the Chicana/os within the U.S. society and prevents them from ever feeling at ease and as legitimate inhabitants. This politically designed mode of abuse that took place since the arrival of the first Anglo settlers to the Southwest is still maintained and even strengthened in modern U.S. society through same land related strategies. That is, the term “alien citizen” is very much used in mainstream discourses and directly refers to their Otherness and estrangement. Therefore, people’s conception of the land becomes fundamental to develop an identity as individuals and as part of a community. This is why Villa refers to the centrality that feeling landless and, hence, homeless has had in the development of Chicana/os’ social identity. Accordingly, during the Civil Rights’ Movement, the Chicana/o community built its political and cultural rhetoric around a geographic symbol, such as Aztlán, which the activists could all call home and which proved their claim as rightful citizens. What is more, Villa collects Soja’s argument that states that “geography, like history, is a foundational category in the constitution of the social world” (240). The powerful activism brought by the Movement was a reaction to the long oppression suffered by the Chicana/o community. Among the many kinds of discriminations the Chicana/os had to oblige were the appalling measures taken during the ’30 and ’40s against them, when many repatriation campaigns took place and many U.S. residents were sent to Mexico

along with the non-citizens. This regard toward all Mexicans and the lack of interest in distinguishing between citizens and non-citizens spread the opinion that anyone of Mexican descent was a non-citizen and the term “alien” began to be widely used to refer to them. Besides, in urban locations, Villa also mentions the paranoia and fear of the “immigrant slums” (71) that was perceived by urban dwellers as a constant source of fear and disgust towards anything non-Anglo. This suspicion and anxiety opened the door for unscrupulous urban planners who saw these neighborhoods and the Anglo population’s concern as their chance to help themselves with whatever they desired, and offered an urban renewal that would “clean” and improve the “physical, economic, and moral health of the metropolitan body” (71).

Tejana feminist historian Emma Pérez claims the urgency of uncovering the role of women in history, an endeavor which becomes even harder in the case of tracing Chicana/os, due to the fact that their history exceeded national borders. In her own words, her historical recovery work does not pretend to determine what the real historical facts are, but just a possible interpretation of an alternative account. In Pérez’s opinion, a comprehensive Chicana/o history should cover particulars in relation to both nations, Mexico and the United States, and analyze the way in which they have been strongly interconnected. Her final aim is to, however, make sure that these women’s existence and actions are acknowledged. In a similar manner, one of the purposes of this dissertation is to make an attempt in drafting a Chicana literary genealogy that questions as well the legitimacy of reductive and rigid interpretation of what a Chicana is and what kind of literature is considered a “real” Chicana/o one. As Pérez explains, to expose and compile Chicanas’ voice, it is necessary to use

the “decolonial imaginary” (*Decolonia Imaginary* xvi) which she describes as the theoretical means with which the third space where women have been active and engaged can be exposed and celebrated; and which will show the incorrect assumption of their silence and inactivity. I align myself with Pérez’s believe of the need for a revisionist history and literary analysis that will “decolonize[s] otherness” (*Decolonial Imaginary* 6). Following this line of thinking, Pérez explains the incorrectness of assigning rigid and unique roles to the subjects living under oppressive circumstances. That is, following Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa, Pérez denies the accuracy of static roles of “oppressed” and “oppressor,” and advocates for the more reliable possibility of the individual to perform both roles. This perspective allows her to conclude that no matter how silenced and restricted women have been, their words and actions exist for someone to unbury and find them. The *tejana* historian also draws the connection and relation between memory and body, which Anzaldúa and Moraga also claimed. According to her, “[i]nscriptions upon the body are memory and history” (*Decolonial Imaginary* 108). That is, she considers that the body is constructed following different patterns answering to the restrictions of history and society. Consequently, diverse elements delimit the body: the clothes one wears, the food one eats, the illnesses one undergoes, the sexual alliances, etc. Meanwhile, Pérez also equals the power of both memory and history to provoke revolution and change.

As a historian, Pérez dives into the Mexican Revolution and she claims that even under the restrictive conditions of the Mexican nationalist movement, women participated and were active and, thus, their actions somehow affected the course of the nationalist movement. However, without forgetting the limited

space for movement that these women were allowed at the time, Pérez does admit that the only way women managed to be political and active was through the creation of “their own spaces interstitially, within nationalism” (*Decolonial Imaginary* 33); that is, the conception of their own space proves to be necessary and quite usual for women in order to alter the course of the greater enterprise of the nationalist movement. Pérez labels this disruption as “feminism-in-nationalism” (*Decolonial Imaginary* 33) which becomes a very appropriate concept for the various attempts and gains that Chicanas have achieved and that this study will include through the analysis of different *fronteriza* writers and their work. Because, as Pérez claims, it is through the third space feminism that a decolonial imaginary is possible and, thus, a revision of history, as has been told, is put into question. As part of this revisionary undertaking, Pérez refers to the writers of early and middle 20th century to stress the importance of their work in opening up an alternative literary space that questions the Anglo discourse. This literary space became the arena to create a Chicana/o consciousness and also encouraged later Chicana/o writers to pursue and continue their challenging literary work. Besides, explaining their importance in starting a different literary tradition, Pérez also celebrates their oppositional character, challenging the more general consensus that deems their work as “mainstream” (*Decolonial Imaginary* 10), and denounces the silencing that these works suffered for years and up until recently. She makes a special mention to the case of the women whose work have been set aside and disregarded as assimilationist, besides the proofs to the contrary founded by some scholars. Pérez stresses the scarcity of possibilities at hand for these women and she calls to bear in mind their especially harsh conditions as

disempowered subjects and how they managed to problematize their position with the limited tools at hand. As examples of their attempts to somehow alter and improve their situation while being critical about it, Pérez mentions two voluntary humanitarian organizations where women were exceptionally active during the early and middle 20th century: women's auxiliary to LULAC and La Cruz Azul Mexicana, among others. Both associations based their work through the Southwest and were intent in battling against racism and discrimination of any kind while they favored pride regarding their culture. As the scholar explains, although both organizations were formed by middle-class citizens and were not interested in revolutionary activities such as strikes and demonstrations, their sole existence and active implication in promoting a Mexican American identity based on respect and intermixture of both cultures, and their dedication to offer medical care to the Mexican descendants when there was often nowhere else to go, is something that can be hardly disregarded taking into account the turbulent and discriminatory atmosphere of the time. Pérez continues explaining the historical process of Mexican descendants into assimilation or into the Americanization. Reading historian Mario T. García's work, however, Pérez states that during the 1920s and 1930s the assimilation of Mexicans into the U.S. might be considered inexistent. This is why, García calls these decades the "Mexican generation" (*Decolonial Imaginary* 81). However, World War II brought a radical change in the situation, and, it is during this period when the generation of Mexican American began.

The term "Chicana" is challenged by non-traditional women who predated or deviated from *El Movimiento's* dominant discourse. On the one hand, early *fronterizas* from the beginning of the 20th century have been often

dismissed as real Chicanas for living earlier than the conception of the term itself, and, also, for not belonging to the working class which is entrenched at the origins of the Movement of the '60s. On the other hand, Chicana feminists and queers have also disputed the dominant Chicana/o discourse by questioning the basis of *la raza*; that is, the notion of *la familia*. According to literary critic Ellie D. Hernández, identifying oneself as Chicana is a crucial position taking into account that traditional identity formations are structured around “exclusive binary paradigms” (178). However, with *chicanidad* a new identity is built from the already established Anglo and Mexican identities and cultures. As such, it does not exclude neither of them, but does not, in an accumulative manner, include both either. Instead, Chicana identity becomes an interactive mingling that moves beyond traditional ways of constructing identity. According to Hernández, the complexity and challenge of Chicana/o identity is that it relies “upon the deconstruction of American history” (185); that is, its existence and validity depends on reinterpreting what the official narratives of North American civilization lies upon. In other words, it could be said that the survival of the Chicana/o identity rests on the negation of the official history as it has been passed on. Consequently, the rhetorics of both are to a great extent mutually exclusive in that the existence of one results from the negation of the other.

In geography scholar Patricia Price's interpretation, both nationalist and land-related symbols, such as the West and Aztlán, fail in similar aspects in the sense that both are defined in terms of borders. In other words, according to the scholar, the Anglo American and the Chicano accounts, both sustained by a nationalist interest and an urgency of historical narratives, are based on a

collective sense of relating to the land through myths and symbols in order to create and claim a nation. In this sense, Price states that both symbols and the nationalist discourses produced by them question the hegemony of the time but, at the same time, “shared important axes with it” (63). This is the fact why the scholar comes to the conclusion that they both create a bordered narration that discriminated different individuals that were supposed to be included. However, I consider that although both narratives share a certain degree of exclusiveness and hierarchization among its members, it is necessary to take into account the reasons why the narratives were originated, and also the position of the narrator. By doing so, it is obvious and without any doubt, that these two symbols and the discourses around them are completely at odds with each other. Basically, the narratives that created “The West” came from a powerful Anglo force which needed a tale not only to justify their exploitation and plundering, but also to enforce a sense of nationhood and an American character that would maintain such supremacy over the native inhabitants of the area. Besides, the Anglo expansionists justified their narratives not as much by their legitimacy as the original dwellers, but as the newcomers who would provide the area and its communities with civilization and worthy cultural heritage. On the other hand, the narratives of Aztlán, produced by the nationalist movements of the ‘60s, were created in order to provide a sense of history, legitimacy and pride to the original inhabitants of the area that had since colonization been deemed as unworthy and, oftentimes, inhuman. The narratives creating the concept of Aztlán had the need to regroup Chicana/os in mind and to strengthen their right to be considered and treated as first class citizens of the United States along with the Native Americans, and not as

second class citizens exploited and discriminated on the base of racist, sexist and classist axes. Therefore, it is fair to say that although the method of regrouping people in a community through narratives that would tie them to the land in order to provide them with a more consolidated identity is been widely used under nationalist movements all over the world, the legitimacy and the purpose behind such narratives are clearly different in the case of the Anglo expansionists when they first set foot in the Southwest and the Chicana/os of the '60s.

Anyhow, the bordering of the American Southwest began and has continued due to different governmental and economic deals between the Mexican and the United States governments. The crossing of the national border has long been a fact among the inhabitants of this borderland. Nevertheless, and as a result of many political and economic strategies, the crossing of the border has become a highly sensitive issue for both governments' politics since the signing of different labor programs between both nations, such as the Bracero Program in 1964 and the more general Border Industrialization Program of the 1970s. As a result of these two labor arrangements, binational crossings became essential for the national economic improvement. However, the unequal conditions and gains of these settlements brought disenchantment within the Mexican nationals and the North American citizens of Mexican descent. In other words, the application of racist and classist measures became necessary for the success of such labor agreements, which, consequently, brought a greater degree of impoverishment for Mexican nationals while, in the North American side, every social malady was reported to have its origins in those crossing the border between Mexico and United States.

Furthermore, when in 1994, NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) was implemented, the already particular “spatial and social relations of labor on both sides of the border” (Price 129) was completely redefined. That is, spatial and social realities were delimited in very specific and unique ways in this Borderland when compared to the general situation in the rest of the United States. While North American and Mexican governments maintained such unequal and exploitative partnership, the laborers were portrayed as the threatening Other that could provoke the instability of North America’s well-being. Therefore, crossing the border and the border itself became the center and origin of many binational political and economical issues that last even nowadays. As scholar Patricia Price describes, “[t]he geopolitical boundary between the United States and Mexico itself might well be viewed as a trickster figure” (151) in the sense that its very construction has been sometimes perceived by the border crossers as unstable, and, thus, malleable or rigid.

Such particularity, however, echoing Price’s analysis, can become the source of what the author terms “contemporary anxieties over placelessness” (119) that is often examined through the different fictional characters present in Chicana literary works, in general, and the very works that will be analyzed in this dissertation, in particular. In other words, Price coins the term “spatial schizophrenia” (119) by reading Lacan’s description of schizophrenic condition as the result of “a fundamental rupture in the logic of our linguistic-based system of meaning and reality” (119); that is, the direct association of signifier and signified. Nevertheless, Price proposes that it would be appropriate to interpret Lacan’s definition of schizophrenia in temporal terms to include also such alignment in spatial terms as well. Consequently, she concludes that the

contemporary anxiety over placelessness, created and in process in the Mexican American border, is a direct result of the breach between identity and place. Therefore, the fact of experiencing the border as an unstable entity affects the lives of these border inhabitants, and it goes to the core of their very identity in as much as it questions the very nature of the place they live and work in, which is constantly being redefined according to the interests formulated in either Washington or Mexico City. The way borderland residents make sense of themselves in relation to the place where they live, work and socialize is highly complex and reaches beyond traditional conceptions of identity and place. This is why this dissertation focuses on the way different Chicana/o authors describe border reality and identities through their literary works and fictional characters. To some extent, these literary spaces allow and serve as the base for a more complex mode of identity formation and relation to the land, where the different strategies and struggles taking place in the characters in their everyday life, somehow mirror the urgency of overcoming traditional forms of identity formations.

According to cultural critic Claire F. Fox in her widely cited work *The Fence and The River*, the popularity and presence of border imagery in contemporary academic narratives and mainstream discourse might be read as the result of the increase of “transfrontier metropolises” (2) along the U.S-Mexican border. Following Fox’s analysis, in just four years from the NAFTA passage, the number of *maquiladoras* rose up to over twenty three-hundred thousand; thus, proving this borderland to be the favored location for foreign investment. This economically planned reconstruction of the previously sparsely populated area has, since the early 90’s, kept growing in the number of workers

and economic profit while decreasing in the quality of living standards for their inhabitants. Although, and still echoing Fox's study, on the one hand, the U.S.-Mexico border retains its attraction as the site that enables expansionist economical profit for the U.S. and other international capital, on the other, it has also become -due to its meeting point between two unequal nations- a place where great contradictions are imposed upon the border inhabitants. Therefore, Fox warns about the tempting acceptance of the media's portrayal of the border which too often overlooks its economical constructedness and, consequently, the way it influences and arranges the lives of border inhabitants and border crossers. Such meeting point of diverse and often contradictory interests has turned the borderland area into a highly volatile and changeable site, thus, its twin-cities have been described, by different interests, as either a conflictive and dangerous zone or as a hybrid and multicultural haven. In other words, on the one hand, Fox calls attention to the denigrating image of Mexico that has widely been publicized throughout the media as the "lower body" (52) in reference to the bad quality of the food and drinking water. Such diminishing publicity only shows the discriminatory fact that Mexicans and border inhabitants have to endure in order for the North American industries at the border to make a profit. What is more important, the source of the pollution affecting the food and the water goes unmentioned and is, thus, presented as if it were inherited to the area and its inhabitants. Therefore, the negative consequences of the border industrial exploitations are propagated in the media with not attention being paid to the ways to solve the situation. Hence, the border inhabitants and Mexicans who are being exploited are depicted as the source and personification of illnesses and danger. On the other hand, however, Fox also mentions the more

positive portrayal of the border presented by theorists, intellectuals and different artists. From these more theoretical perspective, the border becomes a symbol for multicultural and hybrid coexistence between different people and cultures. Although this representation stresses the possibilities of understanding among different communities, it does not overlook the complexity and, in some instances, the contradictory nature of such cohabitation. Nevertheless, it focuses more on the potentiality that such diversity might bring to the border inhabitant and the border crosser, not only as an individual *per se* but also as part of a community that is forced to restructure and redefine their way of being in a place so changeable, contradictory and dynamic as the U.S.-Mexico border.

Feminist theorist M. Jacqui Alexander brings attention and underlines the way in which power directly and strongly affects the everyday life of individuals across national borders. She brings attention to the fact that a gendered, sexualized, raced and classed structure of power maintains its influence among people beyond nation-state divides. Critical with the theoretical approach of postmodernism, Alexander argues that it reproduces the practices of imperialism. She is adamant in her complaint of the continuous perpetuation of a sexualized hegemony that is still very present in the power structure and, thus, in the day-to-day practice. She claims the necessity of confronting this hegemony perpetuated by a set of practices from every site possible. Furthermore, Alexander believes in the way different spaces allow for political opposition as central to compel the necessary process that will dismantle such discriminative dominance. The works of contemporary Chicana/o authors compiled in this study are clear examples of the way the everyday life is already

structured and designed to such extent that it limits and confines individuals' performance. Nevertheless, the theorist also states that it is in their everyday practices and settings that individuals somehow reach for a subversive attempt to get away from the already predesigned path of their life. In addition, she also presents her work as an exercise to "evoke/invoke the crossroads, the space of convergence and endless possibility" (8) which echoes the spirit and intention of many Chicana literary works, in which the crossing of the bridge that is the U.S-Mexican border, becomes not just the setting or an important character in the story, but also the switch that will ignite political opposition and struggle against an unjust system that keeps the Chicana/o community alienated. As Alexander states, "[t]he bridge, in its first incarnation, is an internal one, crossing into different experiences of colonization" (264) and, hence, it is necessary to take down national limits to completely understand the extent of the discrimination regarding the Chicana/o community beyond national borders. Consequently, the transnational must be understood beyond theoretical paradigms. What is more, although the realities and casualties of Chicana/o communities change through time and spaces the act of crossing related to Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory opens a common theoretical ground that would enable the analysis of different subjects and acts of crossing that can still be related to the brave attempt of the early *fronterizas*.

As literary critic Ellie D. Hernández expounds, the border as the geopolitical site turns the border crosser, the undocumented worker, into a "questionable body" (87). In this line of analysis, she claims that the constructedness of such border and the regulation it stands on provides the chance of "appropriating" this body and "reading" it according to predetermined

sexed, gendered, raced and classed values. In other words, Hernández denounces the “regulatory and scopophilic tendency that accompanies the liminal spaces of a nation” (88). That is, the crossing subjects become illicit bodies that are forcefully regulated by discriminatory sexual and gendered standards. Consequently, the critic continues analyzing the way in which the illicitness and sexualized character of border regulation provokes an intensification of cultural and national panic in relation to the border as the representation of sexual transgressions, which although oppressed by institutions, are yet considered as the origin of social unhappiness. Oftentimes, the exceptional reality of the border, a site torn between two conflicted nations, becomes the third space where overflows and trespasses happen. Such exceptionality would be inconceivable within the confines of either of the two nations.

Linking sexual and gendered issues with the border is how Anzaldúa’s work became groundbreaking for Chicana/o Border Studies which were ready for new theories and thinking during the 1980s. As Hernández describes, setting different issues regarding gender, class and sexuality within the Chicana/o community and connecting them with a geopolitical construction such as the U.S.-Mexico border, Anzaldúa centered the attention in an area that although neglected as a geographical site, had been carried inside every Chicana/o activist. Because Chicana/os have traditionally been denied any agency whatsoever, Hernández warns about picturing border individuals as “free-floating signifiers” (96) and presents the documented long history of border conflicts and corresponding state rulings as proof. What is more, she claims that “[b]order subjects disrupt citizenship” (97) and that border control is regulated

based upon the gaze. In other words, an individual's physical appearance and performance becomes the grounds on which border crossers are regulated. That is, a predefined look is taken as measurement to regard crossers as legal or illegal. Hernández also mentions the two opposing trends among scholars and students in Ethnic Studies that perceive that performing an identity is the way to be politically active in their struggle for fair citizenship. They consider that locating and defining a Chicana/o identity, in this case, is the best way to analyze their experiences and their position in the society; on the other hand, other critics do not consider it necessary to define and restrict who belongs where and what her/his role within the community means.

According to geography scholar Patricia L. Price, the internal borders of individuals, which define the differences among them along gender, race, class and sexual identity, always end up provoking and unsettling the seemingly even appearance of external geopolitical confines. What is more, no matter how hard dominant U.S. values and regulations work on structuring the society in specific ways, these very norms and restrictions provoke and compel to conflicts. Besides, the scholar explains the way in which landscape has been conceived in dichotomous values that maintain an unequal relationship between the pair; that is, she collects instances of this binary set of values such as the traditional submission of nature to culture, body to mind, wildness to civilization and relating all these pairs together, subordination of female to male. As a consequence, the feminine was aligned to nature, disorder and body; and, thus, traditionally regarded as inferior and less capable than the masculine. Price continues claiming that any nationalist narrative, be it Anglo American or Chicano is structured by a “debordering and rebordering” (63) alternation. In

other words, similar to what Anglo American narratives written around the symbol of the West and the Frontier did, the traditional Chicano counternarratives of the 60's came up with a similar concept; that of Aztlán. Price insists that the narratives around Aztlán were created to challenge the very legitimacy of the U.S.-Mexico border forced upon them by Anglo expansionist adventures and, at the same time, demanded the Chicana/os' right as the original inhabitants of the American Southwest. Besides, the geopolitical border also reflected the internal borders in terms of race, class and gender that Chicana/os had undergone under the Anglo American power system. Price comes to the conclusion that neither nationalist narrative is totally inclusive in that even the reactionary narrative based on the concept of Aztlán ended up proving to be a bordered narrative for the feminist Chicanas of the community, who expected more than to perpetuate male-centered traditions. As she states, "[p]lace visions are always partial" (65) and, therefore, it is to some extent predictable for the identity narratives based on places to result in non-inclusive accounts. In her opinion, *El Movimiento* promoted male characters as the example of Chicana/o opposition, and, hence, the idea that Chicanas were uninterested in politics and willfully resumed to the private space of their homes was left as the only logical conclusion. Nevertheless, Price does recognize the fruitful possibilities of rewriting the original narratives regarding Aztlán so that they reflect the continuous need of the community to relate to yet another site in order to redefine themselves as individuals within a community.

Subsequently, she includes the scholarship inspired by Anzaldúa's work and accepts the way social constructions, such as race, class and gender, can be challenged and redefined through her analysis inspired by this particular

geopolitical construct. Besides, Price describes the Borderlands as the space where identity matters are discussed, and as a layered realm where non-traditional modes of defining and performing are possible by setting aside binary value systems, and where more complex and dynamic interpretations are encouraged. In other words, a site where “a multiple and contingent subject positioning” (90) occurs and is supported. In order to interpret Chicana/os’ struggle, border theory and the Borderlands, as site-specific places and also as theoretical concepts, provide more fruitful possibilities to overcome the previous rigid theories that left no room for alternative political and social demands. As Price describes it, this new theoretical concept challenges earlier identity theories in such a way that it alters the preference for the center instead of the periphery, or as she states “move the margins [...] to the centre” (100). As a consequence, previously marginalized voices and concerns become pivotal, and what the essence of the center should be is reevaluated as well. Furthermore, unlike the West and Aztlán, Anzaldúa’s Borderlands is site-specific. It is tangible as a geopolitical construct that due to its in-betweenness as the line “dividing” two nations has, however, served as a merger, on the one hand, and as an unreachable gap between first class citizenship and mistreatment, on the other. Its physicality and brutal history becomes helpful in anchoring conceptual and symbolic interpretations of inner borders that have been created in alliance with external ones. As Price explains, the border represents “in-between metaphorical and physical understandings of place in ways that highlight the productive ties between these two levels of existence” (101). The scholar goes beyond in her interpretation of the border and Borderlands theory, and describes the border crossing not only as a spatial

displacement, but as a “to-and-fro movement over time” (102). Nevertheless, no matter how fruitful the border might be, she also denounces the deterritorialization that the Borderlands represent and the difficulties of pinpointing specific sites of oppression, while she warns about the tempting perception of conceptualizing the Borderland experience as a liberating way of being in the world which would, at the same time, present difficulties when attempting to define what the Chicana/o identity is. However, Price denounces the lack of similar research, and theoretical and political commitment and action on the Mexican side of the border. That is, the gap in scholar analyses, research and interest in studying the Borderland as an alternative mode of identity construction that would part beyond restrictive dichotomous representations.

Bearing in mind the importance that space, and the specificity and plasticity of the border has supposed for the theorization of Chicana identities, in her work *For Space*, geographer Doreen Massey also stresses the link between the political action with the study of space. In her statement “the spatial is political [...] but rather that thinking the spatial in a particular way can shake up the manner in which certain political questions are formulated” (9), she does not only consider necessary to study and analyse the political implications given to space, but she encourages thinking about space in certain ways so as to challenge tradition and question the political issues that we have been handed down. In a similar manner, literary critics Janice Monk and Vera Norwood explain the importance of land ownership in relation to the concept of being a voiced subject for early Mexican American female writers. In their article “Angles of Vision,” the authors present the example of early Southwest writers

such as Cleofas Jaramillo or Fabiola Cabeza de Baca who wrote before the term Chicana was even coined, but, nevertheless, presented themes and concerns that parallel later Chicana writers. These critics describe the way in which having a literary voice was linked to possessing land and with it a language and culture that were threatened when the land was taken from their owners. In other words, the sadly common experience for the citizens of Mexican origin of losing land also paralleled the disappearance of the people living on them, the original inhabitants of the American Southwest.

Similar to the intentions of this dissertation, Monk and Norwood connect early female authors to later Chicana writers in their quest for their own identity and voice while creating personal ties to spatial references. Modern Chicanas, according to them, will struggle for their voice by demanding their place and sense of community in relation to the urban space of different North American cities in opposition to the rural and farming communities of early *fronteriza* writers. Linked to what Doreen Massey states by claiming the urban space as their own, these critics affirm that these Chicanas do not only claim their space, but think of it in a political way provoking a new set of questions regarding different matters. They go on presenting the manner that various Chicana authors have redefined the city as a woman, although not the traditional apolitical and house-ridden woman, but an active and outspoken individual who experiences the city and challenges the power structure that has traditionally turned it into an unsafe space for women. According to Monk and Norwood, such urban portrayal might become problematic for some Chicanas, but, nevertheless, it opens up a space where they can explore their identity and overcome their alienated position. Examples of such women and their search

for a self-chosen identity are present in the literary works included in this dissertation. From the more rural settings of early *fronteriza* writers, such as Jovita González, Josefina Niggli and Leonor Villegas de Magnón to the border cities presented by contemporary authors, such as Lucrecia Guerrero, Ito Romo and Richard Yañez –where the characters seek their place in the urban landscape and leave their imprint in their day to day border crossings-, ending with the metropolises of New York and Los Angeles and its bordered queer communities -where the characters of Leticia Luna Lemus offer the chance of studying the symbolic borders that Anzaldúa theorized in the fictive autobiographical Borderland of her childhood. As feminist scholar Tey Diana Rebolledo explains in her article “Hispanic Women Writers of the Southwest: Tradition and Innovation,” “for contemporary writers the relationship to their environment and their cultural tradition [...] shows a nexus with their past as well as introduction of change” (60). That is, the relationship between the space and a sense of belonging, their identity, is a reflection of early Mexican American writers who, although with the logical differences of their time, also experienced and became conscious of the necessity to claim their place as members of a cultural community that saw itself in danger of disappearing under the expansion and subjugation of the Anglo settlers all throughout the American Southwest; and their tool to hold on their identity, culture and history was found in the literary voice that only a few privileged ones were permitted to some extent and even less of them dare to appropriate and to leave a writing path for future generations to continue. Therefore, it is only sensible to recover and learn the legacy these *fronterizas* left and to continue and voice the new concerns that the new times, spaces and politics request.

As literary critic Bruce-Novoa states, “[l]iterature becomes a space for responding to chaos, and more, the response itself” (96). That is, the importance of what has been previously mentioned in relation to having a literary voice is great because it witnesses the struggle of early *fronterizas* to challenge the normative and value systems they were forced upon, and it is the continuance of the need to keep struggling and being politically active due to systematic alienation within the Anglo society, that later Chicana writers have also resort to. In the early years of *El Movimiento*, only male Chicano writers enjoyed the possibility of building this literary space in their struggle against Anglo imposition, but later Chicanas claimed their own space as their way not only to be politically active but also womanly active. In other words, literature also became their means to dismantle Anglo racial stereotypes, but also the Chicana/o sexualized and gender-limiting roles. What is more, in his analysis of what Chicana/o identity is, Bruce-Novoa describes it in terms of space but, in this case, not a physical space, but a cultural one that is set between what Mexican is and what North American is. He states that it is the space and not the hyphen that exists between both terms what the Chicana/o is and that this space, “the intercultural *nothingness* of that space” (98) is what reflects the Chicana/o identity the best. According to him, the influences of both cultures is important but being Chicana/o, however, moves beyond that as the result of the interconnection between these two and more so. Consequently, the critic concludes that the Chicana/o culture is not just the sum of Mexican and U.S. cultures, but the result of the multiple connections and mingling of the plurality existing within each pole; and, hence, an intercultural result that contains multiple possibilities and interpretations that surpass both cultures’ union. To

some extent, the peculiarity of such interrelation is what forces the Chicana/o community to continuously struggle and fight for their continuation as an alternative cultural community that has been traditionally suppressed and erased from the mainstream. Literary critic Bruce-Novoa goes on describing Chicana/o literature as a necessary means for Chicana/os to understand their complex situation as Mexican descendants who, although raised and living in the U.S., do not feel at ease in either Mexican or U.S. tradition. What is more, according to his study, Chicana/os feel the urge to create an alternative space where both cultures mingle and merge, and, hence, result in a third space which welcomes the differences that might turn out in this cultural community. However, he does admit that early in *El Movimiento* Chicana/o literature was valued on the premises of its homogeneity and loyalty to the political cause more than welcoming multiple voices and interpretations about what *chicanismo* should be. Therefore, he compels to the freedom, in both artistic and ideological terms, of artists and critics; that is, he appeals for Chicana/o literature “to be made, not prescribed” (174) in order for different voices within the community to be heard not to only in relation to the content, but also promoting the end of fixed absolutes.

Despite the initial negative reactions and dismissal to any attempt to challenge the traditional form and themes of *El Movimiento*, in the late 70’s and 80’s, Chicana writers began to publicly claim a space for themselves and their literary works where they explored new subjects that although, at times, related, somehow went beyond the national concerns of the Movement. It is at this time, when the notion of the Border(lands) began to be explored according to Monika Kaup, to represent “the location of Chicano identity ‘in the world’” (5). That is,

and following her analysis, the border became a symbol that although certainly based and linked to the real geopolitical construction, it also represented a cultural statement that set the place for the Chicana/o community. This is the novelty of *The Borderlands/La Frontera*, a fictive and autobiographical mixture that reflects Anzaldúa's perspective and opinion of what Chicana/o culture was and should be. The experimentation in the form of the work and also the challenging and provocative statements included in it, turned this work into an invitation for disobedience to the homogeneity that the traditional Chicana/o community and cultural agents compelled. Besides, the Borderlands Studies arose from such work repeatedly and openly dismantled the Frontier thesis that the Anglo society based their historical narratives on.

Kaup, however, presents another concept in order to analyze and understand the particularity of the Chicana production. She wonders about the viability of the concept of diaspora in order to describe the exceptional conditions of border inhabitants on the U.S. side of being so close to Mexico and the border while, at the same time, having lived in the U.S. The scholar asks herself if acquiring a new culture while living so close and in contact with the culture of their ancestors, makes them part of a new national alliance. Later in her work, she groups different Chicana writers within a Chicana diaspora that reflect their dynamic understanding of *chicanidad* in their literary works. She continues mentioning the cases of many Chicana writers who have chosen to understand their identity contrary to the traditional national ideology. That is, it is in the possibility of mobility and travel that writers such as Anzaldúa and Cisneros, according to Kaup, structure their identity. In other words, the scholar states that Chicanas recover the mobility of transnational migrant worlds in

order to disrupt traditional understandings of home and land that are based in delimited and rooted conceptualization of nation-space. These Chicanas present an alternative understanding of identity as not rigidly attached to a single location, but in favor of a dynamic relation. Consequently, “home belongs to the *mestiza*, rather than the *mestiza* belonging into home” (86). In this statement, Kaup not only suggests a public arena for the Chicana, but the possibility of defining what home is and relocating it wherever the subject deems necessary. Therefore, she states that the political Chicana favors mobility and change to stability and traditions; and that it is this new space, created for themselves between their home and the new destination, which allows them to challenge and redefine who they are. Kaup considers that Anzaldúa’s theory and work not only presents more empowering alternatives in her defense of Borderlands and traveling in contrast with traditional spaces for Chicanas such as the domestic space and home, but that she also provides a challenging mode of study regarding the Chicana/o culture from a non-national model to a diasporic one. In Kaup’s reading of diaspora in relation to Chicana feminism, traveling and movement does not mean leaving the native land, but the possibility of understanding home as “connected to a multi-centered diasporic universe” (229) which is connected and defined by various borders that must be crossed and recrossed. Certainly, the scholar admits that not every Chicana feminist follows Anzaldúa’s particular vision, for example Moraga, whose chronotope, according to Kaup, differs from Anzaldúa’s in that she privileges the house over the road.

Other alternative interpretations have challenged and put into question the narratives that arose from the Frontier theory of early Anglo settlers and

their depiction of the Southwest reality, and promote, instead, Anzaldúa's Borderland theory. The New West is one of such trends which is based on the reinterpretation of history and favors the contrasts and mingling of the different cultures cohabiting the area. According to Neil Campbell, it is in a postmodern West that the limited and restricted conceptions of the frontier history have opened up to include "a more complex sense of multiple borders, multiculturalism, and diversity" (102). Thus, the deserted West is portrayed in a more accurate manner in that it includes the various cultures that lived in the area and that mixed in many instances due to a long and close-by cohabitation. It is therefore a matter of fact that contemporary Borderland culture continues to witness and provide a particularly hybrid understanding of identity that problematizes the traditional location-identity union in favor of a more dynamic and heterogeneous conceptualization. As Campbell states, the Borderlands becomes "a space not just defined as a simple text, but an intertext, where meanings and interpretations are connected and interrelated, cross-referred, divergent and inconclusive" (114). Such dynamic and layered system of meanings and interpretations force an alternative understanding of identity that clashes with the rigidity of traditional value systems. It is this new identity-construction-process that Anzaldúa advocated with the help of the very particular and meaningful site-specific construct in the long history of abuse and invisibility of the Chicano community in the U.S. Therefore, Campbell presents Anzaldúa's outstanding interpretation of identity as the identity of the New West female identity that he perceives as "hybrid, shifting, and multiple" (119). To present his idea of multiple and relational spaces, Campbell recovers French philosopher Deleuze and Guattari's well-known concepts of deterritorialization

and rhizomatic understanding of space. According to him, Deleuze and Guattari defend and invoke a dynamic perception of space that would perfectly fit the case of the West. In his defense of avoiding binary value systems, Campbell also promotes the existence of a third space, a meeting point resulting from the unviable dichotomic system. Echoing Deleuze and Guattari's theories, and similar to what Kaup reads in Anzaldúa's work, Campbell states that the New West is the product of routes rather than roots. In other words, the British scholar, along with Kaup, considers that New West female identities are sustained and composed by a non-traditional new understanding of home and belonging. This alternative conceptualization is defined by the mobility and multiplicity that many spaces can provide, rather than by the traditional sense of home and roots on which nationalist politics have based their identity and political claims. It is through the idea of rhizomatic expansion that the understanding of a hybrid, multiple and interrelational identity of the Chicana feminist can be better reproduced and, as Campbell claims, "provide a radical language through which to express some of the New West's multiple identities and its endless capacity to develop and change through the processes of interaction and relation" (166). Therefore, dynamic, multiple, interrelational and malleable identities are originated from nontraditional perceptions of space, and all these representations are gathered and promoted through the New West Studies.

The centrality of Anzaldúa's work and theory to this dissertation and, especially, to the last section where issues of queer *chicanidad* are included is obvious. When dealing with Chicana sexuality, many attempts to demonize it and describe it as anti-Chicano have been made since *El Movimiento*. It is in

the works of Chicana feminists, since the late '70s and '80s, that these accusations have been proven to be wrong. As scholar M. Jacqui Alexander states, the similar negative reaction to female sexuality that Anglo and Chicano tradition have shown substantiated that the Chicana's sexuality has been not only under surveillance, but also strongly repressed by racist and sexist traditions that somehow "unite" Anglo and Chicano men. Alexander denounces the "production and maintenance of (sexualized) hegemony understood, [...] as a map of the various ways that practices of dominance are simultaneously knitted into the interstices of multiple institutions as well as into everyday life" (4). In other words, the internal borders of the Chicana/o community are put on display by specific actions, regulations and surveillance regarding Chicana sexuality that not only provides the U.S. power structure to repress them, but also the Chicano community as well. In a few words, institutional powers condemn it and community-based practices apply it. It is this repression that Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* denounces claiming that Chicanas have not only been discriminated in gender basis, but they have also carried the stigma of a historical sin, personified by *la Malinche*, that blames the sexually active woman as the enemy of the Chicano tradition. Therefore, internal borders, in this case related to sexuality, play a pivotal role in perpetuating the historical racist repression; hence, the act of crossing borders, although a reflection of the physical movement between nations, symbolizes the transgressions of sexually active and challenging Chicanas.

Furthermore, Alexander brings attention to a central point in Anzaldúa's work that, unlike the widely accepted and applied concept of the *Borderlands*, has been mostly overlooked by scholars: spirituality. Echoing Anzaldúa's

statements, Alexander underlines the connection between sexuality and spirituality when she states that “we had a great deal of practice coming out politically, but many of us were timid about coming out spiritually as radical political people” (281). In other words, she challenges contemporary Chicana feminists to overcome the pressure of religion which has historically worked as a tool of colonization, and which she believes is behind the feminists’ reluctance to accept spirituality as part of sexuality the way Anzaldúa did. That is, she explains that pulling apart spirituality and sexuality is the result of a religion which relates anything sexual with sin, shame and the non-sacred. As a consequence, sexuality has been internalized as a practice which is against the spiritual. Alexander explains that the Judeo-Christian religion has discouraged any alternative understanding of spirituality that did not fall within traditional religious parameters, and that resulted in the persecution of non-religious spirituality. It is actually this consequence that condemns every political, ideological and aesthetic practice which does not conform with the establishment.

Literary critic Ellie D. Hernández also defends the necessity of relegating nationalist perspectives in order to understand the Chicana/o transnational culture. She advocates for the term transnationalism as a useful concept to grasp the complex realities that includes, but are not limited, to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, but also opens up the possibilities for new borders, real and conceptual. Most importantly, Hernández defends a postnationalism that includes “a heterogenous arrangement of a nationally based feminism with creative and intellectual links to queer studies and sexuality” (4). In other words, she considers both the concept of Borderlands and postnationalism a new

theoretical interpretation of interdisciplinary analyses. That is, she does not believe postnationalism to be a struggle to place the core of *chicanidad*, but that the specificity of Chicana/o identity cannot be defined within the rigidity of nationalism and national borders, but must be regarded as experiences that cross borders and evolve beyond the existence of traditional identity value systems. Therefore, the feminist scholar defends the postnationality of Chicana/o experience as a historically, culturally and socially challenging fact that do not respond to simplistic definitions of identity. On the contrary, this nontraditional understanding challenges site-specific nationalism in order to defend a transnational conceptualization. Along her defense of Chicana/o identity as one that overcomes national restraints, Hernández also upholds that in the case of minorities, it is through the categories of gender and sexuality, instead of the more traditional race and class axis, that a sense of belonging can be disputed in the development of identity process. Additionally, she claims that the categories of gender and sexuality provide more alternative readings in the process of individuals' identity formation. Accordingly, these two categories exist as an answer to the exclusion and alienation suffered within the nation. Therefore, they become necessary to comprehend the way people form desire, become socially challenging, and redefine the world around them.

Because, under capitalism, boundaries and borders are written all over the body Hernández asserts that Chicana/os and Mexicana/os are constantly transformed into “a semiotic system of signs” (2). Therefore, Chicana feminists became, in the scholar's words, the first feminist group that criticized the nation based value systems sustained by Anglo hegemony and the Chicano nationalist movement of the '60s. Besides, they did not only challenge the traditional

believe system, but offered alternative interpretations and possibilities for identity formation beyond the national boundaries. The theorist continues describing that the reason for diverse points of view regarding postnational analysis within Chicana feminism resulted from the realization that cultural nationalism, as presented by the *Movimiento* in the '60s, favored a political struggle conformed by male figures. Furthermore, Chicana lesbian feminism was promoted among some Chicana feminists who defied not only gendered restrictions but sexual identities as well. Subsequently, and following Hernández's line of thinking, Anzaldúa and Moraga's work *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), became a groundbreaking work for the Chicana/o community and it was an analysis that encouraged more Chicana literary productions which dealt with sexual subjects. Most of these works did not just challenge the tradition of *El Movimiento's* subject matter, but it also innovated the literary form. As she states,

lesbian critical analysis is thus the knowledge production by women of Mexican-American descent whose work has altered the structural and particular oppressive conditions that the colonial history of Mexico and the colonization process of the U.S. Southwest created. (Ellie Hernández 68)

Consequently, it is necessary to include queer Chicana analyses in this dissertation to achieve a more complete genealogy of Chicana literature. As the literary critic explains, Chicana lesbian feminists challenged oppressive value systems that have historically been based on a nation state configuration and that have imposed racial, class and gender structures that have discriminated

the Chicana/o and Mexican American while aligning with foreign powers. It is thus, by focusing on and looking for alliances among gender and sexual identity that Chicana lesbian feminists redefined and reconstructed their history and planned on their future as political agents. Unlike a more community-based cultural struggle of *El Movimiento*, Hernandez informs that Chicana queer struggle was University-based. That is, it was the great influence of those first Chicanas that made to Universities and were active within the *Movimiento* that demanded a more inclusive treatment of a diversified and heterogeneous Chicana/o community. However, although apparently a more elitist or privileged group of feminists were in the inception of the queer struggle, it is true that activists within this group never forgot the working-class community and always tried to present a more accessible approach because they were convinced that queerness was the key to overcome restrictive cultural and gender structures in general.

Ellie D. Hernández continues explaining the reason for a relatively late appearance of a queer movement. According to her, there are several reasons to take into account when understanding why Chicana/o queer action was not public until the 80's and 90's. The first reason would be that writing in itself is compulsively a private and solitary activity where the author secludes herself/himself in order to get further inside her/his "inner workings" (162). Furthermore, queer Chicana/o writers took varied examples from other gay and lesbian movements outside the *Movimiento*. As a consequence, queer Chicana/o writers followed the path of queer writers outside their cultural community. Finally, the scholar underlines the violence within the Chicana/o and Latina/o communities that prevented gay and lesbians from coming out. It

must be bore in mind that the sudden strength that the Chicana/o community found in the Civil Rights Movements made them focus mostly on certain subject matters, such as racial and class discrimination, and that the nationalist movement, as in every similar political trend, originated from heteronormative and male-centered beliefs. Therefore, challenging the traditional image of *la familia* became not only a provation, but a treason to the cause. Hence, later on, as the result of such gender and sexual repression within the Chicano community, a number of Chicana/os felt the need to cross its internal borders and to search for a space, where gender and sexuality were redefined and reconstructed. As a consequence of this dissention, queer writings and theorizations began to appear from within the Chicana/o community. The possibility and strength that entering the universities brought to many Chicana/os was reflected in this separation and it became the origin of the first Chicana/o queer politics and practice. It is then, according to Hernández, that Gloria Anzaldúa's and Cherríe Moraga's work founded the basis for an academic discourse and a political praxis during the 80's and 90's.

Focusing on Anzaldúa, the literary critic explains how her work and theory provoked a transgression from the "heterosexual imperative" (179) that had long been imposed on Chicana/os by the Anglo colonizer, the Mexican tradition and the Chicano political ideology. As a consequence, Anzaldúa sought subjects from other cultural backgrounds that embraced the cultural, gender and sexual freedom she advocated for, and she found solace in the individuals who located themselves in the Borderlands of society. What is more, the Hernández reminds that, for Anzaldúa, life in the Borderlands is something that someone experiences more than what someone is. That is, it "is a practice,

not an essence” (179). She continues describing how Anzaldúa’s theory and purpose was more about crossing cultural and racial boundaries than reinforcing the exclusionary borders already standing within her community. In this contexts, her theory becomes an invitation to Chicanas and non-Chicanas to come together and reinscribe the conflicts created by a history based on racism and sexism. Throughout her work, Anzaldúa turns the conflicting and marginalized Borderlands into a productive space where Chicana/o culture can be altered and amended. Hence, Hernandez believes that Anzaldúa’s Borderlands discards the concept of Aztlán to embrace a feminist alternative that does not disregard the value of home and family as was presented by the *Movimiento*. According to the scholar, this new geographic symbol provides the conceptualization of a wider space that includes issues that were unfeasible within nationalist ideologies, such as transnationalism, hybrid identities and migration. These notions reflect Anzaldúa’s premise that definitions must be fluid and malleable. Nevertheless, Hernández also warns us about simplifying the notion of a postnational position as an antinationalist attitude to make way into transnationalisms.

Feminist historian Emma Pérez’s perspective is also sustained around the connection of individuals to a place, or even the lack of direct contact with such place. In her work, she presents an alternative interpretation of Chicana identity; that of a diasporic reading. According to her, in order to classify and study the Chicana/o experience in the U.S. it would be incomplete to analyze it as only an immigrant experience. It is necessary to take into account their history as a diasporic community, which implies a more complex relation and attachment to the land they live in. Nevertheless, Pérez admits that her interpretation of

diaspora is a personal one that differs from its traditional definition. The historian cautions the reader in remembering that after the Mexican revolution of 1910, citizens from the northern states of Mexico became part of a new diaspora that came to live on a land that had been oftentimes named and renamed during different historical struggles with the Spanish colonists, Mexicans and the Euroamericans that delimited the land they have conquered through borders. Therefore, she states that the unmarked identities of the diasporic individuals were categorized according to the changing names of the lands they traveled through. As a result, the diasporic individual cannot be contained under rigid categorizations such as Mexican, American or Chicana/o, but is constantly renamed and redefined. Hence, the diasporic subjectivity, which is always dynamic and fluid, unites the past with the present in order to create a new future. In other words, the *tejana* historian considers them as mobile third space identities that through contention and creative practices have enabled the Chicana feminist to navigate, survive and reconstruct a new community that is inclusive and agentic.

However, Pérez does not disregard other alternative interpretations that define the Chicana/o experience, such as Immigration Studies and Border(Land) Studies. What is more, she accepts the complexity and relation between borders and diaspora, and considers them, somehow, interconnected in the sense that borders are redefined as the result of people carrying them as they move, and, hence, maintaining cultural traces of apparently foreign cultures. What she attempts in this work is to differentiate the term “immigrant” when referring to different individuals, such as the white European immigrants and the colored Chicana/os. The historian studies a genealogy of Chicana identities and

sexualities as a challenging response to the hegemony present in the dominant cultures. Moreover, the historian considers that sexuality and gender arose as a response to systematic oppression of the hegemony. As a consequence, she refers to desire “as a medium for social change” (*Decolonial Imaginary* xix); that is, a force that will challenge the unequal reality and conditions and that will enable Chicanas to overcome the oppression of colonization. Thus, she presents what she calls a “theory of Chicano/a historical consciousness” (*Decolonial Imaginary* 4) through which she attempts to reconstruct history so as to provide the means for a counter historiography that will offer Chicana/os opportunity to explain contemporary issues, such as immigration and diaspora, or gender and sexuality, among others. As a historian, Emma Pérez also makes reference to the criticism that Anzaldúa received when she presented her feminist theory through a literary version of history and how her writing was described as inaccurate. She affirms that what Anzaldúa pretended was a metaphoric revision of history to make her point in a provocative manner. In other words, she defends Anzaldúa’s purposeful myth-making that proved greatly fertile in opening a literary space that encouraged the gendered discussion relating the *nueva mestiza* as “the privileged subject of an interstitial space that was formerly a nation, and is now without borders, without boundaries” (*Decolonial Imaginary* 25). Therefore, the Chicana feminist claims that Anzaldúa’s stimulating history provided a place within official narratives to feminists and queers and every Chicana/o regardless her/his purity as such. In other words, this lyric history included the voiceless and invisible Chicana/os of the past in order to encourage the present ones into redefining a community that the *Movimiento*’s discourse left somehow barren and incomplete.

Chapter 2. *Fronterizas* Calling out from the Southwest.

Retrieving the past is historically sound, politically
expedient, psychologically healthy, linguistically
necessary, morally essential.
(Pat Mora in *Neopantla*)

The narrative construction of a place shapes the understanding of landscape. Moreover, it turns spaces into meaningful places through land-based stories and myths related to its origins, creating an intricate bond between people's identity and space. Thus, people's identity and sense of place have always been interconnected prior to this narrative construct. The purpose of such narrations is to reinforce people's legitimacy towards the place they inhabit, before the existence of any institutionalized account of such place. Today, modern transnational realities have begun to shake the foundations of this land-connected identity premise.

Few places have been as constructed through hegemony as the American West. Still, many of the original narratives that accounted for it were ignored by the official history and it was mostly the Anglo expansionists' version that was recorded and preserved. According to this official report, the American West was an empty landscape ready to be possessed and given meaning. The imperialist myth perpetuated a biased account and deleted, at the same time, the abuses committed upon native inhabitants. On the one hand, it spread the idea of a Manifest Destiny; that is, the assertion that Anglo settlers were divinely destined to conquest the new continent. On the other hand, this presumption proved to be successful in order to legitimize the Anglo settlers' right to the

West, and it substantiated the rise of an Anglo nationalism throughout the continent. Hence, spreading the notion of a Manifest Destiny served Anglo settlers to undermine the original dwellers by describing them as the alien Other. The few instances where the original cultures were mentioned described them as exotic or uncivilized; therefore, implying that no harm would come from their disappearance. In his analysis, cultural critic Neil Campbell states that “[i]nstead of the representation of the West as a dialogic zone of contact and encounter where interaction and dialogue take place at all levels, myth presented a frozen, one-dimensional idealization of space” (10). That is, a partial account that fulfilled the Anglo settlers’ purposes.

From a postmodern point of view, the very idea of an uncontested, single-voiced history is unacceptable. This new perspective compiles narratives that were previously considered irrelevant so as to achieve a more accurate report of past western culture. Using literary critic Garza Falcón’s term, “the polyphonic ‘voices’” (3) are collected to counterpart the official history that answered to a specific rhetoric of dominance. Therefore, a postmodern interpretation of the West places side by side the different versions of history gathered from alternative sources, such as oral history, folklore and personal narratives. These popular genres provide the experiences and worldviews of communities that were never heard before: the women’s and the non-Anglos’. It is through this “borderland heteroglossia” (Garza Falcón 4) that a new version of Western history is available. These alternative accounts show the different hierarchical systems built around gender and racist axis, and which confined individuals in restricted roles within the community. In other words, as Campbell claims, encouraging the existence of different perspectives and experiences “is

a way of interpreting the lived space of the West as a complex web of interconnections, competing discourses, and different 'voices' that together constitute the region" (10). This postmodern reading underlines and stresses the gaps in the official history.

This chapter, then, will focus on the works *Caballero. A Historical Novel* (1996) by Jovita González, *Mexican Village* (1945) by Josefina Niggli, and *The Rebel* (1994) by Leonor Villegas de Magnón. However, I will also include some other compositions by these authors in order to provide a more complete analysis of their intellectual production, and to acknowledge the importance of their achievements. These women were contemporary to Anglo historian Walter Prescott Webb, but their personal understanding of reality clashed with what Webb, along with the ethnocentric and male-centered academia of the time, was producing. The literary and personal accounts that these *fronterizas* reported certainly show a more complex, contradictory and challenging reality than that recorded by the official narrative. Accordingly, a postmodern analysis of González, Niggli and Villegas de Magnón's works will recover the interpretations of those who were regarded as unimportant at the time. By recovering their literary works, this study will bridge early 20th century Chicana writers with contemporary ones. As historian J. Jorge Klor de Alva claims "beyond gender, class, race, and ethnicity, the international context of Chicanas must be fitted into any conceptual scheme that pretends to elucidate the full complexity of the Chicana past" (66). In other words, the peculiarity and complexity of these early 20th century female writers is but a necessary fact to bear in mind the multiple realities that they represent. Besides, it is my opinion that their experiences, as *fronterizas* of the early 20th century, pair them, to

some extent, with post-'60s Chicana feminists. Therefore, they must not be excluded on the grounds of a restrictive understanding of Chicana identity and experience. Similar to Chicanas during *El Movimiento*, early *fronterizas* were not granted a voice. Hence, by analyzing González, Niggli and Villegas de Magnón's work, the way these women felt and how they perceived their reality will be exposed. Besides, these productions depict the Borderland prior and after the annexation of the territory by the U.S. and reflect the already existing class, race and gender divisions before the Anglo capitalist system was imposed. A further purpose of this chapter, thus, is to offer a postmodern view of the West that challenges the traditional narratives and gives voice to those who were silenced by the official history of the American West. Scholar Neill Campbell defends a "post-Turnerian West" (8) which will call into question previous narratives and will define a postmodern version of the West: the New West. According to this alternative perspective outlined under postmodernism, it is necessary to review the official accounts of the West to search for the multiple layers of realities previously buried. Consequently, a rewriting of the West will be established upon the reinterpretation of internal and external borders.

The choice of a postmodernist approach is based on the belief that it will secure a more faithful understanding of a West where multilayered discourses and realities took place. This New West and, more specifically, the Borderland area of Texas and Mexico, is perceived as more than a geographical area and, thus, the recovery of these female writers' silenced voices will allow the reader to enter the real landscape and the borders that constituted the American West in the early 20th century. Physical and conceptual borders were crossed by

González, Niggli and Villegas de Magnón, both in their work and throughout their life. The recovery of their work will challenge long fixed dualistic thinking and will provide a more accurate understanding of this landscape and its people. Moreover, the writings of these *fronterizas* reflected on paper what it was repressed in reality. That is, although they were never reported in official accounts, instances of identity struggle took place in their time. The importance of this recovery is not only related to the discovery of female *fronterizas*' literary works, but to the consequent certainty of the constructedness of traditional national rhetorics as presented by official accounts written by, among others, Frederick Jackson Turner and Walter Prescott Webb. Although the voice of these female writers was actively dismissed at their time, a contemporary analysis will prove now that they contradicted the official history as it was being produced. That is, and echoing literary critic Garza Falcón, it is through the study of the distinct voices found in their works that "the historical moment is filled out, 'chronotoped' in time and space" (23). In other words, the recovery and analysis of these women's literary production will correct the incomplete historical account regarding the U.S.-Mexico Borderland, and an alternative historical account of Chicana literature will be achieved. In this line, *fronteriza* works of different genres and subject matter will be studied focusing on the challenging and subverting nature of these early 20th century examples of feminist literature, which appropriated and redefined the literary production of their time.

Such appropriation and resignification, [...] resulted in highly innovative texts to the extent that the postmodern rhetoric of the dissolutions of boundaries, fluidity of identity,

and bridging of opposites clearly seems to apply to many works by Chicana authors.
(Mermann-Jozwiak 4)

The author defends the reason to apply a postmodern point of view, which substantiates the works of contemporary Chicana authors, and I intend to take a step further and establish a connection between current Chicana production and those of early *fronterizas*. What is more, the features mentioned by literary critic Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak regarding postmodern narratives, both in relation to content and form, might as well apply to González, Niggli and Villegas de Magnón's literary production. As this section will demonstrate, the subjects brought by these authors, their characteristic point of view along with their bold appropriation of different genres are at the centre of the same features Mermann-Jozwiak confers to contemporary Chicana authors. Therefore, the importance of including these works from early 20th century responds not only to the recovery intent of the New West studies, but is also inspired as an attempt to claim a previously disdained literary precedent to current Chicana feminist literature, set before the productive '60s and Civil Rights Movements. The scholar underlines its relevance to contemporary Chicana literature and she bases her analysis on different aspects that tightly lock issues of postmodern theory and Chicana narratives, such as, "the trope of borders and boundaries; Space and subjectivity; Literary realism; Genre; and Language" (19). Taking into account and including early *fronterizas'* experience and literary works allows the reader to notice that such subjects and interests were also present in their work. Therefore, these features do not only promote an alternative study framework in relation to Chicana feminist literature that

distinguishes from traditional and, generally, from Chicano literature; but, furthermore, they set the precedents of Chicana feminism in earlier writings.

In addition, Memann-Jozwiak includes the term “new geographics of identity” as explored by scholar Susan Stanford Friedman (45) when discussing the special manner that contemporary Chicana authors, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Pat Mora, and Helena Viramontes come out strengthened from their empowering interpretation of conflictive spaces. What is more, she claims that this “new geographics of identity” presents a historically distinct context for the connections established between space and individuals. Tropes such as the border(land) become key in their understanding of both the space as a geopolitical entity and themselves as individuals who live in, between or parted by it. Nevertheless, the scholar also includes the fact that despite the challenging power of such space, the restrictions and constraints imposed by it are never dismissed by these authors. Along this line, Jovita González, Josefina Niggli and Leonor Villegas de Magnón’s works are also the result of them inhabiting this marginal space of the early 20th century for educated women in the Southwest and, therefore, analyzing their work and experience would shed light to the shared spatial, social and genre related issues that, hence, connect them in often disregarded manner. It is important to start by presenting the historical representation of these *fronterizas* to achieve a better understanding of their social and political context.

Early 20th century historian Frederick Jackson Turner described the West as an empty and limitless land. Turner was regarded as one of the main West expansionist supporters of his time. Unfortunately, as scholar Tey Diana

Rebolledo explains “[w]hen we think of the writer as historian, witness, or ethnographer, we presuppose a discourse of truth, a presentation of facts and details that conform to some mainstream notion of what is ‘real’ and what is truth” (*Women Singing* 117). In this sense, Turner and his supporters described what they wanted the audience to read and not so much what was there to describe. Besides the historian’s complete disregard for the encountered communities and cultures, he also ignored the very physical and political lines that defined his desired West. That is, he intentionally failed to mention the geopolitical boundary established with Mexico in 1848 and which, only then, provided the opportunity to continue the expansion in the legal-institutional sense. Turner’s narratives overlooked and, at the same time, invoked the existence of borders, whether internal or external. It is important, in this manner, to stress the political interests at the core of the Anglo American national discourse when it reported the West as an empty space.

Following Turner’s one-sided account, later 20th century historian, Walter Prescott Webb also presented the myth of a unified American culture. In her analysis, literary critic Garza Falcón depicts Webb’s nationalist rhetoric as one that brought together a “shared rhetorical, narrative, and linguistic devices in the service of a specific ideology” (35). As she denounces, throughout his several “historical” studies, Webb maintained and reinforced the idea of an Anglo national discourse which also shared the Aryan supremacy ideology brewing in Europe at the time. Webb’s rhetoric of American national identity depicted a community of hardworking Anglo South westerners struggling against the wilderness and poverty of the environment. At the same time, he also adopted an oppressor’s stance when he presented the native communities as an alien

and flawed Other. Garza Falcón stresses not only the ideological, but also the pragmatic importance that such discourse of Anglo nationalistic rhetoric, as well as the biased account of western culture, represented for Webb as it granted him the presidency of the American Historical Association. Two of Webb's major works are *The Great Plains* (1931) and *The Texas Rangers* (1935) which, according to literary critic María Eugenia Coterá "set the tone for a discourse on Texas history and culture that effectively 'disappeared' Native Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans from its communal script" (205). Coterá denounces that these accounts were created in order to establish a very distinctive binary system in which the non-Anglo was portrayed as savage and, the Anglo as civilized. The consequent acts of appropriation and repression were framed in the context of a necessary and urgent civilizing mission. Thus, it is fair to say, that it was the army and the Anglo nationalistic literature that emptied the American West. This constructed and biased discourse held extreme contradictions that need to be mentioned and denounced. These inconsistencies showed the political and economical goal of the Anglo rhetoric and, also, the passivity and self-deluding attitude of the mainstream Anglo audience of the time.

Literary critic Manuel M. Martín Rodríguez advocates for the recovery of past Mexican American accounts facing the Anglo invasion in order to improve our understanding of the era. Rodríguez brings attention to the already existing differences among the Mexican population throughout the Southwest and California before the Anglo invasion, in an attempt to stress the importance of not oversimplifying and homogenizing the Mexican American experience as a colonized community that he considers is sometimes erroneously portrayed in

contemporary Chicana/o scholars' studies. In other words, he senses that current scholars often disregard class differences and tend to describe the Anglo invasion and its consequences among the Mexican inhabitants mostly along political and ethnic axis. However, the differences between those who owned land and those who did not, and which clearly provoked disparate experiences among the Mexican population, were present long before the Anglos arrived. Thus, he advocates for a more accurate historical and scholarly recovery of the Mexican American experience in the past not only to correct "[t]he unifying nationalistic rhetoric that sprang from the Chicano Movement and dominated much of the criticism written from that moment on" (53), but also to support the importance of recovering and reclaiming texts from the past. He warns about the significance of reading and studying these accounts accepting the diverse experiences undergone by different individuals within the Mexican American community. With this purpose in mind, it is necessary to introduce the exceptional conditions that Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niggli enjoyed at a time when anything and anyone Mexican was systematically marginalized. This contextualization will ease the process to understand their access to privileged environments and acquaintances. The entitlement of these women, nevertheless, must not be held against them, as has long been done by many Anglo and Chicana/o scholars. On the contrary, it is a fact that must be taken into account to better comprehend the extent of their challenge reflected in their lives and literary works.

Jovita González was born in 1904 in Roma, Texas; and, thus, she spent her early years close to the natural frontier that the Río Grand sets between Mexico and the United States. As regarded by feminist scholar María Eugenia

Cotera, the year González was born is crucial to understand the socio-economical context she was thrust into. Precisely in 1904, the Saint Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway was concluded and, as a consequence, South Texas was opened to the rest of the United States. Hence, “[t]he economic, political, and cultural changes that accompanied the transformation of the Borderlands from a ranching culture to an agrarian economy were felt most keenly by previously isolated Mexican ranching communities” (Cotera 3-4). The economic opportunities created by this technological advance brought great numbers of, mostly, Anglo newcomers to establish and settle in South Texas. The harsh and competitive conditions provoked by the new economy oppressed and mistreated the previous ranching families. Echoing Cotera’s study, it is with these *rancheros* that Jovita González identified the strongest, both personally and politically. Probably, as a consequence of the new conflicting environment in the borderlands, in 1910, González’s family moved to San Antonio where, in 1927, González received her B.A. in Spanish. Cotera describes with great detail González’s academic path in the early 1920s which reflects the difficulties and persuasion that she suffered to achieve the proper training and to become a member of the academia. As the critic states, González’s family was not well-off and this fact prolonged and complicated her studies. In several occasions, González had to delay her academic accomplishments in order to work and, thus, provide some economic aid to her family and also to be able to afford and continue a higher education for herself. Moreover, the fact that in González’s youth few women were encouraged to pursue professional education must be born in mind. These unequal expectations between the genders were even stronger in relation to Mexican American women. Nevertheless, González

managed to continue her academic career while working different jobs to pay for her education.

In 1925, Jovita González met J. Frank Dobie through her mentor at the University, Lilia Casis. This encounter became pivotal for González's scholarly work on the field of folklore, as Dobie was who, as Cotera describes, "put Texas folklore studies on the map" (*Life* 11). Dobie proved to be a strong influence in González's production and experience as a member of the academia, and he also facilitated her success in the ethnocentric ambiance of her time. Dobie's impact on the way González understood folklore was strong and this fact led modern Chicana/os to consider her work as assimilationist. As literary critic Sergio Reyna asserts, González's folklore elaboration is shaped and defined by different important male figures in the field. On the one hand, Reyna describes González as a "literary elaborator of folklore" (xv) in that she collected original oral narratives from the Mexican population of south Texas, legends and folk tales, that she later on rewrote into short stories with a more sophisticated literary expression that would suit the tastes of a specific audience "who preferred a refined quality of literature" (*The Woman* xv). Mediating and, somehow, appropriating these narratives to later rewrite them instead of maintaining and preserving the original piece followed a trend among some folklorist at the time, among whom was J. Frank Dobie. However, Dobie and González had some distinct opinions that, obviously, resulted from their opposite experience and stand point towards Texas history and culture. Thus, her personal situation and the clear breaches in Dobie's guidance cannot be overlooked. As feminist critic Cotera claims, Dobie's "contradictory nostalgia" (*Life* 13) defined his interpretation of the folk traditions of Mexican communities

in Texas. In this sense, Dobie was interested in collecting and gathering as much folklore as possible before it disappeared, but his approach and interpretation was “ahistorical and apolitical” (*Life* 13). It is in relation to this point that González performed some intellectual transgression. On the one hand, she collected Texas traditions by including those tales which reflected women’s and servants’ oppressive and subjugated experiences, and not only the ideal portrays of *vaqueros* and *rancheros*. On the other hand, through her thesis on History, González delved into the reasons behind the actual disappearance of Mexican culture in Texas, such as the abuses suffered by this community in the hands of the new coming Anglo settlers, first, and historians and scholars, later.

Literary critic Sergio Reyna also mentions the well known folklorist Aurelio M. Espinosa as another strong influence in González’s work, in the sense that it was from him that she drew her passion to document, collect and publish the culture of Mexican Americans in South Texas before the Anglo invasion. This passion equals González’s dedication and strong commitment to preserve her culture before it disappeared, erased and ignored by the Anglocentrist and chauvinistic academia of her time. In order to contextualize her situation and actions, it is important to mention the sudden interest of scholars at the time collect and promote the folklore of non-Anglo communities. Unfortunately, when read from a contemporary point of view, González’s efforts have often been misunderstood as frivolous and conforming. According to literary critics Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar, there are two anthropologists and ways of promoting Mexican American culture in the early 20th century that must be taken into account. On the one hand, Charles Fletcher

Lummis was considered an expert and the “founder of the ‘Southwest genre’” (Calderon and Saldívar 3), who according to literary critics Calderón and Saldívar, had, as many other Anglo scholars in this field, a patronizing and romantic standpoint when describing native communities. In the critics’ opinion, Lummis’ writings pursued self-promotion and an unconflicting portrayal of the suppressed communities. Moreover, they also mention Aurelio M. Espinosa, a long friend of Jovita González, who advocated the Iberian origin of the culture found and maintained among the Mexican American community of the Southwest. Calderón and Saldívar describe Espinosa’s perspective as dangerous in its selective forgetting of some historical facts and also in his tendency to romanticize the culture of this community. As they understand, it is under Espinosa’s influence that Jovita González, Nina Otero de Warren, Cleofas M. Jaramillo, Josefina Niggli, and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca produced their works. However, these critics defend these productions as these women’s way of introducing a positive self-image in the new reality of the Southwest, and an encouragement of bilingual and bicultural approaches.

Historian Gerald E. Poyo reports that the claim of a Spanish identity made by the Mexican elite through the Southwest must be placed in the years previous to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (384). As referred by the scholar, the population living in the Spanish American province of Texas built a regional identity that was enforced and perpetuated by the isolate nature of the area itself. Thus, a very particular identity and way of life developed in this area and its inhabitants kept to it passionately. As a consequence of the Spanish empire a caste system, *sistema de castas*, was applied that would locate people in varied social status. As Poyo explains,

people were labeled depending on their worth, *calidad*. However, he also warns about the fact that what this “quality” meant was not established and, thus, its meaning changed from community to community throughout New Spain during the 18th century. Nevertheless, and this certainly is interesting, according to him “despite the ideal of stratification in the *sistemas de castas*, fluid local practice allowed the great majority of the town inhabitants to define themselves, or be defined as *españoles*” (390). His study on the society of Bexar, Texas, shows that race, although meaningful, did not limit the *calidad* of the person. It was rather the individual’s acceptance or likeness within the community that qualified her/him as worthy. This analysis shows, then, that race was part but not central to the stratification of people according to social status, and that this identification was fluid and changeable throughout an individual’s life. That is, the status was earned and granted to the person according to her/his behavior in the community. Consequently, when the individual accomplished a reputation s/he acquired the status of *español/a*. At the end of the Spanish ruling, when Mexico gained independence, this official identification ceased to exist in favor of republican ideals brought to the new nation. However, after the Anglo invasion when racism was enforced among the Texas Mexicans, *tejanos* recovered part of their old fashioned identity definition system in order to help them cope and resist the racism that grouped every *tejano* together under the newly resurfaced identity system.

All in all, and echoing María Eugenia Cotera’s analysis, it is important to stress the accomplishment that Jovita González achieved in the conflicting years of 1920s and 1930s and that she managed to be regarded as a Mexican American folklore expert, to publish various articles in the Publications of the

Texas Folklore Society, and to become the vice president and president, for two terms, of the Texas Folklore Society. All this must be framed in the context of an academic environment lead mostly by Anglo men.

In 1929, however, two years after Jovita González received her Bachelor's degree at Our Lady of the Lake, she was awarded with a Lapham Scholarship. Consequently, that summer, she traveled through South Texas on her own recording the testimony of Mexican American dwellers in order to complete her M.A. in history at the University of Texas at Austin. Her thesis was entitled *Social Life in Cameron, Starr, and Zapata Counties* and she submitted it to her thesis advisor, Eugene C. Barker, an established historian at the time. This thesis was fortunately recovered and edited by literary critic María Eugenia Cotera in 2006 after, as she states, it had long been confined to silence and oblivion since its presentation in 1930. In her introduction, "A Woman of the Borderlands," Cotera considers González's thesis to be probably her "most vocal" (*Life* 16) attempt to include the Mexican American community in the official history of U.S.-Mexico Borderlands and to amend the gross and intentional mistakes collected in the historical narratives. Thanks to this recovery and edition, present researchers are able to achieve a more complete understanding of González as a precursor of female Mexican American writers and as the author of one of the first intellectual attempts to correct history as it had been written. In other words, Cotera explains the challenge that González's thesis represented in terms of the very people she was submitting it too. Eugene C. Barker, her thesis advisor, was, along with J. Frank Dobie, her colleague and "protector," and Walter Prescott Webb, the scholars who wrote the history and culture of U.S.-Mexico borderlands in the restricted and biased

manner it was later popularized. At this point, I consider that it is necessary to include González's thesis' first paragraph as a sample of her outspoken challenge, as a non-Anglo female scholar, to those male Anglo scholars she was working with in her day-to-day life. In my opinion, it reflects a passionate response to the great discrimination suffered by the Mexican American community in Texas and by her own personal experience struggling in an ethnocentric academia:

There exists in Texas a common tendency among Anglo-Americans, particularly among Americans of one or two generations' stay in the country, to look down upon the Mexicans of the border counties as interlopers, undesirable aliens, and a menace to the community. Those among the last group named who have this opinion should before making a definite stand consider the following: First, that the majority of these so-called undesirable aliens have been in the state long before Texas was Texas; second, that these people were here long before these new Americans crowded the deck of the immigrant ship; third, that a great number of the Mexican people in the border did not come as immigrants, but are the descendants of the *agraciados* who held grants from the Spanish crown. (n.p.)

In this bold introduction, González asserts her position regarding the Texas history written at the moment by Barker, Webb, and Dobie. In her analysis of the thesis, Cotera wonders why González, after establishing herself as a folklorist and having a secured position in the English or Spanish departments at the University of Austin, risked her professional security by presenting her thesis under the supervision of Barker, who she must know would recognize her challenge to the historical record he was promoting. In this situation, it is no

wonder that Barker was reluctant to admit González's interpretation of Texas history. But, finally, as Cotera explains, the thesis was accepted after González's friend, Carlos Castañeda, intervened in her behalf. As the feminist literary critic states, Barker's doubts were the result of both González's alternative exposition of Texas history and the unusual form in which she structured her thesis. Therefore, similar to modern Chicanas' writing, González did not only put into question the ideological body of her time, but also the formal structure in which it was presented. She surely knew about her transgressions and this would explain her detailed justification of the sources used in her research presented in the introduction of her thesis:

The historical material had been gathered from sources at the Library of the University of Texas. The description of social life is based primarily upon study and observation of the communities described. [...] People in all social sphere were interviewed, politicians, bankers, ranchmen, and laborers, and their ideas together with the impressions of the writer have been combined particularly in the last chapter of this thesis. (n.p.)

The fact that she developed her research at the university library is surely a way of securing and defending the veracity of her ideas throughout the thesis, and, furthermore, the illegitimacy of any accusation of invention for her challenging portrayal. Besides, I believe, González went to a large extent to include her voice and her community's, and, also, to claim their right, as the native inhabitants of the area, to tell the history of Texas. In her alternative historical account, González did not only include crucial historical events that Dobie, Webb and Barker dismissed, such as the Wars of Federation (1839) and the Carbajal Rebellion (1851), but she also provided a sociological approach of the

Mexican American community in the Southwest. In this account, she included the voices of women along with the cultural wealth of the Mexican American community in an attempt to dignify the people who were being dismissed by historical and cultural accounts. In other words, what González presented was a defiance to the “rhetoric of dominance” (Cotera, *Life* 17) in both the retelling of the history of Texas and also, as Cotera states, by presenting new fundamental events ignored by other scholars. Hence, she did not only correct the history of Texas, but her thesis “reframe(s) the borderlands as a transnational zone” (Cotera, *Life* 18). González’s vision of the peculiarity of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, as an area where national limits are transgressed and where traditional national realities are useless, places her as a predecessor to future Border Studies and the concept of Borderlands.

It was as the result of another scholarship, a Rockefeller grant in 1934, that Jovita González gathered folk traditions in South Texas. Provided with the data of this research, she became inspired by the role that *Mexicanas* had played in the founding of Texas, and, in 1936, she began to write her most important work of fiction: *Caballero. A Historical Novel*. González wrote this novel in collaboration with a woman called Margaret Eimer, whose pen name was Eve Raleigh. As María Eugenia Cotera describes, Margaret Eimer was a “frustrated but talented writer whose short stories had been rejected by numerous magazines” (206). This unpublished Anglo author became González’s writing partner, and theirs became a collaborative work that lasted a decade or so, and which was not published during the authors’ lifetime due to repeated rejection by publishers. *Caballero*, whose original title was “All This is Mine,” presents the U.S.-Mexico border society right after 1848. The story is

narrated from the Mexican American perspective of the *hacendados* and, more specifically, from Don Santiago de Mendoza y Soria's family's point of view. All throughout the novel, the clashing interests of the Mexican and Anglo communities are presented. These struggles go beyond the conflict between land ownership in that, on the one hand, they reflect the multifaceted nature of the West, and, on the other hand, they record the tensions regarding the internal borders that isolated and subjected the non-Anglo and/or women.

We must recall that the connection between people and land is very important to construct, through symbols and myths, the identity of a community. While Turner's and Webb's narratives centered in the Anglo nationalist identity along their conquest, during the '60s and with the revival of the Civil Rights Movement, the Chicana/o community also structured around a powerful spatial symbol, Aztlán, in order to claim their rights as the original inhabitants of the U.S. This trope, as will be discussed in the following chapter, also referred to a geographical space as their homeland, and similar to the Anglo West, Aztlán became more than just a geographical site for *El Movimiento*. However, and according to critic Patricia L. Price "[t]hough its intent was to contest the hegemonic, Anglo American narrative, Aztlán also shared important axes with it. In particular, both are border(ed) stories" (63). In other words, and as later studies have shown, although the Aztlán of the Chicana/o nationalists challenged the Anglo version of the West and its sociopolitical implications, it also perpetuated a patriarchal system so as to maintain a male-favored order. Ironically, these shared patriarchal values can be found in both Webb's and Américo Paredes' works. That is, even though Mexican American scholar Paredes denounced the abuses of the Anglo intruders and helped preserve the

tejano culture, he also complied with perpetuating a rhetoric of dominance that silenced the U.S. *Mexicanas*. Coincidentally, both Américo Paredes and Jovita González were born close to the Río Grande, where many *corridos*- a cultural reaction from the Mexican working class to denounce the oppressive state under Anglo power- were set. These ballads collected and praised a Mexican cultural heritage which celebrated a male hero. On the contrary, Jovita González's *Caballero*, short stories and history thesis challenge the gender repression that both Anglo and Mexican traditions celebrate. Therefore, while Paredes' work turns around the fierce class and race discriminations, González, oftentimes, includes a clear and preservative report of gender abuse. As critic María Eugenia Coteria asserts, "unlike Américo Paredes, [...] Jovita González does not present the *Tejano* community of the nineteenth century as some prelapsarian utopia" (*Life* 20-21), but includes, the contradictory and complex borderland society in its attempt to adjust to the changes through the negotiation of the rigid cultural borders, such as class, gender and sexuality present in the traditional Mexican community. Thus, Jovita González must be placed closer to modern Chicanas' perspective and work in that she presented her particular vision of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands and gender oppression in the early 20th century, way before the 1970s, and which is missing from the more celebrated Américo Paredes in the field of Chicana/o Studies. One of the most illuminating examples of the dissent regarding González's and Paredes' depiction of traditional *Tejano* community is the negative portrait of many male characters as the means of challenging the idealistic portrayal of the *corrido* warrior presented by Paredes.

Álvaro's spurs clinking, swaggered past the servant women, lustful, possessive eyes on the youngest and prettiest ones. Slender but powerfully built, the muscles revealed by the tight-fitting suit of buckskin moved with the coordination of a creature of the woods. (González and Raleigh 5)

The son of the main character in *Caballero*, Don Santiago de Mendoza y Soria, Alvaro's negative description as a cruel, self-centered and lustful young man disputes Paredes's romantic depiction of the *corrido* hero. In doing so, *Caballero* not only deconstructs this iconic figure, but as María Eugenia Cotera reports, it "presents an oppositional response both to dominant patriarchal culture as a whole and to elements of that culture in traditional Chicano texts" (*Caballero* 339). Transgressing the traditional female standpoint aligns Jovita González with both Josefina Niggli and Leonor Villegas de Magnón. All three women made the most of their privileged position as educated women by making their career in search of a new binational and bicultural space. They wrote in literary genres that were dismissed as *puro cuento* and they transgressed both traditional Mexican, and Anglo ideological and cultural constraints by presenting male characters that would subvert the traditional value system of both nations. On the one hand, Jovita González described the character of Álvaro as an oppositional portrayal of the *corrido* hero. On the other hand, in her first novel *Mexican Village* (1945), Josefina Niggli presented the character of Bob Webster as the ideal border subject who struggles in his search for an alternative identity. These two male characters are but an example of the way in which these early *fronterizas* challenged idyllic depictions of border heroes. Thus, it is necessary to underline that the myths produced by

the Chicana/o cultural nationalism denied a voice to *tejanas* and diminished their contribution to the community during the cultural conflict that took place in the area. Moreover, what makes *Caballero* such a remarkable literary effort is that the authors were very careful when presenting similar amounts of good and evil within both communities in order to secure a more truthful picture of the socio-historical reality of South Texas. By doing so, the authors recorded an alternative and more complex version of the reality that challenged the official narrative in their effort to preserve their culture from the erasure of time and, especially, from biased politics.

Chicano literary scholar John M. González affirms that the authors of *Caballero* did not just encourage assimilation to the Anglo culture, but tried to present a hybrid and cooperative stance that would benefit the *tejanos* in the confined socioeconomic and ideological situation they were. In order to achieve this mutual understanding, he locates the authors' discourse within the context of "Texas-Mexican discourses which outlined both the possibilities of agency and the limits of thought within the specific postcolonial conditions of the South Texas borderlands" (267). He also regards Jovita González and her novel as a precursor in terms of its literary genre, as her novel provided a new literary space that allowed a more complex and realistic analysis of Anglo and traditional Mexican cultures' encounter at the border than that provided by the *corridos*. In a similar trend, María Eugenia Cotera aligns Jovita González's ethnographic novel with Native American Ella Deloria's *Waterlily* (1988) and African American Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), in that the three of them represent "formal experiments and ideological artifacts" (15) and were, hence, disregarded from being published due to their formal and

ideological challenge. What is more, she stresses the widely ignored and crucial fact that *Caballero* was the result of a collaborative project between a Mexican American and an Anglo author. Thus, the many criticism regarding this novel and González's collaboration with the Anglo power must not be taken lightly without being aware of the fact that the novel was indeed the result of a "cross-cultural collaboration" (Cotera 201) with all its implications. In Cotera's opinion, it is this collaboration what places González closer to Chicana intellectuals, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Emma Pérez, and Norma Alarcón, because it poses a productive metatextual challenge to the "'dominant discursive logics' of nation, patriarchy, and resistance" (Cotera 202). In other words, González's and Eimer's collaborative narrative should be read as an example of the complexity of redefining concepts, such as nation and identity that will challenge the *status quo* and, hence, discriminate non-traditionally identified individuals.

In their work, Jovita González and Margaret Eimer placed these two oppositional cultures into conversation with the purpose of finding a way to negotiate and redefine this new borderland society in a more positive and pragmatic manner in order to retain some Mexican *tejano* cultural heritage, which was rapidly disappearing. Thus, *Caballero* should be understood as a site where concessions became part of a revolutionary challenge for ethnocentric discourses. Besides, John M. González claims that "[t]he discursive deconstructions of the *corridos*, and armed *guerrilla* conflict no longer offered *tejano* intellectuals of just a generation later truly useful modes of analysis or viable strategies of communal oppositionality" (267). That is, *Caballero* should be regarded as providing a greater threat to Anglo oppressive discourse while, at the same time, it questions the limitations displayed by traditional cultural

productions. *Caballero* moves beyond this Mexican-Texan nationalistic medium and its promotion of a male-centered ideology which relegated women to an object position devoid of any agency. This passive portrayal is directly contradicted by *tejanas'* history.

In their effort to bring both cultures closer, González and Eimer focused on the class distinctions existing within the Mexican community so as to present the Anglo audience with a more similar community; that is, a community that valued class over race. It is important to bear in mind that although González regarded herself as part of *gente decente* –someone from a privileged social status with exquisite manners and values- her economical situation was far from a comfortable one. However, she tried to secure a position in the academia where hardly any posts were available for non-Anglo women. To overcome such obstacles, González claimed her *gente decente* privilege, and, thus, *Caballero* includes some class-based remarks in relation to people within both communities that modern Chicanas might find problematic. Her stress on class values did, however, to some extent, challenge the racist values of her time as she condemned the greedy Anglo settlers that exploited and abused the Mexican community. Thus, although controversial, it is necessary to take into account González's reasons to separate herself from certain groups within the *tejano* community. Unfortunately, her efforts placed her both among and apart from *tejanos* and never as an equal to her Anglo colleagues in the academia. Hence, Jovita González created an identity for herself in order to navigate through different spaces, both physical and conceptual, in her daily life as a member of the Mexican community in Texas and as a female scholar in the Anglocentric environment of the university. As Chicana feminist Leticia Garza

Falcón claims, Gonzalez's identification as *gente decente* might be the result of her long term relationship with Mexican exiles in San Felipe and to their performance of a more traditional Mexican mentality. However, the literary critic believes that González's recurrent identification might be triggered by her need to "define herself as a lady among the men of a male-centered, male-dominated academy" (89). In other words, González seems to try to fit in different worlds with which she does not totally agree with or feel comfortable in. On the one hand, she had to face the suspicion of her community as female scholars were not common and, thus, she felt the need to accommodate to the patriarchal ideology by constantly identifying and proving her high morals as a woman, even if she challenged the traditional role of women. On the other hand, she also had to struggle to keep her position as an intellectual among the Anglo ethnocentric colleagues at the university and, once again, made concessions in order to prove her worth as a scholar.

Nevertheless, the authors' exhaustive description and direct critique of fixed class and gender systems questioned the rhetoric of dominance way before *El Movimiento*. Besides, they challenged tradition in a way that later Chicanas will emulate in their work. That is, creating narratives of everyday life in order to subvert the *status quo*. González -along with Niggli and Villegas de Magnón- included characters that experienced and crossed different borders while they struggled in search of a new identity. *Caballero* presented the border as a site which by its very nature facilitated an alternative world view that overthrew the traditional identity system's axis of nationalism, gender and race. This is why González's voice "even when coming from within the Mexican elite, or from within an academic Anglocentric world" (Garza 11) should be heard.

Aligning with María Eugenia Coterá's conclusion, Jovita González was keenly aware of the singularity of the borderlands. She did not only live there, but spent her years as a scholar of folklore and history traveling throughout South Texas, listening to the original inhabitants of the area and reading the narratives produced by the male, Anglo academia of her time. González's varied work reporting the culture of *Tejanos* and her surprising decision to move from the comforts of the English and Spanish departments of the University of Texas Austin, and deciding to pursue her master in History under Eugene C. Barker does not seem an innocent decision to make. It is my opinion that witnessing the self-serving and romanticized portrayal of her people by Texas folklorists and Anglo scholars, or as Coterá describes it the "whitewashing" (*Life* 4) of Texas history by her colleagues, pushed her to take the responsibility to square the historical account in order to preserve what was original and was turning into alien.

Unlike Walter Prescott Webb's work, a contemporary to González, *Caballero* was not published until after the authors' death. While Webb's reports on the American West satisfied the purpose of an official history based on the idea of Manifest Destiny, González's historical novel presented complex identities structured around gender and class lines that directly challenged and put into question Webb's rhetoric. This defiance by a Mexican American female writer, despite her academic background, clearly limited the chances of *Caballero* to be published, while Webb's work, on the other hand, was celebrated and rewarded. After her years as a scholar, Jovita González worked most of her time working as a public school Spanish language teacher in South Texas and, apparently, according to Jose Limón's introduction to *Caballero*, she

told no one about her career as a creative writer (xxi). The audacity of the novel led Edmund Mireles, González's husband, to deny its very existence in an interview with feminist historian Marta Cotera in the mid-1970s. In José Limón's statement, the interview with Cotera was mostly answered by Edmund Mireles while Jovita González listened and added some remarks. As Limón explains, Mireles feared the political consequences of publishing a novel by an author with a Spanish surname in the '40s. In this line, critic Garza Falcón addresses the great importance that McCarthyism played in defining and constraining Jovita González's generation's public performance. The terror of being connected to communism or left-party political ideology forced citizens, in general, and Mexican American intellectuals and labor activists, in particular, to behave extra carefully and to avoid any chance of being persecuted. In this context, it is understandable that the Mireles couple, who were actively working to promote both the Spanish language and the pride in maintaining Latin American culture during their period as high school teachers in Corpus Christy, felt the need to lie about the existence of González's novel, *Caballero*. Furthermore, scholar John M. González sets Jovita González's life span in the Jim Crow era, once again, in an effort to contextualize and bring together the repressive socioideological circumstances she was raised in and had to navigate through. As Jovita González herself denounced in her master's thesis:

Many incidents which occurred lately have disgusted the Texas-Mexicans to such an extent that some have changed from the most loyal American subjects to the bitterest anti-Americans. [...] They oppose the discrimination that is shown concerning their attending certain public places. They resent the fact that in some of the Valley towns, Mexicans are not admitted at cafes, picture shows, hotels, and bathing beaches. [...]

The Texas-Mexican families do not want social intercourse with Americans. But they do demand the privilege of attending the same public places as Americans do. (114-15)

Aligning with this description, historian David Montejano describes that, “in political and sociological terms, blacks and Mexicans were basically seen as different aspects of the same race problem” (262). Although the historian clarifies that the prohibitions regarding the Mexican population were not as officially stipulated as they were for the African Americans, in the day to day experience they were equally (mis)treated. It was as the result of such similar experiences that Montejano appropriates the denomination of Jim Crow to describe the policing and control suffered by Mexicans throughout Texas.

It is, thus, not surprising that Mireles expressed his concerns about the consequences they would have suffered as high school teachers in Corpus Christy during this time. As Limón describes, Mireles was also anxious about the reactions that the novel might provoke among “the Anglo bigots and Chicano nationalists” (*Caballero* xxii) if published in the ‘70s. Nevertheless, and according to Limón’s account of Marta Cotera’s interview, when Mireles informed about the destruction of the manuscript of *Caballero* “Jovita Gonzalez, unobserved by her husband, made a brief wagging gesture with the hand to Cotera, clearly *negating* her husband’s statement” (xxii). It was finally, in 1996, when *Caballero* was published for the first time by Arte Público Press. The novel was recovered and edited by scholar Jose Limón and coauthored by María Eugenia Cotera, daughter of Marta Cotera.

Cultural encounters already existed in South Texas, where *Caballero*’s historical romance is set, as the result of Spanish settlers’ colonization of the

New Spain's far northern frontier. By 1845, this area became the objective of the U.S. army that sought to establish an American claim and to extend into the interior Mexico. The failure of diplomatic negotiations with the Mexican government did not stop the expansionist desires of the U.S. army and this locale suffered several frontier-related wars in the next few years, concluding with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. As a result of this Treaty, the northern territories of Mexico and the border country of South Texas officially became the U.S. government's property. Consequently, Mexican citizens instantly became North Americans. Unfortunately, reality did not change so rapidly and the linkage to Mexico remained strong. This tight relationship was reflected in the language they used, housing types, foods, folklore, mode of entertainment, and loyalty to the old country. The South Texas's geographic position and relative isolation secured a strong independent population, economically and culturally speaking. In other words, although being close to both Mexico and the rest of the U.S., South Texans liked to maintain their autonomy. Unlike other parts of the West and Texas itself, the population in South Texas was mostly of Mexican origin. In this particular context and after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, *Tejanos* living in this area found themselves discriminated by an Anglo minority that designed and enforced unequal conditions for the citizens.

After 1848, South Texas underwent a drastic sociopolitical change adapting from a feudal system into a capitalist one. This change brought not only a new social system, but it also shook the very foundation of the *tejano* identity which was based on land property. Mexicans of South Texas perceived land as the means to insure familiar well-being, status and respect, while for

Anglo Americans land meant a quick profit. The new capitalist system involved different political and social practices that gradually affected the daily routine of the Mexican American population. All these sudden changes provoked identity struggles within the Mexican American community. Although some *Tejanos* assimilated by acquiring the new Anglo ways and even marrying the Anglo newcomers, others fought to maintain old customs and to preserve their old identity.

The situation of the Laredo border area was particularly complex in the political, cultural and social sense. By the end of the 19th century, Laredo's strategic geographical location encouraged, at times, difficult but nevertheless lasting relationships between both nations. The several important international bridges connecting Laredo with Mexico made the exchange of goods, people and, thus, culture, natural. Consequently, single nationalities became insufficient for some border residents as the city's cultural, class and political diversity grew, specially, for *fronterizas*. According to critic Sam López "Laredo is a case study of a place giving rise to a socially and politically progressive ethos" (21). The works of the authors included in this chapter do not tackle directly the insufficiency of Mexican/Anglo American nationalities when defining individuals. Besides, their lives and works prove clear examples of the inaccuracy of the terms in which border women were represented and portrayed by official accounts. These reports failed to mention or admit the new consciousness rising among these women, proving, as scholar James E. Crisp eloquently describes, that "[w]ritten history, in fact, may be wielded as a cultural weapon that cuts a far wider swath than a bayonet" (111). In other words, Crisp denounces that the "scientific history" (114) supposedly pursued during the

early 20th century by educated and leading historians, such as Eugene C. Barker, did not secure the veracity of the narratives or succeed in avoiding biased portrayal of the communities involved. Therefore, as a consequence of its complex socio-historical landscape, Laredo awakened the urge for a multilayered identity among some of the *fronterizas* that might have not happened had they lived in another area. By questioning their identity and acting upon it in the literary field, González, Villegas de Magnón and Niggli subverted not only the social restrains set on women, but also the traditional literary genres they wrote in. As a result, they must be regarded not only as challenging women, but as capable writers. On the one hand, González and Niggli wrote in literary genres that were considered unimportant and womanly at the time: personal narratives and romances. These genres were not included in the canon and were disregarded as little more than gossip and *cuentos*. Villegas de Magnón, on the other hand, adapted a traditionally male genre, such as the post-revolutionary *memoir*, to provide her personal account of the Mexican Revolution. Hence, these writers took advantage of the means that were available, and they enacted a subversive act of questioning the establishment while coming to ends with a personal identity struggle.

This new identity, bridging between the Mexican and Anglo American identity, and moving beyond the sum of both, foreshadows what will be later regarded as Chicana identity. In a very similar manner, González, Villegas de Magnón and Niggli challenged the same issues, faced strong obstacles, and managed to overcome, to a certain extent, the restrains of an ethnocentric society, and their own male chauvinist community. "If identity is in a constant state of flux at the psychological or theoretical level" (López, Sam 3), these

fronterizas' works represent a parting point from which contemporary Chicanas have arrived to where they are at the moment. Thus, studying these early 20th century works will help understand the construction of the Chicanas' group identity in the same way current works will aid to discern how this identity will fluctuate and evolve in the future. Although acknowledging the differences with 21st century Chicana writers, what González, Niggli and Villegas de Magnón achieved must be considered "the revolutionary act of survival and the more radical act of writing through the prism of their identity" (López Sam 19). It is the multicultural and negotiating nature of the inhabitants of the U.S.-Mexico borderland that made the border a perfect metaphor for the articulation of Chicana identity. The mobility of the Rio Grande becomes the perfect image to symbolize the failure of the political construction of the border that sets the two countries apart, and it also prompts to question the truthfulness of traditional North American Studies. What is more, the constant interaction between both nations demands a redefinition of notions, such as "national, transnational and diasporic communities and identities."

In the early 20th century, technical difficulties and different political agendas of the Mexican and U.S. governments made it hard for the general public to learn about what was happening around them. In such a context, the proliferation of alternative newspapers throughout the southwest became a fact in cities such as Laredo, San Antonio, El Paso and Los Angeles. According to scholar Nicolás Kanellos, it was during the 19th century and early 20th century when the Spanish newspapers became the source of information and cultural writings, such as poetry and prose. This press did not only spread some of the precursory ideas about causes of the Mexican Revolution, but it also covered it

and was politically engaged. As Kanellos explains, some of the published work were written by educated political refugees - especially those who had to leave Mexico after the Revolution and settle in the Southwest- with the purpose of creating a sense of community in exile. These intellectuals' goal, then, was to promote and encourage traditional Mexican values. In other words, to create a community within the United States that would preserve Mexican traditions. These works represented an alternative source of information and culture to that offered by Anglo American papers. Nicolás Kanellos includes *La Prensa* (1913) and *La Opinión* (1926) as two major daily newspapers of this era. As he continues, and connected to women's important role in maintaining a Mexican community in exile, these newspapers often targeted and alerted them about Anglo customs. This warning answered to the fear of losing the women to the Anglo Americans, attracted by the new possibilities offered to some of them, such as freedom, agency and intermarriage- rendered as male roles by traditional Mexicans-, which meant a "threat to the genetic and cultural survival of the Mexican community" (Kanellos 116).

Fortunately, as stated by Kanellos' study, women were not only the recipients of these alternative newspapers, but they turned the press into their means of public expression, and became active professionals. Women, such as Sara Estela Ramírez, Leonor Villegas de Magnón, Andre and Carlota Bermúdez, María Luisa Garza, and Lucía Eldine Gonzales not only worked for different newspapers, but they were the "organic intellectuals of their times who revealed different discursive positioning of women within their societies" (Lomas, *The Rebel* xv). These intellectuals left a written testimony of border daily existence, where they encouraged a border identity that promoted the

coexistence of both cultures. The very setting of the border with its political implications fostered the success of an alternative press. The borderland between Mexico and the United States became an area where a lot of Mexican people and Mexican descendents came together, and discussed political and cultural concerns as they were played out in the more constrained manner in areas that were situated further away. That is, the overlapping of both cultures, the Mexican and Mexican American, created an ideological space that allowed for a more indulgent discussion and interpretation of both nations' value systems. Consequently, traditional identity notions such as gender, class, and nation loosened up to some extent. This relaxation made it possible for many border women, such as Leonor Villegas de Magnón, to acquire an activism and agency previously unthought of. Thus, as stated by literary critic Donna M. Kabalen de Bichara, "their writing represent the voice of women who have chosen to speak by putting themselves into the text" (160). Similar to what Jovita González did with her Master's Thesis, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and many other women decided to voice their opinion and discuss gender issues challenging the traditional conception regarding women's lack of interest in politics by signing with their own name. Thus, they become vocal in relation to the changes that were necessary to improve women's situation in the borderlands. Unfortunately, as Kanellos states, this prolific literary period, when so many Spanish newspapers were available throughout the Southwest, came to an abrupt and violent end with the Great Depression. The dramatic poverty brought by the economic crisis, turned the Mexican American community into the scapegoat of North American politics. As a result, the repatriation of citizens and non-citizens alike became quite common, especially throughout the

Southwest. These, sometimes, voluntary and, oftentimes, forceful repatriations, fomented fear within the Mexican American community. Subsequently, their active political and cultural pursuits declined.

Critics Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar consider that “[b]orders [...] function as a site of confrontation between popular and official interpretations of the historical narrative” (152). Bearing this idea in mind, it is not surprising to come to the same conclusion as scholar Sam López that the borderland becomes “a site-specific place producing the possible for radical redefinition of ‘accepted’ social, cultural, and gender roles- a space of potentialities” (9). Thus, this alternative press which proliferated in the complex socio-historical context of the U.S.-Mexico borderland, became the key factor in making women’s role public during the revolution and helped equaling their merits to men’s. As scholar Kabalen de Bichara describes, the border, as the crossing site of the cultural spaces of Texas and Mexico, hence, becomes “a space where memory is shared and where certain texts that deal with that memory are created and conserved” (161). It is from this space that Leonor Villegas de Magnón brings her memory of the Mexican Revolution and documents it in order to report the crucial role of women during the Revolution, and to defend this participation against the erasure it was suffering in male-authored narratives. Furthermore, the author’s intent to claim these women’s right to a pension for their services, as did their male counterparts, is crucial to understand her repeated attempts at having her work published during her lifetime. The account of her many border crossings in order to aid the soldiers as head of La Cruz Blanca became symbolic of her crossing of internal borders as a woman representing herself as an active subject in such historical event. I

align with Kabalen de Bichara's interpretation that Villegas de Magñón's claim of her experiences through the writing of her *memoir*, *La Rebelde* and *The Rebel*, "become an interstitial intervention of what Pérez defines as 'third space feminism'" (32). In other words, Villegas de Magñón appropriates a traditional male literary genre, the *memoir* and the historical narrative, in order to incorporate her centrality in the Revolution, which was certainly considered men's affair. By doing so, she boldly challenged the veracity of previous reports of the war and, moreover, demanded the public acknowledgment and the afterwards economic reward for herself and her female war partners.

The Rio Grande makes the perfect metaphor for the dynamic Chicana identity. As evidenced by early *fronterizas* studied in this chapter, these writers took shelter in the idea of crossing and travelling across the river and they lived the crossing experience as a reflection of their constant negotiation of different worlds. "For *fronterizas*, the nature of their multiple negotiations on the border inherently involves the river in a spatial, practical, and political sense" (Sam López 54). In other words, the unexpected nature of the river parallels these women's mingling of cultures in their search for their border identity. Their works, a clear reflection of their lives, certify that identity politics needed a new way of definition as tying individuals' identity to single locations did not fulfill González, Niggli and Villegas de Magñón's needs. Their works "revived the fluidity of transnational migrant worlds that had been lost in the conceptualization of the homeland as a bounded and unified nation-space" (Kaup 82). In other words, Kaup describes the alternative reading of the border that took place after the '60s-'80s nationalist Chicana/o Movement, where the border became redefined as a contestatory location for alternative

understanding of the Chicana/o Studies. Moreover, the scholar recovers Amy Kaplan's and Mary Louis Pratt's depiction of the border as the site where postnational cultural creations are set and, thus, the border is depicted as a provocative *locus* that inspires Chicana/o cultural projects to overcome static and confining notions of a nationalist scope. However, as important and crucial as this contemporary border reinterpretation is, it is also necessary to realize that the transnational conception of the border is not a product of the 21st century, but that previous examples of this perception are at the core of the works by some early female border writers. The issues of transnational identities are to be found in González's, Niggli's and Villegas de Magnón's works when they describe their home beyond traditional nation-based narratives. That is, "the past has to be re-entered not as a closure but as a bridge to some new space where new identities might be constructed and new communities forged" (Campbell 128). For this reason, the importance of these early 20th century *fronterizas* is undeniable in that their works exhibit previous instances of identity struggle in the U.S-Mexico borderland. These cases, thus, helped open the path for later Chicana writers; no matter how apart and, even, in opposition these early experiences might appear from 21st century Chicanas' perspective. As scholar Sam López claims, I believe that the definition of the Chicana identity must be flexible and inclusive enough to appreciate their foremothers and to include, through the study of their work, these literary spaces as samples of contestatory sites of early 20th century discriminatory mainstream discourses. Furthermore, it is time to amend the literary ostracism that these border writers have suffered.

Leonor Villegas de Magnón' *memoir*, *The Rebel*, deals with the complexity of border reality during a period when its very existence was a fairly new event. This *memoir* shares many features with González's *Caballero* and Niggli's *Mexican Village*. However, it is necessary to study their differences as well in order to achieve a more faithful picture of the early 20th century. The strongest similarity between these female border authors consists on their absence from the historical or literary corpus. Thus, their works' importance in the recovery of alternative narratives of the borderland area in the early 20th century has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Villegas de Magnón's life and work, as it is presented in *The Rebel*, took place on both sides of the border; and, thus, by studying *The Rebel*, the reader will learn about the women's activism during one of the most important event in border history: the Mexican Revolution.

As a privileged early *fronteriza*, similar to González and Niggli, Villegas de Magnón traveled and lived on both sides of the border. She had an acute knowledge of the particular reality of the borderland and, specifically of the hardships brought by the Mexican Revolution to people's lives. Leonor Villegas de Magnón was born in June 12, 1876, in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, days before Porfirio Díaz's attempt to take Mexico City from Lerdo de Tejada. Her father, Joaquín Villegas de Magnón, a citizen from Santander, Spain, travelled to Cuba in the 1860s seeking wealth, and from there, he continued to Texas to try his luck in the ranching business. Valerianna Rubio, Leonor's mother, was the daughter of one of the well-established families in Matamoros; thus, when they married, her family money secured the wealth of the couple. Joaquín Villegas de Magnón and Valeriana Rubio had four children: Leopoldo, Leonor,

Lorenzo and Lina. The family enjoyed an exclusive life as the result of Valeriana Rubio's family money and Joaquín Villegas' new fortune in various import and export marketing, ranching and mining businesses. Leonor's idyllic life came to a halt when her mother died at a young age. Her father remarried Eloise, a woman who was persistent on adapting the North American way of life. At this point, Leonor was sent to the Ursuline Convent in San Antonio. Later on, she transferred to the Academy of the Holy Cross in Austin. In 1895, she graduated with honors and teaching credentials at Mount St. Ursula's Convent in New York and returned to Laredo with the intention of teaching. In 1901, Leonor married Adolfo Villegas de Magnón and moved to Mexico City where she enjoyed the bourgeoisie life the city and her privileged social status allowed her. Around the same period, she became politically conscious and, shortly after, politically active. She wrote articles in favor of Madero and against the reelection of Díaz. She also joined the *Junta Revolucionaria* in Laredo and became a very prolific article writer in different border newspapers, such as *La Crónica*, *El Progreso* and *El Radical*.

In 1911, after Madero took power, Villegas de Magnón founded the organization *Unión, Progreso y Caridad*. This organization had the purpose of extending women's domestic chores to the public sphere. Villegas de Magnón, although intent on encouraging women to be socially and politically active, was very careful not to overtly challenge the traditional beliefs attached to women's chores. Leonor's political activism did not stop with this organization, but after the Mexican Revolution broke out, she founded and ran *La Cruz Blanca* (a corps of nurses for the revolutionary forces) in 1913. This association joined in the Mexican Revolution in the different areas on both sides of the border, and

its participants met and worked along with some of the main figures of the Revolution. *La Cruz Blanca*'s political affiliation became a partial one when they decided to follow the advance of the First Chief, Venustiano Carranza, who sought the presidency of Mexico and became president of Mexico in 1915. After the Revolution, Leonor Villegas de Magnón continued her political interest, but there came a time when she realized that all the work made by women during the Revolution was being either silenced or diminished by the historical accounts. In order to end such biased reports, she dedicated her last years to write her experience and point of view of the Revolution. The purpose of Villegas de Magnón's chronicle was to ensure the women who fought during the Revolution the official recognition they rightfully deserved and to claim, at the same time, the veterans' pension for them. This intellectual and political project turned out to be the hardest fight she ever took part as the result of the many denials to publish that she received regarding her *memoir*. As scholar Clara Loma states in her introduction to *The Rebel*, "[s]he died before she received her veteran's pension and three days after she had made her last attempt to have her story published" (xxix).

La Rebelde was published in *The Laredo News* as a serialized narrative in 1961. At first, the whole chronicle was written in Spanish with a Mexican postrevolutionary audience in mind. It was later that *The Rebel*, an English version of the *memoir*, was published by the Recovering the U.S.-Hispanic Literary Heritage Project. In critic Andrea Tinnemeyer's opinion, this narrative about the Revolution became key in showing an alternative point of view, that of a female Mexican American active witness. Its novelty does not only refer to the unique situation of having a woman as the first person narrator of such historical

event, but also that as Tinnemeyer stresses previous “representations of the Mexican Revolution privileged a version which was agrarian based, and peopled by members of the lower class” (124). Therefore, thanks to the publication of *The Rebel* by Arte Público Press, recovered and edited by scholar Clara Lomas, Leonor Villegas de Magnón presents an alternative narrative in which not only the women’s strong role is presented and claimed, but also the author’s own experience as a member of an upper-class family is available. Besides, the *memoir* is Villegas de Magnón’s means to claim her participation and personal understanding of this highly regarded event, and also to portray the way people on both sides of the border and belonging to different class status were affected by it. What is more, Tinnemeyer reflects on the value of Villegas de Magnón’s political stand when she describes the difficulties of claiming her voice as a woman and as a *fronteriza* who embraced a binational identity that overcame traditional and static notions of nationalism. This identity struggle is very well exemplified in the literary decisions of the author, who first dedicated her *memoir* to a nationalist, Mexican audience who dismissed the publication of *La Rebelde*. Afterward, the author decided to address a new audience, this time the Anglo population, in her new English version entitled *The Rebel*, which had been rewritten and adapted in order to emulate the taste of the new audience while carefully relating the historical events. With the rewritten *memoir*, she intended to provide the Anglo community with a better understanding of the Mexican Revolution, and, at the same time, facilitate and encourage an improvement in the relations between both nations.

This *memoir* aimed at recording Leonor Villegas de Magnón’s personal experience and her version of one of the most critical moments in the history of

Mexico and the borderlands. Much in the same manner as González and Niggli, Villegas de Magnón was an educated woman who made her purpose in life to work in favor of a better understanding between the North American and Mexican communities. Becoming the bridge or translator of both communities felt urgent to Leonor Villegas de Magnón and she narrated her own experience as the example of her goal. Nevertheless, she did not only seek a more amicable relationship between both nations, but the main purpose of her *memoir* was to claim the women's right to a veteran's pension for their participation in the Revolution. The official narratives of the war written exclusively by men and following the fashion of the time ignored or diminished the contribution of women's participation during the war. Consequently, these women, Villegas de Magnón included, were denied the veteran's pension they were entitled to and were left out of the official report of the Revolution. Leaving aside the traditional feminine roles during wars, such as beautiful muses or prostitutes (Sam López 48), Villegas de Magnón was intent on naming real women who performed as spies, military officers and other active non-traditional roles. Hence, this *memoir* is highly important not only because it gives a unique insider's female perspective of the Revolution, but because it also provides a literary space where issues such as nationalism, gender and class are challenged and put into question in such a manner that proves Villegas de Magnón to be a clear precursor to modern Chicana literature. The author's compilations of the actions performed by women during the Revolution and her detailed lists of names, which make identification possible, conformed to a challenging historical document. The author's more dynamic understanding of traditional value systems is turned into literature, through the appropriation of a

traditionally male genre, which she readapts to her purposes. Challenging the literary genre, thus, is not but a mere reflection of the provoking nature of its content. It is bearing this in mind that scholar Tinnemeyer aligns Villegas de Magnón's formal and thematic content innovations with Gloria Anzaldúa's experimental tendency to subvert traditional and rigid systems. Similarly, Villegas de Magnón uses her female voice to present an alternative reality that will reconsider the traditional value system.

In this line of thinking, it is interesting to include scholar Martha Eva Rocha Islas' considerations regarding the writing of *memoirs*. According to her, it is the intention of the author to report her experience and, hence, make the audience aware of the author's mind (77). Therefore, it is highly important to interpret what the main character, the narrator, reports, as much as, what she forgets or does not mention. This unique feature is very present if both versions of Villegas de Magnón's *memoir* are read. A comparative study will certainly highlight the gaps and the slight dissimilarities that the author included in her Spanish version, *La Rebelde*, the first one she wrote with a Mexican audience in mind, and *The Rebel*, the English version that she later wrote with an Anglo audience in mind. Thus, as Tinnemeyer states, the *memoir* is "carefully orchestrated by Villegas de Magnón to ensure against misreading" (133), probably after her experience with the Spanish unpublished version. Besides, and echoing critic's analysis in *The Rebel*, Villegas de Magñón ignored the traditional code of autobiography by shifting from first to third person throughout her account, providing her *memoir* with a more distant tone that would place her closer to the Anglo audience. In a similar trend, it seems hardly coincidental that historical accounts from women writers were considered suspicious as reflected

by Eugene C. Barker's reticence in relation to Jovita González's master thesis and the various declines to publish her novel *Caballero*. Leonor Villegas de Magnón's *memoir*, as well, was not published as a whole either in Spanish or English regardless of her careful choice of information included depending on the audience in mind. Therefore, although generally absent from modern Chicana/o studies, these early *fronteriza* works were revolutionary for their times. The fact that their more innovative works were cornered during their lifetime should be regarded as a proof of it.

In order to comprehend the Chicana past, literary critic J. Jorge Klor de Alva claims that its international context must be born in mind. Thus, restrictive modern notions of legitimate Chicana class and ethnicity should be discarded to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of *chicanidad*. However, the critic warns about the limited means available to define and understand their history, that of "standard male-oriented history" (67). Therefore, he brings attention to the irony of trying to collect and study Chicana history by using male-oriented tools and male-oriented testimonies. This must be challenged by recovering the narratives and perspective of women, and it is in this context, then, that Villegas de Magnón's *memoir* should be recovered and analyzed. As Klor de Alva explains, the traditional male-centered theories are structured and defined by discriminatory class concerns disregarding any other issue crucial to relate and understand women's particularities which have marked their experiences throughout history. It is actually the constant obsession with González and Villegas de Magnón's class privileges that have obscured and overlooked these authors' challenging and provocative contributions from the perspective of modern Chicana/o Studies.

When reading the history of the Chicano Movement, the reader will encounter great voids regarding the events happening before *El Movimiento*. From the 1960's on, a Chicano literary canon began to emerge but, once again, important writers were put aside. Therefore, it is necessary to recover some of the voices that were ignored by, both, Anglo and later Chicano literary canons in their effort to promote a unified Chicano rhetoric. By recovering the works of early *fronterizas*, researchers will be able to study the differences existing within the border Hispanic community that are witness to its diverse experience along history. Besides, these authors' works will surface many issues that have been overlooked in the interests of a homogeneous and unproblematic definition of what a Chicana should be.

In feminist literary critic scholar María Herrera-Sobek's words, "Chicano/a literature is undergoing a reassessment; it is being reevaluated with respect to origins, legitimacy in the Academy, its national ties and so forth" (210). The feminist scholar denounces that the canon of Chicana/o literature is still being created and defined. Therefore, it is important to be extremely careful with the kind of literary corpus created for Chicana/o Studies in that it should avoid the gaps and incompleteness of other long established examples, such as the English one. Herrera-Sobek believes that the creation of the English canon is the result of the political nationalistic trend of 19th century and, thus, its main purpose is to provide a sense of national coherence and unity. Consequently, literature and the establishment of a literary canon became a social product that pursued the political aim of promoting a national consciousness. Echoing the feminist's conclusion, the formation of a literary canon, hence, has traditionally been limited and confined to political suitability rather than literary value. This is

why Herrera-Sobek warns scholars about the temptation of copying previous canon formation and, thus, maintain a discriminatory literary establishment based on political interests. She also brings attention for the critical theories applied when analyzing Chicana/o literature. She aligns with literary critic Tey Diana Rebolledo and her concern regarding the “application” of European and American critical theories to Chicana/o literature. This concern has its base on the notion that the Movement and its cultural production were created, precisely, as resistance to mainstream Anglo European and American literature. Herrera-Sobek warns Chicana/os about constraining and suppressing literary works in the process of establishing a Chicana/o canon because their literary characteristics or their authors’ do not respond to an established ideology. All in all, and agreeing with Rebolledo’s statements, Herrera-Sobek worries about the incongruence of evaluating a Chicana/o work applying discriminating critical theories that devaluated non-Anglo and women’s work anyway.

Herrera-Sobek’s recollection of Rebolledo’s thinking claims that the specific geography and ideology of the Southwest in the early 20th century discouraged women from having time to participate in literary production. Rebolledo has collected and claimed instances where Mexican American women participated, maintained and promoted oral literary products, such as folktales, legends, recipes, and so on. What is more, thanks to varied efforts from current Chicana/o scholars, this work has been recovered and promoted, and even written works by women have been (re)published and analyzed, hence, providing them with the importance and worth they have. The works of these three *fronteriza* authors, González, Niggli and Villegas de Magnón, mirror the relation between the physical border and the intellectual search for identity

as individuals and as communities. More specifically, feminist Chicana scholars Herrera-Sobek, Rebolledo and Anzaldúa directly refer to Josefina Niggli as a forerunner for Mexican American literature, who included active and sound female characters in her work and for creating literary spaces where hybrid subjectivities were displayed.

Following this idea, according to queer theorist María de los Ángeles Torres “[i]dentity is a social construction that requires continuous negotiation among the individual, the community, and the society at large” (373). Hence, the focus must be placed not only on how individuals or communities construct identity, but also on how societies in return construct individuals’ and communities’ identity. This two-way process involves many value systems, which are often socially constructed and, hence, will evolve through time. As a consequence, it is hardly possible to establish a set of patterns that could be equally applied to everyone in the same community. Social axes such as nationality, class and gender have not remained fixed through history. On the contrary, they are dynamic value systems which evolve and acquire new parameters. Such dynamic nature guarantees the complexity of systematizing individuals’ identity. The political border set between the United States and Mexico has often been regarded as the reflection of identity conflicts suffered by its inhabitants. According to Norma Iglesias, “la frontera ha sido asociada con la crisis de identidad” (126). In other words, the border, which divides space into home and the alien Other, is a political construct that often does not reflect the feelings of the borderland individual. Following Iglesias’ analysis of border cinema production, she claims that the definition of border reality has always been related to the owning and control of the cinematic production of its reality.

Similarly, it can be argued that the same happened in relation to the literary production about and from the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. That is, traditional Anglo nationalistic rhetoric first, and Chicano's male-centered political and literary productions later, limited and made it difficult for border women to define border life as they experienced it. Thus, they have been denied the possibility of representing and narrating their lives as they perceived it. This disapproval brought an internal struggle among feminist *fronterizas*. Political borders create identity crises that have their origin in the fear of losing what make people who they are. Consequently, it is fair to state that border conflicts compelled González, Niggli and Villegas de Magnón to question the reality they were born into. What makes border identities so interesting is that they do not acknowledge the traditional political and social boundaries. These early 20th century female authors sought an understanding of themselves and the world beyond the dualistic parameters of the traditional system. They avoided choosing one nationality over the other, between Anglo culture and Mexican culture. They preferred to embrace both, because that was what they felt to their core. In other words, it is this borderless understanding of themselves what makes it a suitable border identity from the 21st century studies' point of view. Identity, along with culture, is the result of a process, and, so, it does not sprout out of nowhere. An individuals' identity evolves and is defined through time, taking and discharging new meanings and understandings. It is through cultural reproduction that communities express themselves and make sense of the world around them. It is through art that modern Chicanas have validated themselves as a dynamic community, which redefines the new realities that the Chicanas experience. Border Studies have become of paramount importance

for contemporary cultural and literary studies. The notion of crossing borders, physical and conceptual, is often applied in modern cultural studies. Therefore, these early *fronterizas* must be considered the predecessors of modern Chicanas who deny any national alliance. At the borderland, where the presence of many cultures pervades, hybridity becomes the essence of *fronteriza* identity. It is from this very same standpoint that queer critic Anzaldúa will develop her cornerstone theory of the Border(lands). It is, thus, only sensible to recognize and note the similar transnational conceptualization of identity that Niggli, González and Villegas de Magnón included in their work and life experience. Hence, preceding current Chicanas, these *fronterizas* used their literary writing to express the variety and complexity of their culture, not as a unique one, but as an example of yet another cultural and identity alternative.

Josefina Niggli dedicated her life to secure the visibility and voice of alternative narratives that described the Mexican sociocultural landscape. The scenery where Niggli set her narratives reflected the U.S.-Mexico reality of her time. Niggli's first novel, *Mexican Village* (1945), will be mainly the basis for the recovery of yet another narrative of the West that has long been disregarded by Anglo and Chicano/a Studies. Bearing in mind that the way "a place and its people are portrayed in literature depends on a complex relationship between the cultural values and perceptions of the writer and the 'facts,' the 'reality' or 'truth' of what is perceived" (Gish 2), Niggli's account of the borderland reflects her personal feelings towards both, the place and the people who inhabited this area. Unlike González and Villegas de Magnón, Josefina Niggli published her major works during the '30s and '40s. Literary critic Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez mentions the difficulties at the time of publishing under a Spanish surname and,

particularly if dealing with Mexican American life. In Niggli's case, her last name did not represent any problem, but it is the fact that she wrote on the East Coast instead of Texas that is mentioned by Martínez as an added key advantage to succeed in her literary enterprise. Therefore, unlike both González and Villegas de Magnón, Niggli was able to make her living as an independent woman and scholar. What is more, as Martínez states, "she was saluted as a world-class playwright in the 1930s, and as a best-selling novelist in the 1940s" (2). *Mexican Village*, Niggli's first novel, sold 5,000 copies when it was published for the first time, and five consequent reprintings were issued. In the decade after its publication, the novel sold a total of 22,253 copies. However, despite her success, by the end of the 20th century, Niggli was almost forgotten along with Jovita González and Leonor Villegas de Magnón.

Josefina Niggli was born in Monterrey, in the state of Nuevo Leon, Mexico, just when *La Revolución* broke out. Her father, Frederick Ferdinand Niggli, was a Texan comptroller for different Mexican factories, who descended from Swiss and Alsatians that migrated to Texas. As Martínez explains in Josefina Niggli's critical biography, his father's employment was the origin of Niggli's setting in *Mexican Village*. On the other hand, Goldie Morgan Niggli, was a well-known violinist whose ancestors came from Ireland, France and Germany. Having European American parents and being born and raised in a well-off environment surrounded by Mexican servants, made Josefina Niggli felt an outsider in her own house. Consequently, Niggli developed a hybrid identity. This dual approach consisting in Anglo and Mexican heritage placed her in a complex position where she felt part of and apart from both communities. Niggli's long academic career initiated with a brief attendance at the American

School in Mexico City, after which she was homeschooled until she enrolled at the Main Avenue High School in San Antonio, Texas. Afterwards, she attended the College and Academy of the Incarnate Word, where she pursued a major in philosophy with a minor in history. A fact that aligns her with Jovita González's and Leonor Villegas de Magnón's interest in history. Josefina Niggli began her career as a literary writer at a young age and she attempted many genres, such as poems, short stories, plays and novels. According to Martínez's biography, later on, Niggli was an actress and playwright in the St. Mark's Players and, then, for the San Antonio Little Theatre (SALT), and she also worked for KTSA Radio, where she was quite successful writing and producing different programs.

When she decided to pursue further studies, in 1935, she enrolled in the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where she sought her master's degree with the prestigious Carolina Playmakers. As Martínez describes, this cutting edge theatrical company specialized on folk theater and was composed mostly by men at the time Niggli joined it. Despite her minority status as a woman, similar to that encountered by Jovita González at the University of Texas, Niggli succeeded through hard work. When she finished her master's, she intended to return to Monterrey and set up her own theatre. However, the difficult world economy and political tensions made her change her mind. As a drama writer, Niggli decided that folk wisdom would be the perfect means to adapt small-town Mexican reality into dramatic plays. Her purpose was to present the prejudices ingrained in the Anglo community regarding Mexican people. Consequently, Niggli made a careful use of her knowledge as a Mexican native, and her work reflected the influence of her stay with the Playmakers in North Carolina and the

modalities of folk “prevalent in her homeland, modalities that were central to the Mexican novel’s representations of the postrevolutionary future” (Orchard and Padilla 94). In other words, Niggli had already started integrating an educational purpose in her literary work, achieved from her deep knowledge of Mexican and Anglo cultures, in order to claim the richness of the Mexican culture.

Similar to what happened to Leonor Villegas de Magnón and other women during the Revolution, the impending war, the World War II in this case, allowed professional opportunities for Niggli and other women that would have been hard to get in pacific circumstances. Among other jobs, Niggli started working as a script editor for the radio division. She was also hired as a clerk at UNC-Chapel Hill, she became a script director in the radio division, an instructor for radio courses, and between 1942 and 1944 she got a teaching position and, taught Shakespeare and drama. Later in her career, Niggli turned to writing novels, where the very genre allowed her to present and develop the halfway identity of various characters throughout her novels. She published two novels in quick succession: *Mexican Village* in 1945 and *Step Down, Elder Brother*, two years later.

The importance of the historical context when Josefina Niggli was writing her first novel, *Mexican Village*, must be taken into account to understand the importance of her work. Due to the Mexican Revolution and the labor shortage in the United States, many Mexican citizens travelled to the States in search of a new opportunity to rebuild their lives. This immigration had its effects in literature, as well. The Mexican literary contributions played a major role in the development of Mexican American literature. As a result of this new literary source, a revision of Mexican culture became possible and it encouraged a

more amicable and equal relationship between Anglos and Mexicans. It is in this context where Josefina Niggli's *Mexican Village* must be placed. This is a novel in stories which Niggli sets in Hidalgo, México, in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. According to Martínez, Niggli's choice of a postrevolutionary era answered to her own personal knowledge of that time, and, also to the fact that she believed it to be an appropriate setting to explore *mestizo* consciousness.

In terms of the novels' formal composition, *Mexican Village* might be read as a novel or as a set of independent, but connected stories, which deal with the day to day life of a small Mexican village. These ten stories share some of their characters. However, each story revolves around a specific type of character in this border town and, hence, allows the portrayal of a many layered frontier reality. They mirror aspects of the everyday life in this rural community through the perspective of different characters and their varied lives. It is through the ample variety of characters that Niggli ensures a more complete and detailed depiction of Mexican life. The novel is a portrayal that goes beyond prejudices and preconceived Anglo notions, and which responds to Niggli's educational purpose. Similar to Jovita González, Josefina Niggli enjoyed an expertise in folklore knowledge which came as the result of their experience of both worlds, the Mexican and the Anglo American. Their purpose was similar too, that is, to present an insider's view into the Mexican culture and to show it with its inner contradictions, as well. Niggli used Mexican tales and legends in her works and included Mexican folk wisdom, which she considered important. These narratives, then, reflect the many social, racial and political frictions that underwent within the Mexican culture. Sometimes the characters themselves

are conflicting and other times the experiences they live are the source of conflict. Anyhow, these stories present a more complex glimpse of Mexican culture than what might appear from an inattentive reading.

Raymund Paredes, among other scholars, describes Niggli's work as the example of Mexican American literary romanticism. She has been said to present a romanticized description of nature and rural life, stereotypical figures such as farmers and *vaqueros*, and an idealized past with unthreatened cultural traditions and values. Although Paredes' description of *Mexican Village* as a highly entertaining piece might sound as a little condescending and even an over simplification, I do align with his enthusiasm regarding Niggli's portrayal of border subjectivity in the character of Bob Webster. Moreover, literary critic Sam López describes Niggli's work as the following:

Niggli takes several of the stereotypical or archetypal female roles in Mexican culture- [...] and carefully peels aside the "conventional" perceptions of these figures to challenge a male-oriented point of view on the society she is representing. (100)

Niggli often included female characters in her stories, such as the Mayan Ixtabai and the *Virgen de Guadalupe* and, thus, recovered and rewrote female characters that questioned traditional female roles. This literary commitment of redefining positive and culturally meaningful female figures puts Niggli into conversation with modern Chicana writers, who have also reappropriated legends, such as *La Llorona* and *La Malinche*. Furthermore, the main characters of the novel *Mexican Village* analyzed in this chapter are Bob Webster and María, who are both depicted as outlanders. The complex identity

of these two characters represents the border subject; that is, the result of an untraditional mix of origins and experiences. They seem to personify Niggli's positive interpretation of the border identity in the sense that they gather the best of both, traditional and modern worlds. It is through these characters, among others, that the multilayered nature of border life is represented. It is ironic that these misunderstood characters turn out to be the ones who, somehow, connect all ten stories and secure a sense of coherence as a whole.

According to Martínez, it is of paramount importance to stress the fact that Niggli was, but a few exceptions, the only Mexican American who wrote and published in mid 20th century stories set in Mexico and which revolved around Mexican history and culture; and to do so, in English language. When working as a writer, Niggli had a specific goal in mind. She aspired to become the cultural translator between what she considered home, Mexico, and the place where she matured her literary career, the United States. She was adamant in her goal to celebrate and spread the Mexican culture to the Anglo American audience. Niggli used her bilingual background and made the best of her experience as a bicultural subject to "translate" the Mexican culture to an Anglo American audience in amicable terms. This is why, I believe that she should be regarded as the predecessor of contemporary Chicana feminist writers who deal with border identities. Especially in her novels, Niggli studied the border subject of what she called "halfway child" to refer to the experience of those individuals who felt caught between national borders, and the ideological and emotional consequences of this position. Therefore, her work should be studied with the purpose of locating the mentioned "mestizo political consciousness" (Martínez, *Josefina Niggli* 6) that is so present in current

Chicanas' experience. What is more, it is important to mention the fact that according to literary critic Elizabeth Martínez, the analysis of Niggli's work and her interest and "obsession" of developing individuals caught between borders should include her three novels in order to accomplish her far more complex enterprise of representing the "mixed values and heritages within Mexican society in an era of rapid modernization" (*Josefina Niggli* 126) and also within the U.S.:

Her first novel represented the Mexican peasant and his folklore (as in her comedies), the second explored the awakening of mestizo national heritage as a result of the success of the Revolution, and her third novel focuses on the instrument of its origin. (*Josefina Niggli* 245)

In other words, the critic considers appropriate to take the three as a whole in order to fully understand Niggli's deep study and concern with the idea of *mestizaje* she was so devoted to explore. Bearing in mind Martínez's conclusions regarding Niggli's novels, it could be said that Niggli spent her adulthood tracing the origins, and analyzing the features and characteristics of border identity. Her personal experience, no doubt, compelled Niggli to constantly examine this hybridity through her literary works. Unfortunately, the author never acknowledged this exploration, and, thus, the reader can only infer from her interest and commitment to this topic what she felt herself. Thus, Niggli created characters that may reflect what she felt, but without acknowledging them as her own. This is an enigmatic and elusive attitude of hers that provides diverse interpretations. However, as Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez's critical biography describes, in the obituary that Paula Shirley wrote about Niggli she

manifested the writer's "feeling of being a 'halfway child,' one caught between two worlds" (255). These words, then, although not directly from Niggli herself, might be the closest corroboration of what her work already reflected; that Niggli, as González and Villegas de Magnón, was a *fronteriza* who found herself struggling to find the space where she could make sense and enjoy her border identity.

The successful *Mexican Village* was made into a film, *Sombrero*, by Metro Golden Mayer (MGM) in 1953. Although the film was directed by Norman Foster, starred by Ricardo Montalbán, and Niggli, herself, worked in the adaptation, it did not work out as expected. Among its failures, literary critics William Orchard and Yolanda Padilla highlight the decisive changes carried out in the film. They consider that the flawed adaptation "is the representative of a crisis in the cultural production and political rhetoric of Mexican Americans in 1950s" (90-91). In other words, Orchard and Padilla claim that at the time of its release, due to the inception of the Cold War and McCarthyism, non-Anglo citizens were especially pressured into exercising their loyalty to U.S. customs and culture. Echoing Garza Falcón's analysis, where she mentions the oppressive political context that McCarthyism brought in and which Jovita González was forced to negotiate, Padilla and Orchard also underline the complexity and repressive ambiance that restrained the topics and themes accepted in Hollywood during that time. This fact is probably behind the complete erasure of the character of Bob from *Sombrero*, and the shifting of the central character to Pepe González, a much less interesting character in Niggli's novel. Removing Bob's *mestizo* character from the film canceled the challenge he embodied for the Anglocentric discourse, which promoted a

traditional nationalist identity. Thus, Padilla and Orchard believe that this crucial alteration of the original story secured “a depoliticization of the novel” (104) that would align with the politics of the time. After publishing her novels, Niggli’s career as a writer came to a three-decade halt. In 1950, she received a fellowship to study in England and she also worked at Dublin’s Abbey Theatre. From the mid-1950s until her retirement in 1975, she taught fulltime at Western Carolina University, where she was also in charge of her own theatre program.

Scholar Norma Klahn states that “[m]emory matters as the self constructs an identity in relation to the place” (122). Agreeing with Klahn’s statement, what has been described as a mere nostalgic longing for an idealized past, proves to represent, in my opinion, early *fronterizas*’ political stand in an effort to fill the gaps that have been previously dismissed. Although Klahn refers to modern Chicanas, such as Cisneros, Cantú and Mora among others, I believe that Niggli, González and Villegas de Magnón’s literary enterprises are even better examples of the work of the memory in the creation of border identities which are strongly connected to a specific geopolitical site. Furthermore, from modern Chicanas’ stand point, memory should lead them to reclaim these early *fronteriza* authors and their literary work in order to complete an unabridged Chicana genealogy. By doing so, they will stop the “dis-(re)membering” (Klahn 123) of a complete Chicana literary history.

To conclude the chapter, it is necessary to put these three *fronteriza* writers in conversation with each other so as to examine the shared features and the challenging nature of their work. It is my aim, hence, to focus and pay special attention to issues relevant to class and gender relations in three of their works, *Caballero*, *Mexican Village* and *The Rebel*. With this comparative

analysis, some samples of the provocative nature that have been widely misrepresented as assimilationist will be analyzed. It is my believe that these works are the proof of a complex and subversive attempt to move beyond restrictive conceptions of identity by Jovita González, Josefina Niggli and Leonor Villegas de Magnón. This analysis connects these authors with later Chicana feminist writers, and, thus, should be recognized as the predecessor of a similar yet modified alternative identity to the traditional Mexican and Anglo-European one. The question discussed here is whether these early *fronterizas* might be considered Chicana authors even though technically the very term “Chicana” was not coined until later in the ‘60s. Some scholars might not agree with the idea of expanding the term to such extent as to cover these early 20th century women, but, it is my opinion, that it will not question the relevance of Chicana/o studies, but, on the contrary, it will help establish connections beyond the temporal and spatial realms. The concept of a feminist Chicana identity should be flexible enough to undertake new considerations and, thus, underline the very notion that identity concepts should be inclusive and dynamic. This flexibility is not only proof of the particularity of the Chicanas, but, it also substantiates its living and productive potential.

Caballero's portrait of the Mexican American population might provoke some controversy from a contemporary Chicana perspective. Jovita González traced her heritage to the affluent, *hidalgo* class that established the 18th century Spanish settlement in South Texas and she presented herself as a descendant of the Spanish *hacendado* class. As a result of this class consciousness, her point of view sympathized not with the working class or *peones*, but with the first Anglo newcomers. Consequently, “[c]urrent historical

hindsight could indict González and Raleigh as ‘assimilationists,’ ‘vendida,’ or ‘feminist,’ for their pervasive argument favors Americanization” (Segura 139). González showed a strict *gente decente* consciousness, to borrow scholar Garza Falcón’s term, which set her apart from the common Mexican. Nevertheless, such class-related beliefs responded, I believe, to her struggle to be accepted by the Anglo and male-centered academia during the 1920s and 1930s. González probably thought that presenting the Mexican culture from a class perspective would make it more understandable for the Anglo audience and they would, in time, change their prejudices towards the Mexican community. As González herself stated in the introduction of her Master’s Thesis, she “hope[d] that a better understanding between the two races will soon prevail in the border communities” (n.p.). Hence, in her effort to bring both cultures closer, she focused on class distinctions existing within the Mexican community in order to present the Anglo audience with a similar community to their own; that is, a community that valued class over race. Despite her economic, racial and gender disadvantages, González succeeded in securing a position in the academia where hardly any posts were available for the non-Anglo, and even less for a non-Anglo woman. Therefore, González’s stress on class values, regardless of its problematic condition from a contemporary current point of view, did, however, challenge the racist values of her time. Hence, although controversial, it is necessary to take into account González’s reasons to separate herself from certain groups within the *tejano* community. Unfortunately, her efforts placed her both among and removed from *tejanos* and never as an equal for her Anglo colleagues in the academia.

Leonor Villegas de Magnón, on the other hand, lived and wrote on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border. She was raised and lived in privileged conditions that might distance her, as in González's case, from nowadays working-class-conscious Chicanas. Nevertheless, her work and life show her determination to improve women's situation in a society where tradition was the law. The more than twenty-six letters of rejection she received from both North American and Mexican publishing houses show the provoking nature of her project, *The Rebel* and *La Rebelde*. The uniqueness of her work is indisputable in that as scholar Andrea Tinnemeyer describes "[p]rior Chicana/o representations of the Mexican Revolution privileged a version which was agrarian based, and peopled by members of the lower class" (124). In Villegas de Magnón's *memoir*, however, she included mainly the testimony of middle class, educated women who had also been silenced by the official post revolutionary *memoir*, and later by Chicana/o Studies. Therefore, *The Rebel* offers an excellent literary witness to the many instances of class and gender crossings present at the author's lifetime and, more specifically, during the Revolution. Ironic as it might sound, the possibility of transgression became greater as a result of the peculiar reality of the war, which, cannot be forgotten, has traditionally been considered a man's affair. The fact that in the early 20th century a border woman expressed and defended the existence of binational subjects is surprisingly modern. In scholar Sam López's words, Villegas de Magnón believed "in the organic, fundamental nature of the relationship between her land of birth and that place she resided in, as well as the movement of historical back and forth across the bridge" (54). The author herself, similar to Jovita González's experience, suffered the suspicions of both

Anglo and Mexican individuals for her defense of a new understanding of national identity. It was in order to ease the negotiation of both cultures that she wrote an Anglo and a Spanish version of *The Rebel* always keeping in mind the concerns of each audience. As literary critic Donna M. Kabalen de Bichara states, Villegas de Magnón “chose to create texts that function as independent intellectuals forms and as mediators that attempt to enter into dialogue with and affect a change in the reader’s perspective” (171). In other words, she wanted to make herself understood by both publics because she rendered it necessary to bring both cultures closer, most importantly in the specific site of the border. It was as a result of the very nature of the border that the “stablishment of a consciousness arising from the legacy of a non-diasporic postcolonial condition of females in the spaces of the Texas-Mexico border area” (Sam López 39) took place. Unfortunately, the gender and identity crossings that happened during the Revolution were considered suspicious after it ended and, thus, all Villegas de Magnón’s tireless attempts to publish her *memoir* failed up until after her death.

Switching from one language to another and being able to walk into different worlds, the Mexican and the Anglo one, Josefina Niggli also became the voice of those who were not heard. Niggli, same as Jovita González and Leonor Villegas de Magnón, hoped to gain the confidence of the Anglo readers and to show them the border reality they either ignored or misunderstood. These three *fronterizas* lived in a time when very few women had access to education and then, even less of them, pursued a professional career. Niggli, who enjoyed such privileges, was highly dedicated to raise awareness about the richness of Mexican culture. She put special emphasis on the issue of

frontier complexity way before the Civil Rights Movements of the '60s and dedicated her work to show all that was to gain from the good relations between both nations. Niggli did not write *Mexican Village* from the border, but from North Carolina. She, thus, "secured the University of North Carolina Press and Holt, Rinehart to publish her works at a time when few Chicanas were published" (Orchard and Padilla 91). Niggli, as González and Villegas de Magnón, focused on the issue of border reality with the purpose of easing the tensions between Mexico and the United States.

Knowing and challenging the Anglo and Mexican communities is not the only feature these authors shared with each other and with current Chicana writers, but they also experimented with the literary genres that were available at their time. In terms of form, Jovita González and Eve Raleigh's *Caballero* is developed in a genre that was considered womanly and, hence, unimportant: a mixture of the novel of manners and the historical romance. Taking advantage of a less valued literary genre, the authors were able to present a more personal and challenging vision of the reality they experienced. Hence, writing in what was determined as a less "serious" style at the time, provided them with the chance to give voice to border identity. Later Chicanas, as well, will favor the inclusion of narratives that have previously been ignored as a means to recover the silenced voices of women and the non-Anglo.

Moreover, Villegas de Magnón also challenged tradition with her writing style. In her personal account of the Revolution, she included at once the three literary genres that were more widely used to narrate the events: the historical narrative, the novel, and the personal *memoir*. These genres were mostly authored by men, and, not surprisingly, were also starred by men. Having a

female author appropriate these literary spaces while accommodating them to her needs, made Villegas de Magnón a suspicious subject. “Writing emerged as the medium for the definition of the individual subjectivity of the Chicana writer through the articulation of collective experience and identity” (Herrera-Sobek and Viramontes 218). In other words, similar to what scholar Herrera-Sobek states about contemporary Chicanas, Villegas de Magnón, by becoming an active participant in an essential episode in border history and by relentlessly trying to publish her claim for all active women during the Revolution, defended the possibility of an alternative identity for border Mexican American women. This alternative border identity included a group of real and fictitious active individuals who collectively called into question the official version of history. The dynamic nature of the borderland area and the description of the border inhabitants, as crossing in both directions for different purposes, offered Josefina Niggli a useful device to reflect by parallelism the dynamic nature of border identity. Such fluency and, at the same time, division reflected in this space is also mirrored in the very structure of her novel, *Mexican Village*, which is divided in different stories that could be read separately or as a single narrative. Niggli chose a setting she was familiar with. The borderland and its political fracture, the border, producing, accordingly, fractured identities among border residents. This rupture becomes even more profound among women who have undergone “a heritage of conquest, division, and redivision” (Sam López 17).

Besides experimenting with the form of their literary works, Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niggli should be considered as current Chicanas’ predecessors in view of their challenging

subjects. These *fronterizas*' exhaustive description and direct critique of fixed class and gender systems questioned the rhetoric of dominance way before *El Movimiento*. They challenged tradition in a way that later Chicanas would emulate in their work; that is, creating narratives of everyday life in order to subvert the *status quo*. The three of them included characters that experienced and crossed different borders while they struggled in search of a new identity. In order to accomplish a more exhaustive understanding of *chicanidad*, it is crucial to include the works of these predecessors who have long been disregarded by scholarly analysis. Ignoring early 20th century female authors' contributions due to a narrow understanding of *chicanidad* based on class and ethnic biases might be seen as resembling the many attempts of silencing Chicana/os based on gender and racial biases.

González's *Caballero* presented the border as a site which by its very nature facilitated an alternative world view that overthrew the traditional identity systems axis of nationalism, gender and race. The scholar's aim, as her varied work proves it, was to improve the position of *tejanas* that suffered the limitations of their gender and their race in the hands of the powerful male and Anglo population. As a female border inhabitant who pursued a career in the academia, she took advantage of her intellectual background to attempt to bridge her community and the Anglo community. González believed in the advantages that would result from the understanding of both communities, and she offered herself as the translator for the worlds she found herself connected to. She became the personification of an identity struggle that has been at the core of later Chicana literature. This is why González's voice "even when coming from within the Mexican elite, or from within an academic Anglocentric

world” (Garza Falcón 11) should be heard. Claiming women’s agency is at the basis of modern Chicana literature and Villegas de Magnón did so, as well, by writing the testimony of deeds carried out by real women during the Mexican Revolution. Her demand of women’s right to action and her perception of the dualistic nature of the border area make it unthinkable not to consider Villegas de Magnón a precursor to modern Chicana literature. What is more, and as scholar Sam López claims, her literal and conceptual border crossings appear to be much more pertinent taking into account that she wrote from the U.S.-Mexican borderlands at a time when life at the border was “rather more alive and real than the often distanced and (almost wholly) academic pondering of that question in the 70s and the present” (55). *Mexican Village*, on the other hand, “brings to light the transnational networks at play in ostensibly nationalist practices, while revealing and examining the neocolonial relationship between Mexico and the United States” (Padilla, Yolanda 46). It mirrors 20th century Chicana literature in that it describes the mobility of the Chicana subject and the importance of daily life as a site of contest. Niggli’s sharp analysis on the everyday life and the apparently mundane chores helps the reader learn about the complexity and the artifice of every comment and action taken by individuals. Niggli’s work should be considered a sociocultural critique of the border area that foreshadowed the oncoming Chicana consciousness. Niggli used the background of everyday life in order to present the issues of border identity, bi-nationalism and women’s constrained reality. Her apparent naivety disguises a provocative attempt to challenge and reevaluate the traditional values of her time.

From a contemporary Chicana perspective, *Caballero's* portrait of the Mexican American population might provoke some controversy. González traced her heritage to the affluent, *hidalgo* class that established the 18th century Spanish settlement in South Texas and she presented herself as a descendant of the Spanish *hacendado* class. González's indulgence toward the first group of newcomers does not imply that *Caballero* is less critical with reality. Many instances throughout the novel denounced the irrationality of the feudal system inherited by the Spaniards that still ruled the Mexicans within the Texas society. All kind of abuses and mistreatments were exerted on lower classes and by describing the injustices forced upon innocent people, González reports a less idealistic reality of pre-1848 South-Texas than that found in Américo Paredes' work. Américo Paredes was contemporary to Jovita González and although they both shared their academic itinerary and political responsibility towards the *tejanos*, Paredes' work proved to be lacking any serious concern for gender issues; a fact that González was not happy to let go. Therefore, although both scholars share their criticism of class restrictions forced upon the Mexican American population by the Anglo power system, Paredes left aside crucial issues when claiming equal rights for everyone, such as those related to gender. In *Caballero*, the abuse imposed by Don Santiago, head of *Rancho La Palma*, on the weaker characters is described not just as an example of the feudal system, but as a sign of mental illness. Bearing in mind González' own class consciousness, she, nevertheless, presents class as the impending consequence of a tyrannical tradition.

But in Don Santiago all the savagery that was twisted into black hatreds for the Americans, all the high-minded pride willed him by two aristocratic families and come to fullest bloom in him, all the vanity of the dictator, poured their blood over his brain and blotted out all thought of Rancho La Palma, all sanity. (González and Raleigh 140)

This insanity is not unique to the character of Don Santiago, who represents the traditional Mexican ways, but has also passed on his beloved son, Álvaro. In his stubbornness for keeping matters as they were in the past and denying the coming of a new era, Álvaro appeals to the bloodthirsty conquerors to solve the matter of the Anglo newcomers in such a ferocious manner that hints to some kind of mental imbalance. Don Santiago's obstinacy is the result of his beliefs in his right to be master of the land he received from his ancestors. So, even if the historical and social situation has changed, he shows no sign of adapting to the new environment and clings to the past. Although throughout the novel, Don Santiago and Álvaro's blind rage is described as a sign of their backwardness, it is true that the authors did despise the second wave of newcomers formed by low class Anglos. Therefore, although González and Raleigh criticized the old ways' injustices, they however echoed the arbitrary class hierarchy.

The fugitive, like the man Tomás had shot; the land-greedy who justified their rapaciousness with the word "pioneer" and used it as a blanket to cover their evils-sullyng the good word and the constructive men entitled to it; the trash, the "puerco", like George and his sister, squeezed out of a community that refused to support them any longer; the wanderer, fleeing from nothing but himself; the adventurer, his conscience and his scruples long dead. All these, and more, came to Texas like buzzards to a feast. (González and Raleigh 195)

Denial is presented as an inherent trait of the Mexican personality throughout the novel. There are many Mexican characters that are pictured as believing that what they ignore will not happen. Their blind confidence in their right to their way of life detaches them from what is happening around them until they are forced to interact and negotiate with the new reality. By staying in their *haciendas* and socializing with the other *hacendados* around them, Don Santiago and the others succeed in ignoring the new reality. Contact with the Anglo American is the least desirable for Don Santiago and his son Álvaro. Unlike other characters in the novel, they do not feel any class alliance, but consider the Anglos as low as their peons. Besides, the *hacendados'* problem lays in their lack of foresight and in the fact that they are not ready for the newcomers. These *rancheros* expect the Anglo settlers to respect their Mexican ways and their inheritance, and have not foreseen the incompatibility of Anglo capitalist system with the Mexican feudal practice. However, the Anglo settlers do not only question Mexican values, but have no doubts about the validity of their behavior. Thus, the defense for the perpetuation of the traditional class system does not only come from the privileged Mexicans, but Anglo settlers also cannot help but relate high class with high morals, and, along the same line, high class with fair appearance. To make matters more complex, even the characters from lower classes are forced to believe that maintaining the traditional class system is unquestionable. They are certain that it is a person's social status what makes her/him worthy and not so much the race s/he belongs to. Presenting the lower class in such manner is quite problematic taking into account the injustices forced upon them on behalf of the maintenance of such order. It is only the rebellious characters from the novel

who agree on the advantages resulting from a good relationship between the first Anglo settlers and the Mexican elite. This position might coincide with González and Raleigh's beliefs about the reality of their time. González trusted the peaceful and fluent coexistence of both cultures to secure a richer Texan culture.

Throughout the novel the internal borders within the *tejano* community surface and the different class status are described to separate landowners, *peons*, *vaqueros*, and the rest of the household. The reader learns about a feudal system where *hacendados* rule their land, cattle, and every single person who lives in it with the same cruelty. Workers are treated as the master's property and even when the relationships between the master and the workers are friendly their class differences are never forgotten. The obsession for control is hardened when behaving in front of the *peones* and servants. The impression that the old ways still stand and, therefore, the power system has not been weakened becomes of great importance. According to the *hacendados*, the inferiority of lower classes comes with the inferiority of character, as well. *Peons* are regarded as animals and they are often described as having no soul. Therefore, their masters expect the same good behavior and profit that they will receive from their cattle. People from the lower classes are also described as having a treacherous nature and as lacking the dignity and honor of higher classes. These character traits are linked to the very nature of the class position, and the reality they have to endure is never mentioned. Besides, the *hacendados* are described as having higher values as the result of their privileged class status. In other words, the low moral values attached to the *peons* are described as inherent to their class and unrelated to the exploitation

they suffer. Therefore, it must be admitted that a certain amount of inconsistency from the authors towards the lower class is present throughout the novel.

Notwithstanding, class privileges might be overlooked in the perpetuation of a male chauvinist system. More than once in *Caballero*, women belonging to the privileged class are put down and lowered to the servant's level the moment they question the patriarchal system that restrains them. In this citation, Doña Dolores- Don Santiago's sister- faces the master and challenges the prevailing system.

Never mind, Angela, God isn't listening to your father's play acting and you needn't work yourself up about it. Santiago, shame on you for frightening your family. Go hide, flee to your ranch like a sacred rabbit, go spend your temper on your peons and those who fear you. We are women, yes, but we have our own souls. (González and Raleigh 98)

It is important to stress the parallelism drawn in this passage between *peones* and women of the high class. González and Raleigh's present work was not published while they were alive and it was not only the story that was provocative, but the fact that a woman directly questioned the Mexican traditional system and the Anglo settlers' prejudices. The obsession with pure blood is described as something desirable for the old Mexican families, but the authors present this tradition as what it is: a weakening of blood after generations of intermarriage. This, once again, brings a glimpse of the authors' opinion, who favored intermarriage between the Anglo elite and Mexican one. Furthermore, in another passage, Luis Gonzaga, the second son of Don Santiago, a sensitive man who is sympathetic to the Anglo newcomers,

challenges the class and gender values of his traditional system. Don Santiago, believing that his long faithful goatherd has lied to him and has also helped the Rangers, punishes the old man with the whip. Witnessing his father's atrocious behavior towards one of the oldest and most faithful servants, Luis Gonzaga intervenes and defends the goatherd from his father cruelty with his own body. It is interesting that this non-macho character is aligned to some extent with the privileged class Mexican women, not only somehow reflecting Jovita González's own position, but also showing the way in which gender transgression is accompanied by class transgression, too. That is, in the previous passage, not only does the character of Doña Dolores challenge her tyrant brother, along with the oppressive system he represents, but the effeminate character of Luis Gonzaga, as well, puts his own father and the old system into question.

In relation to Leonor Villegas de Magnón's *memoir*, *The Rebel*, first of all, it is important to recall that it is set in the context of the Mexican Revolution. A sequence of upheavals formed this war, where different men tried to substitute Porfirio Díaz's long ruling. The author's words when referring to Díaz's dictatorship do not just challenge his position, but ridicules him in a somehow problematic manner because it is his low social origins that she makes fun of. In other words, Villegas de Magnón's own privileged position becomes her stand from which to ridicule Díaz. The contradiction of the dictator's behavior towards his once fellow class group is stressed by the author's class-based-discrimination towards him. Therefore, although Villegas de Magnón's reference to the dictator's lower class background is politically incorrect, the origin of her criticism lays in the striking differences happening in the society between the privileged and the lower classes. The author does not only criticize the situation

of the working class, but she also brings attention to the struggle led by middle class citizens. Although the origin of the Revolution was placed on the extreme disparity between people from different class status, it might be difficult for contemporary readers to comprehend how the privileged sympathized with the poor. Such liking is lacking from the traditional class system where the wealth of the rich was secured by the poverty of the working class. However, the poorest population was not the only one who suffered under Díaz's ruling, but the middle class also endured a grim future in the Mexican reality of the time. It was, probably, the harsh situation of the middle class along with the dramatic situation of the lower class that awakened and propelled the sympathies of the privileged class. Therefore, although the Mexican Revolution's rise was set in the unequal situation of the different classes, the tensions intensified when middle class citizens began to be conscious of their unprivileged situation in comparison to the reality on the other side of the border. The possibility of crossing the political border made the Mexican citizens aware of the comparatively dissimilar conditions that took place on the different sides of it. Consequently, the border area, as that "third space" that later Chicanas will refer to, became the site where revolutionary ideas and political activism would spark. It is fair to say that it was the very nature of the border area, with its constant interaction and exchange, that settled the grounds for questioning the traditional class system.

Some critics have pointed out Villegas de Magnón's work for its plain depiction of her loyal native servants: Julia and Pancho. This couple was part of the author's life since her childhood in Mexico. Later on, when Leonor and her brother Leopold were sent to North America to study, the couple frequented

Don Joaquín's house in Mexico as candy sellers in order to keep an eye on the other two younger siblings left with Eloise- the stepmother- and their father. When yielding to Eloise's constant pleads, the family moves to the American side, Pancho and Julia followed them and made a living selling coffee and *tortillas* to the workers who crossed the border. When Leonor founds the White Cross, it was Pancho, widowed by now, who helped her passing information and sympathizers across the river. Regarding Pancho and Julia, three facts are undeniable: the reader learns very little about these two characters' private life; they play a secondary role in the testimony of women's performance during the Mexican Revolution, which was the main goal of the author; and, finally, they enter the *memoir* mostly through their interaction with the Rebel, Villegas de Magnón herself, and her family. However, their role is more important than what their characters might seem. In my opinion, Julia and Pancho represent the dynamic nature of the border. These two characters' experience of the political border is reduced to a mere crossing of a river. Furthermore, they secure their survival from the river, no matter which side. Parallel to their experience of the border, Villegas de Magnón perceived the border area beyond political terms as a space where different socially constructed borders were easy to trespass. The malleable nature of different social traditions that limited women's agency is beautifully expressed in the author's recurrent image of a fluid border. The liquid border and the bridge over it are often brought into the readers' attention all through the *memoir* challenging the social and political stiffness of her time. Consequently, Julia and Pancho's characters transcend their humanity and become the symbolic representation of what Villegas de Magnón perceived as the borderland. Nevertheless, the fact that Villegas de Magnón does not make

any particular comment regarding Julia and Pancho's poor life and limited opportunities is controversial. The couple's life is described in nomadic terms, either selling candy on the streets or selling tortillas and coffee out of their hut. The author does not mention any attempt from her or her family to improve their life and allow them to upgrade economically and socially. By including no complaints from the couple, the *memoir* portrays Julia and Pancho as if having no interest in advancing their lives and being happy in their scarcity. Such an assumption does hint the classist basis for the old peonage system in which the servants were pictured as agreeing to their subordinate position as a result of their unambitious and conformist race. Although Villegas de Magnón's *memoir* does leave some conflicting ideas unresolved, she still presents a challenging view concerning the unequal reality of her time than what might be expected from a woman of her bourgeois upbringing.

The depiction of the servants as plain and naive, however, is problematized in a passage when Pancho separates himself from the Native Americans. Such differences are made on the basis of Pancho considering himself more privileged because he is a servant working for a rich family. However, Julia, his wife, is quick to answer and reminds him that they are both Indians themselves. Such response shows that Julia is conscious of the implications involved in the politics behind the classes and its effect on people. In other words, even if as servants they enjoy what is considered a more "civilized" life, the privileged class will only perceive the color of their skin and their facial features: "'Look, Julia,' he whispered, 'so much money. The Indians would have killed us.' 'Foolish one, the Indians are our people. Don't be too proud, Pancho,' Julia chided him gaily" (Villegas de Magnón 30). It is also

interesting to mention that this passage is slightly altered in the original Spanish version, *La Rebelde*, and, thus, having Julia clarify Pancho's classist statement might be understood as Villegas de Magnón's didactic intentions towards her Anglo audience. Related to the parallelism in racial and class division, there are two more passages regarding the natives that are worth studying. In the first one, Villegas de Magnón presents her own father, Don Joaquín, describing the Indians beyond the narrowness of his time:

They are the last of a noble race that once owned Mexico. Now they are wanderers in their own land. These men are good at heart, just like all of us. If they are approached in a friendly manner, they quickly respond. The world is not actually against anyone. It is fear and misunderstanding that make people fight. (Villegas de Magnón 22)

Don Joaquín regards them as equals and admits that their discriminated situation is a result of human ignorance, not the natives' inherent inadequacy. What is more, he seems to respect them as the owners of the lands they once were. Such familiarity results from the experience of ownership and tight relation with the land that the natives and Don Joaquín shared at different times in history. Having a man of Don Joaquín's position express these words and admitting the ill treatment the natives suffered shows Villegas de Magnón's attempts to challenge the unfair class-based discrimination established in her society. This passage is also missing from *La Rebelde*, therefore, the author's intention in improving Anglo preconceptions towards the native inhabitants cannot be clearer. There is yet another instance when the author puts into question the existing class system that had imposed itself by force rather than

by conviction. The author refers to the old Spanish system of peonage and the way it kept the native subjugated and oppressed. As a result, the original inhabitants were denied any chance of success by either the Spanish peonage or by the later Anglo-European. Such class discrimination, hence, reflects a racial discrimination which was hard to subvert. Villegas de Magnón acknowledges her privileged position as a member of the Spanish *hacendado* system which perpetuated itself by denying the basic needs to many people. The merit of making such a public acknowledgement of the unfair distribution of opportunities by a member of the privileged class, such as Villegas de Magnón herself, is worth recognizing.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the privileged class must be done in order to achieve a complete picture of the complex class tensions presented by Villegas de Magnón. If the reader keeps in mind her goal when writing her *memoir*, the laudable words echo her intentions. Including the assistance that the privileged offered during the Revolution might have helped the author to be listened by the audience she intended the *memoir* for. Although some passages describe the aristocrats unwilling to help at first, but later being convinced to do so, the author includes them as part of the highly regarded White Cross. The good image of the association was not always the result of friendly agreements with the privileged. The *memoir* also includes instances when the White Cross turned to more drastic measures, such as appropriating local newspapers in the towns where they arrived. In other words, praises and achievements of the organization were not always secured by the good relations with the wealthy sector of society, but articles and pictures were used to promote the good image of the organization, as well. Villegas de Magnón wanted her *memoir* not

only to place attention on the work done by women during the Revolution, and their right to a veteran's pension; but, similar to González and Niggli, she wanted to perform as the bridge between the American and the Mexican communities. Such work of "translation" was based on her own experience as an active woman living and working in the borderland. She understood this unique space as the improved version resulting from the peaceful cohabitation of North American and Mexican citizens that happened in this area during the Revolution. Her ultimate goal was to prove to everyone that by revising the restrictions imposed by traditional class and race systems both nations would gain.

While Villegas de Magnón structured her *memoir* mostly around the events of the Mexican Revolution, Josefina Niggli chose to present a postrevolutionary portrayal of society in her first novel, *Mexican Village*. In this depiction, Niggli made sure that different characters coming from different class backgrounds were represented, from the town leaders to the working class. In *Mexican Village*, such class distinction also reflects the racial divide where the indigenous population serves those who, in general, claim their Spanish origins. However, this racial and class correlation is challenged with the arrival of the main character, the *mestizo* Bob Webster. This character embodies many contradictory elements; therefore, he becomes the ideal character to represent the transnational border subject that Niggli was interested in. According to literary critic Yolanda Padilla "his is an identity spills across national borders, makes manifest political, cultural, and racial histories that have constituted the border region, and reveals the mutually shaping relationship between the border and the nation" (56). When Bob arrives to town as the quarry master, his place

within the community parallels that of the rulers of the valley: the little doctor; Don Nacho, “alcalde primero” of Hidalgo; Don Rosalfo, who owns extensive orange groves; and Father Zacaya. However, his behavior as the quarry master differs from the men who came before him. Consequently, his personal performance of his class position becomes foreign for the community. Once he has managed to gain his workers’ trust and has made them accept him, to some extent, his efforts to modify his predecessor’s work and habits bring back the natives’ skepticism towards him and he is made to feel as an outsider again. In this case, it is not so much his bearing towards and among the quarry community that makes him a stranger, but his social position and the freedom that comes from it that provokes it.

Later on, when Bob’s status in the community is secured, new conflicts related to his hybrid identity spring. Various instances are related to the Castillo members who represent the most important family in Hidalgo and, therefore, they are the epitome of the Mexican elite’s obsession with purity of blood and the family name’s survival. When the heir, Joaquín Castillo, arrives to Hidalgo after having disappeared during the Revolution and thought to be dead, he fears that his privileged position is threatened by Bob’s popularity within the community and with the Castillo family, as well. Hence, he cannot help to show his contempt towards Bob for his Indian blood and to consider him less worthy because of it. His behavior represents the traditional racial system concomitant with the class system which has made Bob unable to develop a healthy hybrid identity. Ironically, it is Joaquín’s father, Don Saturnino, who plays an important role in securing Bob a place within the community of Hidalgo. By the end of the novel, Bob is about to find his place among the privileged class and he will do

so challenging the traditional preconception about who belongs to this status and how he should behave. The character of Bob and what he achieves question the privilege of certain races above others. Obviously, racial preferences result in specific public features, such as one's name and physical appearance. Bob personifies the layered border subject who struggles to come to terms with his hybrid identity. Such hybridism is the result of his mixed origins with his Indian mother and Anglo father. Throughout the novel, Bob goes from denial to acceptance; and, by the end of the novel, he embraces his hyphenated identity with the symbolic act of renaming himself and changing his father's Anglo name for her mother's Mexican one: Roberto Ortega Menendez. The rejection he suffered from his Anglo father and the difficulties of being regarded as a non-Anglo have defined him as a conflicted individual. Due to the troubles in placing Bob in the traditional dichotomy regarding race and class, he becomes a challenge for both communities, the Anglo-European and the Indian. As a consequence, he is considered an outsider both by himself and by the people around him. The daily negotiations in defining who he is and the constant battle between his feelings and what he is expected to be is what defines him as a border subject. This character, hence, personifies the border subject as a site of contest for bicultural or biracial people.

Bob's physical appearance is described as being a hybrid between Indian and Anglo features. Therefore, from this character's first moment in the novel, the reader learns about his mixed ancestry. Bob's looks are described as not standing out in one way or the other and, accordingly, he is regarded as an outlander the moment he sets foot in the Mexican town. The feeling of being an outsider is present in Bob Webster's new life on the Mexican side and he

himself accepts this feeling as being part of who he is. Although during most of his youth Bob associated this feeling to being partly Indian, once he arrives to Hidalgo he realizes that it is not only the Anglo and the Europeans who consider him an outsider, but that the Indians also do so. Another reason for Bob's identity struggle rises from his name. Having an Anglo name, but an undefined physical appearance which does not correspond to it causes him to feel like an impostor in his own body. This conflicting match between his name and his looks are at the base of his difficulty in coming to terms with who he is. Bob's inability to define himself according to the traditional identity axis becomes a major theme in *Mexican Village*. His mixed ancestry and lifestyle is problematic for those who believe identity to be one unmovable set of features and values. This character is the first to wonder and strive with such a confined system of identity structure when he attempts to describe himself. For this reason and bearing in mind the historical period and the geographical setting of the novel, this concern becomes the centre of dispute.

On the other hand, the perception of a reality divided along racial and class lines is what has allowed Alejandro Castillo's family to rule and maintain their privileged position. By presenting different perspectives related to the hybrid subject -the more radical embodied by Bob's father, the mild position of Alejandro Castillo and Father Zacaya's comprehensive one- Josefina Niggli succeeded in counteracting the diverse opinions arising from the topic of traditional racial and class systems. The importance of blood and racial perpetuation, however, is not defended only by the privileged sectors of society. Bob himself, ironically, provides a special meaning to the fact of sharing similar racial origins: "But these three Mexican young men gave him a feeling of

comradeship that grew not so much from a meeting of minds as from a relationship of blood” (Niggli 192). Such “nostalgia of the blood” is presented various times in the novel and, thus, it might seem that Niggli was especially interested in introducing this concept in order to discuss its importance. It is possible that she deliberately introduced this racist and elitist opinion that she witnesses among her colleagues and the privileged Anglo people in order to show its insensibility toward the forcefully discriminated and abused Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Throughout the novel, different characters back up the importance of blood-sameness to achieve a successful relationship with people of the same race. However, if blood is regarded as more important than upbringing and life experiences, then, it reduces people’s successes or failures to some innate feature that cannot be altered. This idea turns out problematic when it comes to defend Bob’s value as a transnational hybrid subject. By the end of the novel, Bob creates his own space in the community within his own terms.

I’ll change my name, he thought, back to Ortega. The valley will like that. They could never pronounce my Yanqui name. He put his palm against his face in the pale darkness as though he were meeting a new person, and merging into that person, and becoming that person. (Niggli 542)

This passage describes Bob’s willing encounter with himself for the first time. In it, Niggli brings the many superficial traditional marking aspects, such as name and race, and turns them into an improved possibility which the character of Bob is responsible. Bob decides to change his Anglo name and adopt his

mother's. Even when he finds out that he is actually a member of the Castillo family, Bob decides not to tell anyone about his true identity. For the first time in his life, he feels wholesome with himself as a mixed subject and he does not want to be part of the reality that the Castillo name represents. Bob clearly embraces his hybrid self which deems racial markers, as darkness and fairness, irrelevant and even incomprehensible for him. His mixed behavior and feelings are at rest and he finally becomes part of the community. He becomes, in a way, the bridge between the opposite classes within society. Bob is the border subject in whom the *inditos* trust and, at the same time, he is respected by the rulers of the village who represent the moral power.

As much as these early *fronterizas* challenged the traditional class system they belonged to but felt uneasy in, González, Villegas de Magnón and Niggli's works are extraordinary in their denunciation of the traditional gender structure. The class privileges that current Chicanas have found unsolvable in order to include these authors among their predecessors have, unfortunately, convinced them to disregard their work. However, thanks to the recovery work of some Chicana/o scholars, this silence has been abandoned and their serious study has proved that these women did question the fairness of class division despite their being part of the privileged class. Nevertheless, their overt gender transgressions clearly precede current Chicanas.

Throughout *Caballero*, the reader encounters many examples of the restraining force of the traditional gender system. What is more, gender division within the *tejano* community proves to be a stronger restricting border than that of class. In fact, it is the injustices brought along its lines that ultimately provoke the disintegration of Don Santiago's family. The merit of the authors lied not just

in presenting an alternative perspective of the historical and social context, but also in gathering a set of characters that by questioning these internal bordered hierarchies evolve, up to some extent, through the story. Such challenging nature is found especially among the female characters of the novel. It appears that María de los Ángeles' and Susanita's only way out of their father's rule is that of marriage. In María de los Ángeles' case her wish to become a nun is crushed by her father, and she is ordered to socialize and party in the city's dances so a suitable man can ask for her and get married. From the opposite position, Susanita- Don Santiago's favorite daughter- enjoys falling in love and being admired. In the end, both of them end up marrying Anglo settlers and being sent away from the *hacienda* by their father. María de los Ángeles marries Red McLane, an Anglo politician who has learned the Mexican ways, and finds in Ángela his way into the Mexican community: "You want to marry a Mexican girl from the higher class because it'll be to your advantage to get the Mexicans on your side. This girl has a vulnerable spot and you work on it" (González and Raleigh 213). According to literary critic José Limón, the union of Angela de Mendoza y Soría and Red McLane represents the symbolic center of the narrative, arguing that this pragmatic alliance best represents the terms of national consolidation between Anglos and Texan Mexicans during the 1930s and 1940s. However, Susanita's marriage to lieutenant Robert Davis Warrenner is more of a romantic and idyllic kind. Susanita is described as the ideal example of the Mexican elite. However, the authors of the novel turn her from this role to that of the heroine that breaks with all conventions. Although this character does not show much psychological depth, still, by the end of the novel, she challenges everything she has been taught and turns into a desiring

subject that takes action in order to secure her loved ones, be it her husband to be or her brother Álvaro. By doing this, she acknowledges a new reality opening in front of her and enjoys the gender transgression: “As if the love-struck, weeping, frightened girl was still in the patio spilling tears on a wedding dress, and a woman who looked like her was riding in a world that, also, was a new and different one” (González and Raleigh 263). Susanita’s behavior does not only shock and surprise herself, but even her servants cannot help but fear the world where she does not behave the way she should according to tradition. The weight of this tradition takes a toll when the servants feel uneasy about a more equal relationship among individuals. Such statement clearly responds to the cowboy’s worries about changes. Facing a reality where the long ruling establishment ceases to be viable is unnerving and threatening to those who wish no changes. In the *vaquero*’s mind, Susanita’s transgression parallels the drastic changes taking place in the society as a whole. Apart from Ángela and Susanita, the character of Inez, another privileged young woman, is worth mentioning. Inez does not belong to the García and Soria family, but she is a young good-looking lady who is part of the Mexican elite, as well. In the novel, she is introduced as one of Susanita’s friends in Matamoros. It is through the character of Inez that the authors, once again, highlight the restrictions that the Mexican traditional ways brought to women. Ladies must marry among equals to perpetuate the *status quo* and to do so they must place the well-being of the community above their own. Marriage must be conceived not as a personal choice, but as a step to achieve the common good. However, it is not only what the ladies do, but what their nature is like that is continually tested. A woman must not only act in favor of the patriarchal system, but must behave and be as

men wish. Showing any sign of character trait is looked upon and considered a problem that needs solving.

Moreover, there is the character of Doña María Petronilla, Don Santiago's wife. When Don Santiago bursts in rage, it is his wife who suffers the most knowing that it is a husband's right, by tradition, to let off steam in the way he pleases. Being his wife means that she, the supportive gender will be the one paying it; and although she fears this abuse she does not question it.

What little color her face held drained away. Not at the news, for that was too vague a thing to have meaning to her, but at the new glitter in her husband's eyes. When Santiago's eyes looked like two discs taken from the polished jet necklace which Doña Dolores treasured, it boded evil for all of them. Particularly for her, his wife, buffer of his wrath. (González and Raleigh 9-10)

By the end of the novel, however, even Doña María Petronilla, the submissive and frightened wife of the master, collects the courage to face her husband and contradict him. However, it is also true that such outburst responds to Doña María Petronilla's feelings as a mother and not so much to the restrictions set upon her as a woman. Therefore, although the mere fact that she contradicts her husband is something worth mentioning, she is behaving just the way a mother should according to the traditional patriarchal system.

The analysis of gender transgressions in *Caballero* would not be complete without mentioning two more characters. The first character, Doña Dolores is Don Santiago's sister, a widow who lives with the family in the *hacienda*. Through her character the authors show that it is not only the youth that fight against tradition, but a middle-aged lady that speaks her mind also

will. This woman's character and worldview sets her apart from every other female character in the novel in that she perceives herself as equal to the men.

Command all you wish, I shall not obey. I do not cringe before you as your wife does, I shall not blindly do your wish as does Angela, I shall refuse the abuse you heap upon Luis Gonzaga. I am a Mendoza and a Soría also and worthy of the name if you are not, and though a woman, I know my duty! (González and Raleigh 26)

Nevertheless, although her gender transgression is remarkable, her class consciousness might result problematic. Doña Dolores claims her place in the world by virtue of her being born into a family that maintains its favorable position thanks to a traditional class hierarchy. Such privileged position is perpetuated by the very system she so much detests when constrained by its restricted values towards women. Therefore, Doña Dolores' questioning of the old system is encouraged by her privileged class status. On the other hand, the character of Luis Gonzaga does not fulfill his father's idea of what a man should be like: "[h]e (Don Santiago) frowned again when slim, good-looking Luis Gonzaga walked quickly past him and took a place beside Susanita [...] Painting pictures like a woman, and he a Mendoza y Soría! An artist -insult to a father's manhood!" (González and Raleigh 6). Luis Gonzaga personifies the artistic and sensitive male character, and his challenge of the old system is as important, if not greater, than that of the women in *Caballero*. This character is presented as an outcast, never at home, least of all among his own male relatives. However, the arrival of the new system in the hands of those whom he has been taught to regard as barbarians, considers his artistic character more

positively than his own family. Luis Gonzaga is protected by his sisters and he confides in them, but it is not until he meets Devlin and other Anglos that he feels he can be his real self.

For a moment-a happy, expanding moment-he had had a feeling that he belonged. That he would not have been considered peculiar and effeminate, as his family and those his age saw him to be, he felt certain. Nor would he have been scorned for his artistry, as others scorned him. (González and Raleigh 104)

Both in the introduction and epilogue of the novel published in 1996, scholars José Limón and María Eugenia Coterá agree in the homoerotic coupling of Luis Gonzaga with the character of Devlin. According to them, Luis Gonzaga's transgression is not related just with gender traditions but also towards the heteronormative position of traditional Mexican culture. In this sense, this character does not only represent an alternative to gender understanding but he also becomes an alternative male hero that is in deep contrast with the more traditional and accepted *corrido* hero of Américo Paredes. Therefore, González and Eimer did not only pay attention to the faults on the base of such idealized and romanticized hero, but they, to some extent, show their disagreement by presenting Luis Gonzaga as a more appropriate male alternative for the new era. Nevertheless, even without going as far as to consider their relationship queer, Luis Gonzaga's final attitude towards his father and what he represents could be considered as one of the most important border crossings in the novel. This character is the only one that goes beyond gender restrictions and leaves his community to go as far as New York and Baltimore. Although, Susanita and Ángela break with their father and, to some extent, with the old system he

represents, they jump from one male-ruled position to another one: marrying an Anglo. They break up their gender restrictions in their decision to choose their own husband, not for the common-good but out of love in Susanita's case, and admiration in Angela's. However, it is Luis Gonzaga who completely ends with traditional gender expectations by becoming an artist and by leaving his community for foreign places where he must prove himself as an artist and also as an equal American among the Anglos.

As Villegas de Magnón's *memoir* shows, the severity of the traditional class system was altered by the extraordinary circumstances of the war, and, thus, gender relations were temporarily modified, too. The Mexican Revolution's urgent need of as many sympathizers as possible to achieve their political goal loosened the rigid gender system that perpetuated the inactivity of the female population. Villegas de Magnón took advantage of these exceptional circumstances and resolved to live and lead other women into an active and meaningful life that would have been unthinkable in peaceful times. Another important characteristic for such transitory freedom was the very geographical space that was affected by the Revolution. The dynamism of the border area created a space that was not located in either North America or Mexico. Villegas de Magnón and later Chicana narratives witness this area's idiosyncrasy, which provokes alternative value systems. This possibility would be improbable in a more hegemonic space. There are many real women mentioned in *The Rebel*, but the present work will focus only on four of them: Leonor Villegas de Magnón herself, María de Jesús González, and Trinidad and Evita Flores Blanco.

Through her *memoir*, Villegas de Magñón directly questions the traditional duties of a mother who must stay with her children and look after them. She explains how she left her children behind to actively partake in the Revolution. Behaving this way, she did not only prioritize her willingness to become a political subject over her duties as a mother, but she did it without discussing it with her husband:

With no opportunity but to go forward, the Rebel had left her three children with her brother and his wife. With an indefinite idea of her husband's attitude towards the Revolution, she had set out on an unknown expedition. [...] Behind them would be soon an abyss which would separate them from the past, for those they loved, from their inheritance. They did not speak of home, nor the ones left behind, but kept their eyes on time. (Villegas de Magñón 106)

Taking decisions that would greatly affect the well-being of her children without her husband's consent, places Villegas de Magñón in opposition to her traditional upbringing. From this passage, the reader learns that Leonor's husband was in Mexico and had been long enough for her not to know his political sympathies. The fact that the husband was not at home and had no close relationship with his wife and children was probably an ordinary reality at the time, but for the wife to follow her political interests regardless of her husband's opinion is a clear breach in the gender relations of the society of early 20th century. Moreover, working as a nurse and taking care of the injured soldiers as a member of the White Cross was a role that was considered womanly. Villegas de Magñón, however, also became interested in political journalism and she acted upon it by writing different articles. Passionate as she

was about Francisco I. Madero's politics, she constantly stated her opinion in the frontier newspapers. Pronouncing one's political opinion in such a public way shows a clear provocation to the traditional gender relations of her time. She did not only have an opinion in politics, a matter which was considered to be men's, but she expressed them a way contrary to the advisory female caution; that is, publicly in the newspapers. She dared to become a public voice and she signed with her name for everyone to know. Such audacity resulted in the confiscation of many properties and businesses owned by her father, but, even then, Villegas de Magnón enjoyed his support. Through this alternative press, she became the voice of those women who had been silenced by tradition and were actively participating in the Revolution.

In her *memoir*, Villegas de Magnón not only represents the women's presence in history, but she is given the honor of writing Venustiano Carranza's life by the general himself. This responsibility was extremely important as it showed the general's trust on Villegas de Magnón and on her ability to recount history, a subject that has traditionally been allocated to male authors. This fact proves her proximity to one of the leaders of the Revolution and Carranza's willingness to make her the voice of such an important historical moment. This event shows, once again, the extraordinary circumstances that the Revolution brought to women. Thus, Villegas de Magnón's activities went far beyond tending to the sick. As stated in her *memoir*, she took advantage of her role as a nurse and political reporter and she became, in some instances, some sort of a strategy designer. Such role certifies the rebel's knowledge and tight implication in the very core of the war, that is, the military section of the soldiers.

María de Jesús González is another female character who appears in Villegas de Magnón's *memoir* and who also exemplifies the alternative gender roles assigned to women during the Revolution. María de Jesús González was a teacher from Monterrey and a telegraph operator who joined the cause of the Revolution. She got a position as a teacher at the Laredo Seminary, but due to her mother's illness she was forced to give up her job and to return home where she opened a school, instead. When the Revolution started, she volunteered and became part of Villegas de Magnón's organization, the White Cross. However, this young woman preferred to be active in the cavalry and that is what she pursued. When the time to meet General Carranza comes her willingness is not enough and her gender becomes too big of an obstacle to enlist the cavalry. Being a resourceful girl and all, as Villegas de Magnón describes her to be, she decides to accommodate her appearance to what is more appropriate for the traditional standards:

Then I thought that I could easily pass for my brother, dressed in soldier's clothes. [...] The barber remarked how beautiful my hair was. "Well, just cut it off," I told him, "and lay them in this box. Give me a man's haircut." (Villegas de Magnón 109)

This passage clearly shows that some aspects connected to gender relations were harder to change than others and having women fight in the war was still too provoking. Under these circumstances, women would alter their appearance to look like men and to be allowed to join the cavalry. María de Jesús did so and turned out to be an important asset for the success of the First Chief. However, she was not the only one and Villegas de Magnón mentions other volunteers

who would cross-dress so they could trick the traditional gender tradition and fight along with the men. Although disguising as a man and joining the cavalry is described in an amusing way by María Jesús, Villegas de Magnón does not do it only for entertainment purposes. She also includes passages so that the life-threatening dangers this woman suffered should not be overlooked. Later on, however, the dramatic instance is lightened by the account in which María de Jesús describes her escape. Once again, it is through cross-dressing that she manages to escape, but in this case it is looking like a woman and performing in a traditional way- a woman who comforts and brings food to her family in prison- that turns her into an unsuspecting subject.

The area of the Borderlands becomes one of the main characters in Villegas de Magnón's *memoir* as a result of its ability to represent in geographical terms the borderless reality that Villegas de Magnón and her comrades dreamt of. In other words, the physical crossing of bridges and of the political border resembles the metaphorical crossing of identity borders. During the Revolution, the border space became a binational area where volunteers overcame the rigidity of traditional systems. In María de Jesús González's case, her constant crossing of national borders correlates her trespassing the traditional gender system.

The Flores Blanco sisters, Trinidad and Evita, are yet another example of the significance of border women during the Revolution. These women were born in Monclova, Mexico, close to the border. At a very young age, Trinidad learned to decipher messages and she became in charge of the telegraph office of her town when their mother died at a very young age. While Trinidad worked, she sent her younger sister Evita to San Antonio to school. These women's lives

stands for the borderless perception defended by border subjects who carried out their lives, work or studies on both sides of the border. When the Revolution started, the Flores Blanco sisters volunteered for the cause by working on different telegraph offices. Their work for the Revolution involved keeping secret communication hidden, sending the Revolutionists messages for free, and intercepting all the messages to or from the surrounding areas. All in all, these women contributed a great deal to the Revolution carrying through a very active and vital role that was far from the more domestic chores women were expected to perform. The peculiar conditions of the war and the area of the borderland, where the United States and Mexico met, allowed unordinary breaches for women. It is important to acknowledge that these women had the power of information, so it was up to them as followers of Francisco I. Madero and, later, Venustiano Carranza to silence it or pass it on. Contrary to Villegas de Magnón's public voice spread through the political articles for the alternative press, Trinidad and Eva Blanco had the power of the secret voice of the political messages from the telegraph offices in their hands. Thus, all three women were extraordinarily granted the power of the voice which had been traditionally denied to women. It is unfortunate to learn that when the Revolution ended this power was taken back from women. The forceful reestablishment of the traditional gender relations that came after the Revolution made sure that women's enormous contribution to the war was either silenced or reduced to folkloric anecdotes. It cannot be forgotten that it was the official denial of publishing centers that later prevented Leonor Villegas de Magnón from publishing her personal report of the Mexican Revolution as a *memoir*.

In the postrevolutionary contexts of *Mexican Village*, Josefina Niggli presents an array of characters that fulfilled her perception of border reality. In order to study Niggli's challenge to gender traditions and preconceptions, I have chosen the character of María who, in a similar way to Bob's, is alienated by her community due to the contentions she presents to the traditional identity establishment. María is presented as the symbol of the excluded and as a warning for those who are tempted to break through the traditional value system. It is logical to infer that Josefina Niggli conceived such a female character in order to fulfill her purpose of having her Anglo and Mexican American audience question their prejudices and challenge their beliefs about gender relations. Similar to Bob's character, María's appearance is cause of ambivalent reactions from different members of Hidalgo. On the one hand, her exceptional beauty causes envy among most women in town who fear losing their husbands to her. However, María is indifferent towards her appearance's effects among her neighbors. Niggli presents María as a woman who is proud for her ability to survive despite the community's alienation, and not in the slightest concern with her looks. Such an attitude in a woman is certainly out of the ordinary compared to the other female characters. Unlike María, almost every other woman in Hidalgo is concerned about her appearance as it represents the most important means to secure a good marriage, and, thus, a decent life. María's beauty brings a lot of attention to this character and she is described as something extraordinary. In the novel, she becomes the love object the main male characters, Bob and Alejandro Castillo, share and will become, later in the novel, the secret that will unite them, too. The impression

María makes on Bob is a deep one and he describes her as the personification of the dream woman.

There's a *Sleeping Venus* by Giorgione in the art gallery at Dresden. When I first saw it, I fell in love with it. The delicate flesh tones, the sensual, lovely body, the exquisite pure oval face. But I always thought it was just a dream—a perfection of the occidental Venus, until I saw María. But as far as I'm concerned, María is that picture brought to life. (Niggli 383)

María's beauty sets her apart from society, but what is more interesting is Bob's description of her as being pure and delicate. Whenever she is referred to by any other person in the valley, mostly women, she is described as being a wench, a river girl who has no moral values whatsoever and makes her living by sleeping with men. In other words, from what the reader learns, her independent and self-sufficient spirit does not seem to fit with such a delicate portrait. However, it is important to recollect that Niggli had a very specific Anglo audience in her mind and that the positive characters she included in her work had to be recognizable and easy to relate to by this specific audience in order to achieve her goal. In other words, Niggli created María with features that an Anglo American audience would sympathize with: golden and independent. Similar to the character of Bob, María is also representative of a hybrid subject not only because of her attitude and behavior, but because of her looks.

In addition, Niggli, once again, makes the name or, in this case, the lack of it an intriguing issue. María is described as being born in *los Gallineros*, the poorest part of the village, and having no name: "Other children are born there without names. But their mothers marry at last and these children grow up with

the others. My mother killed herself” (Niggli 447). In this passage, the reader learns not only about the reason for María not to have a name, but also about her tragic origins. As a consequence of her father never taking his responsibility for the baby and her mother never marrying, María is left without a last name. Bearing in mind the importance that family names had in traditional societies, her life is already doomed. Moreover, having her mother commit suicide becomes the definitive reason that leaves María in the most unfortunate and vulnerable position. Hence, her ground as an outsider is decided from her childhood by reasons that have little to do with her own acts as an individual. However, being an outcast all her life has forced María into becoming a self-sufficient, independent woman. Her independent behavior and outcast status, so different from what was expected from a traditional Mexican girl, turns out to be the key for her involvement with the most powerful family in Hidalgo, the Castillo family:

“She saved my life during the Great Revolution. The Family Castillo does not forget its debts” and then to the gravediggers, “Bury her on Castillo land, next to Alejandro.” “But, Don Saturnino,” protested Don Timotéo, “that will cause a great scandal!” The man on crutches spoke coldly. “And since when has this valley questioned the actions of the house Castillo?” (Niggli 449)

This excerpt hides the tragic love story involving Alejandro Castillo and María. The reader learns that this unusual pair became friends in their childhood by sheer accident. Since then, always in secret, Alejandro and María have shared their lives even through the Great Revolution where María saves Don Saturnino’s life. Such brave act is not forgotten by the oldest member in the

Castillo family, but is not until the end, when it is too late for both lovers, that Don Saturnino discovers the true nature of Alejandro and María's relationship. In the following passage, by letting María be buried together with Alejandro confirms the old man's remorse for the pain caused by the old value system. This story clearly shows the author's aim of questioning and proving the damaging effects of a narrow value system that although related to Mexican people, could be expanded to the Anglo American people, as well. That is, Niggli's attempt to bridge the gap between both cultures is made into words and stories that different audiences could understand and, hopefully, reflect on:

It was the fault of their inheritance. Alejandro came from the carefully tended pure blood and the proud challenge of a handful of conquerors who had subdued an empire with cruelty and in the fierce knowledge that they were the chosen warriors of God. María, this full-bosomed, long-limbed woman, was as much a part of the earth as though she had grown from it. (Niggli 384-5)

The language used in this passage is interesting in the sense that it recalls the language so often used by conquerors and adventurers when referring to land and women. The land and María are perceived as one and Alejandro symbolizes the result of that social system, which empowered a few at the expenses of the rest. The author, hence, frames Alejandro and María's relation in the same tradition. However, Niggli anticipates the fatal end by describing both characters as victims. Although the reader can easily perceive María as a victim of her circumstances and period, but it is harder to feel the same way towards the privileged Alejandro. The author, nevertheless, blames the narrow minded and cruel education received by the privileged class. By doing so,

Niggli's educational purpose found its place among her audience, because she did not blame the individual –no matter how unfair s/he might be- but the education and society in general. This certainly was a wise manner of dealing with the delicate job of assigning fault in the source of the antagonistic relations between the Anglo and Mexican communities.

By describing María as part of nature, it could be argued that the author is presenting an individual who does not follow the dictates of her society and has no misled values, but her own natural instinct. Moreover, María's actions and life style, while uncivilized –having lived out of the community all her life- are close to nature and, thus, cannot be blamed. It is also interesting to see the references to the river and María being called a witch and a wench. Such descriptions bring this character –without taking her fair appearance into account- close to the well-known Latin-American myth of *La Llorona*. It must be remembered that one of Niggli's purposes was to prove the richness of Mexican culture to an Anglo audience, who for the most trusted their knowledge about Mexicans in prejudices and picturesque stereotypes. Consequently, with a didactic purpose always in mind, Niggli included in her works as much folk elements as she could.

Chela, the major's daughter, is another female character worth studying. She is described as being homely and, throughout the novel, the other characters comment on Don Nacho's sorrow in Chela's lack of interest in men. she gets on very well with the women in town and she even accepts the fact that young women walk beside her in order to make their beauty more obvious by comparison. Men also like Chela and respect her, but she does not seem to be taken into account as a woman to marry with. Therefore, it is interesting to

see how both María and Chela are alienated in their communities although for different reasons. On the one hand, María lives in the outskirts of town, literary and metaphorically, thus, has no friends to rely on. On the other hand, Chela lives at the centre of town, and is well regarded by her neighbors. However, she is isolated in the sense that her friends treat her well, but without really knowing or intimating with her. Therefore, both women are unable to openly express who they are. María and Chela are victims of their appearance and unconventional character in their relative isolation. Lacking beauty and consequently having her worth “diminished” as a woman makes Chela acquainted with the problematic nature of the values that rule the valley.

Niggli’s interest and sympathy for these two female outsiders is clear when both of them are granted the favor of the two most desirable suitors in the novel. María and Chela, each of them in their own way, stand out in such a challenging manner to tradition that both Castillo sons cannot help but, to some extent, rebel against the old system and seek these non-traditional type of woman. María represents a self-sufficient independent woman, and Chela lacks the beauty and desire to marriage that women were expected to have. In this manner, these two female characters, by being alienated by the values of society, become close to each other:

Then, for the first time, a village woman smiled at her with sympathy and understanding. Instinctively María’s hand went out; Chela’s strong fingers enclosed it. They said nothing there was nothing to say. Then María returned to her house, but with a new softness in her for the town she had always hated. (Niggli 440-1)

In this excerpt at the end of the novel, there comes an instance when María and Chela achieve such a deep understanding of each other that, to a certain extent, they part from this encounter with a sense of belonging and able to come to terms with their isolated position within the community. Similar to what happened to Bob, these women appear to find themselves and come to terms with their non-traditional position within their society. However, unlike Bob Webster's solitary revelation, María and Chela meet themselves through the other. Hence, despite the fact that each woman represents the opposite of the other in relation to their social location, Niggli brings them together through a brief, but deeply emotional, recognition in each other's eyes.

All in all, recovering the official narrative of the West in search of alternative voices that were silenced is necessary. In this case, such recovery has been possible thanks to Jovita González and Eve Raleigh's novel, *Caballero*; Leonor de Villegas memoir *The Rebel*; and to Josefina Niggli's novel in short stories *Mexican Village*. In *Caballero* the authors not only described the political changes undergone by the people living in the Southwest after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, but they proved that setting such border provoked a new understanding of the individuals and their community. Villegas de Magnón's memoir describes women's active participation in the Mexican Revolution, which was essential in defining life in the U.S.-Mexico borderland. Finally, through her novel, Niggli presented a borderless space that allowed the author to engender and to develop the quintessential border subject.

Paradoxically, this same political division will become more present and repressive in later Chicana writings. Besides, the topics present throughout

González, Villegas de Magnón and Niggli's works, such as the U.S.-Mexico borderland, the powerful female characters and the use of the everyday life to uncover the confining values maintained for tradition's and morality's sake, proves it necessary to include these early *fronterizas* in the study of Chicana border literature. These border writers prove the existence of educated women who, having experienced life at the border, made their goal to leave written witness of the diversity and dynamics of the Borderland beyond traditional understandings of nation, class and genre identities. They worked with a political purpose in mind, which was to record border reality from a transnational perspective by creating a literary space where the official record of the U.S.-Mexican borderland was rewritten.

Chapter 3. Surviving the Border, Inhabiting the Borderlands.

I would prefer to see border identities as inscribed identities
—that is, written or engraved, enrolled as on an official list.
Another definition of “inscribed” would be to draw or delineate
(one figure) within another figure so that the inner lies in the
boundary of the outer at as many points as possible.

(Tey Diana Rebolledo in *The Chronicles of Pancho Villa and Other Guerrillas*)

As a result of the violent history between Mexico and the United States, Mexican Americans living in the U.S. have had difficulties to define themselves in terms of their own history and culture. The U.S. defined and promoted a self-interested historical narrative, which, in turn, relegated the Mexican Americans to poor socio-economic positions. The purpose of the U.S. dominant discourse, hence, was to secure an unequal hierarchy which placed the Anglo citizens in an advantaged position in relation to the communities of color. Consequently, as Chicana feminist Adaljiza Sosa Riddell denounced “Chicanos [were] induced to define and describe their very being and existence in terms of external constraints and conditions imposed upon them” (93). In other words, the United States’ long history of colonization and conquest succeeded in isolating the Mexican American community, and in supporting a detrimental image that negatively affected Mexican Americans’ cultural tradition. The diffusion of the dominant U.S. culture, as well, determined a discouraging self-image among the Mexican Americans. The devastating effects of a discriminatory culture are

described in historical terms by the following excerpt from Chicana activist Anna NietoGomez:

Because culture is a remnant which mirrors people's accumulative economic adaptations in history, the social-psychological roles of Mexican men and women are the products of the economic and class conditions of 300 years of oppression. ("La Chicana" 50)

As explained by NietoGomez, then, confining Mexican Americans into an unprivileged socioeconomic position perpetuated social inequalities, and allowed a process of a selective cultural homogenization where any discrepancies from the Anglo dominant culture were suppressed. In this regard, Chicana critic Rosaura Sánchez declares that living in a culture is completely different from being exploited and oppressed by it. The scholar explains the difficulty of overcoming cultural borders that encompass social, economic, and ideological axes, and which directly affect the citizens beyond and above the geographical and political borders that set nations apart. Although Mexican Americans were immersed in the U.S. culture and, hence, bombarded by it, yet the cultural boundaries spread by the media and the U.S. educational system marginalized them. Hence, Mexican Americans found themselves with the impossible task of receiving and being expected to participate in a culture that was based on the very erasure of all non-Anglo influence.

In the 1960s, a number of factors put a halt to the long history of oppression regarding communities of color in the United States, including the Mexican American. On the one hand, the poor socioeconomic and political

conditions endured by individuals of Mexican origin, and the political inspiration brought by the militancy within the Black movement, on the other hand, prompted together great numbers of Mexican Americans with the purpose of demanding their rights as U.S. citizens. This challenging spirit focused on the awakening of their cultural heritage as a means to encourage a united and proud Mexican American community.

Although *Mexicanos* and Mexican Americans were politically active previous to the 1960s, it is true that, at this point in history, their actions followed a politically defined program in which not only class and economic abuses were denounced, but cultural empowerment also became central. Furthermore, *El Movimiento* represented a “cultural nationalism” (NietoGomez, “Sexism” 99) after which active Mexican Americans renamed themselves with the politically conscious term of “Chicana/o.” As scholars Beatriz M. Pesquera and Adela de la Torre explain, the common use of the terms Chicana and Chicano were widely appropriated in the late 1960s during *El Movimiento*, and sided the Chicana/os with African American, feminists and anti-Vietnam activists in their shared goal to challenge the U.S. hegemony. In the case of the Chicana/o movement, militants became political agents who claimed their right as first class citizens and denounced the long history of oppression suffered as non-Anglo people. The name of *La Raza* was also promoted by Chicana/os to celebrate an alliance among individuals of Mexican, South American and Central American traditions.

In this manner, the political activism undertaken by *El Movimiento* included the recovery of a culture and history, which would challenge the U.S. hegemony. Chicana/os believed that, by becoming a cultural community and

being able, as a unified group, to question the *status quo*, they would succeed in coming to terms with their past. This would, in turn, help them to define themselves in a more rewarding way. Claiming their own history and culture provided the Chicana/os a sense of pride and belonging. Chicana/os from *El Movimiento*, thus, marched and worked to recover their silenced and misrepresented past, and denounced the abuses suffered by their people through different periods of the American history.

Echoing Chicana feminist Anna NietoGomez, however, “[i]n the case of Chicano nationalism racism is identified as the issue and cause of oppression. The economic system of capitalism is not always addressed as the focus of change” (“Sexism” 99). In other words, Chicana/os denounced that racism was engrained in the capitalist ideology of the U.S. and, so, supremacy was defined in racial and cultural terms where whiteness exceeded. The importance of an uneven economic system settled by capitalism, however, must be studied in order to examine the origin of the multiple oppressions forced upon the Mexican Americans in the U.S. history. Locating the varied sources of persecution would help Chicana/os to challenge them and to successfully dismantle them. According to NietoGomez, the U.S. class system, like racism, was based on skin color and, hence, the non-Anglo population was restricted to lower paid jobs. Class division aligned with racism in perpetuating an unprivileged colored class. The veracity of this statement is asserted by Sonia A. López when she concluded that throughout the 1960s when *El Movimiento*, along with other cultural nationalism, was at its most powerful moment, Chicana/os “continued to provide the main source of cheap labor in the Southwest” (101).

Despite the great changes brought by the various activist movements during the 1960s, critic Alma M. García considered that these movements' repercussion turned to be weaker than what it could have been due to the limited and, at times, essentialist interpretations of the social maladies of the time. This shortsighted understanding restrained and impoverished the movements' repercussion on the politics of the time. As García explains, each community demanded their own rights and denounced the oppression of colonization and slavery. Yet, activism was performed by these communities separately according to specific gender, ethnic, class, and cultural distinctiveness instead of as a heterogeneous group, which shared their oppressed status within the U.S. society. As a result, the critic believes that their impact in challenging the political and social conditions of the time was weaker to what it might have been had all the politically active U.S. citizens coordinated as a block (Black militants, Chicana/os, anti-Vietnam War activists and women's right representatives).

In the case of *El Movimiento*, the homogeneity of the group was considered necessary in order to endure and survive as a strong unity. Such requirement was not only deceiving, but problematic as well, bearing in mind the fact that when people with varied experiences meet it is forceful to foresee a range of opinions and values. The imperative of a homogeneous group implied a classification of "legitimate" values versus "illegitimate" ones. This hierarchy prompted the silencing of certain voices, which, in itself, paralleled the very repression *El Movimiento* denounced. In the Chicana/os' case, specific gender roles became the central issue when including or excluding certain individuals from the community. One of the most critical Chicana activists, Anna

NietoGomez, stated that “[s]exism is part of the capitalist ideology which advocates male supremacist values” (“Sexism” 97). Hence, she believed that when it came to Chicanas, *El Movimiento* perpetuated the patriarchal system at the root of capitalism, which was what the Movement was fighting against. In this case, it was not whiteness that was privileged, but maleness, and some Chicana/os did not see fault in such prejudicial statement.

Following this line of thinking, scholars Elizabeth Martínez and Ed McCaughan explain that “[w]hat makes *machismo* seem part of a stereotype is viewing it as strictly a cultural phenomenon, some kind of ‘weird’ latin characteristic, rather than as a form of male supremacist ideology serving capital accumulation” (52). Promoting unequal relations in the name of culture or race overlooked the role of economic and political interests behind the concept of *machismo*. That is, this belief, somehow, displaced the “blame” and obscured the real source of oppression. It is in this line, then, that these scholars claimed that the benefit of maintaining *machismo* in the U.S. capitalist society answered to the interests to lessen the benefits of the domestic work force secured by Chicanas/Mexicanas, to maintain the labor competition between both genders, and to redirect violence. Hence, although Chicana/os during *El Movimiento* rebelled against the capitalist idea of whiteness being superior, they did not struggle with the capitalist idea that male was above female and, thus, women became dependent beings. What is more, as NietoGomez points out, some Chicanos seemed to forget or were ready to ignore the fact that they, as men, were also perceived by the white power as “either effeminate, or a ‘Macho,’ overcompensating because of his powers position in his society” (“Sexism” 98). As a consequence, racist sexism

implanted by capitalism victimized both the Chicana and the Chicano in similar terms.

However, within the Chicana/o community some members failed to notice that a similar dismissive behavior was taking place among their comrades. As feminist Sosa Riddell critically stated: “[t]hese defensive Chicanos are not too different from the Mexican Americans who, in the early days of the newly articulated *Movimiento* defended the status quo situation” (93). According to her, the reason behind this previous complacent attitude was the result of two realities. On the one hand, the relatively privileged status within the U.S. society gained by a few Mexican Americans might have been the reason not to back up *El Movimiento*. On the other hand, the internalization of the racist discourses of the time, which along with Anglo social scientists, stated that there was something inherently wrong with Mexican culture, and that such trait was the cause of their marginalized and poor situation in the U.S. This last statement appeared to be a desperate attempt to deceive oneself into believing in a non-racist U.S. and the urge to impersonate the proof of it. Therefore, I conclude that Chicanos of *El Movimiento* chose to ignore the sexist discrimination they were victims of in order to focus on the more physical racism. This choice of the less evil might appear necessary in order to legitimize a nationalist discourse that would secure Chicanos’ privileged position within the community. Unfortunately, some Chicana/os reinforced this sexist hierarchy by regarding male and female roles as a cultural trait and “the Raza (came) to accept this as a great *tradition*” (Longeaux Vasquez 110). As a direct result of the sexism implemented and promoted during the first years of *El Movimiento*,

some Chicana/os, who felt cheated by the Movement, began to meet separately and to discuss alternative issues relevant to their needs.

During the first years of *El Movimiento*, Chicanas asserted their claims along with Chicanos. However, there came a time when they started to publicly put into question the gender roles imposed on them as women within a political movement. Feminist scholar Beatriz M. Pesquera explains that although there was an interconnection between women's employment and men's participation in the household chores, this labor was still divided in gender terms. Therefore, although the fact that women worked outside the domestic purview did provoke a higher participation of men in household chores, the distribution of such task remained unequal and unbalanced. Along this line, scholar Maylei Blackwell states that Chicanas did not "[found] themselves as women" (50), but their political activism and realization came directly from the everyday life experience they had with men. That is, their long subservient position as part of a traditional Mexican American cultural community made them aware of the stark discrepancies between their own experiences and the Ideal Chicana that the Movement created.

In the light of an evolving understanding of identity, feminist Angie Chabram-Dernersesian states that the Chicana identity was not a fixed construction that one might inherit and, hence, passively come to possess, but it was on the making. That is, Chicana identity was acquired and performed. This dynamic exercise paralleled the flexibility of the identity itself, which in Chabram-Dernersesian's opinion changed according to the subjects' position. In other words, she states that the very "axis, terms of discourse, and points of contention" (37) of the Chicana identity fluctuated in relation to the setting and,

hence, placed itself within the dialogue of history, society and culture. In a similar trend, scholar Gabriela Arredondo promotes the idea that Chicana feminism, as a dynamic identity, came into contact with different value system and, hence, was often considered suspicious by more static and essentialist understanding of identity formation. However, Arredondo defends the possibilities that such a dynamic conception brought to the Chicana identity a heterogenous nature that continually questioned its values in the constant exchange and relation with different subject positions and contexts. Therefore, without dismissing the differences within the very Chicana identification, she defends its affiliation with hybridity and change, which did not lessen its relevance.

Throughout the years between 1968 and 1971, Chicana feminism was not only rejected within the community, but it was perceived as a direct attack to the unity and success of the Movement. This ideological rejection did not come only from Chicanos, but some Chicanas, too, saw feminism as a threat to the Chicana/o community. Chicana feminists were regarded as traitors to the cause and they were also despised for aligning with Anglo feminists. What these Chicana feminists defended and denounced was that unlike the Chicanos, women within the Movement were victims of a “triple form of oppression: as members of an oppressed nationality, as workers, and as women” (Vidal 23). As Chicana feminist Elizabeth Martínez stated, no matter how hard a Chicana worked, she would always be looked upon by her own community as a face and a body. The worth of a Chicana, hence, was measured in relation to sexist attitudes and prejudices that defined her as a sexual being instead of as a political agent. She was not only ignored as a “fellow victim of oppression”

(Martínez, “La Chicana” 33), but another set of prejudices caused by sexism was forced upon her in the name of cultural tradition. Unfortunately, according to most Chicana/os, such sexism was no more than the result of the oppression suffered by them in the U.S. society, and, hence, not their fault but the system’s.

In relation to these differences, it is necessary to mention the First National Chicano Student Denver Conference held in 1969. This conference, which might be considered as one the Movement’s first meeting nationwide, was organized by Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales and it managed to gather a thousand participants. The relevance of this conference is worth explaining. On the one hand, it was as the result of hard work and discussions that the iconic *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was created here and, thus, the bases for *El Movimiento* as a nationalist cultural activism were established. Unfortunately, it was during the conference when the stark antagonism between members of the Movement became obvious. In a highly controversial statement, a delegate of the caucus stated that “[i]t was the consensus of the group that the Chicana woman does not want to be liberated” (NietoGomez, “La Femenista” 88). In feminist scholar Maylei Blackwell’s opinion, this declaration became only but part of the more internalized fear to be rendered a traitor to the Chicana/o cause. As the critic explains some women in the conference were so focused on proving their alliance to the cause and trying to prove that feminism was not “whitewashed or lesbian” (141) that the discussion was distanced from the self-interested heteropatriarchal origins of the conflict. However, Blackwell believes that it was as the result of the controversy that took place in the Denver conference that a more steady resolution to request the empowerment of Chicanas was pushed.

Despite the initial rejection from both Chicanos and some Chicanas, feminists kept working, rising consciousness and denouncing different matters. Among the topics that Chicana feminists were most interested in were the way in which education, religion, sexuality and tradition had been implanted as oppressive institutions that had mistreated them. By the end of May 1971, the first national conference of “Raza women” (Vidal 21) took place in Houston, Texas, organized by the YWCA (Young Women Committed to Action) where six hundred women gathered and discussed the above mentioned issues. What was most important about this conference, and according to Mirta Vidal, was that “the conference as a whole reflected a rising consciousness of the Chicana about her special oppression in this society” (21). However, at this conference, as well, problems and disagreements in relation to Chicanas’ issues within the Movement also showed the deep breach among the participants. This division was made most visible when a number of women walked out of the conference as a protest for their disagreement with some of the subjects raised at the meeting. In general terms, activist Anna NietoGomez classified the position of those who walked out and those who stayed as reflecting ideologies of “movimiento vs feminism.” On the other hand, among those who stayed there were “feminists vs. loyalists” (90). Loyalists did not consider sexism as a legitimate issue in the Movement’s struggle against racism. Linked with this opinion then, the notion of the traditional family as defended by Chicanos during *El Movimiento* needed no change. On the contrary, feminists claim that the traditional family perpetuated unequal roles for men and women that needed to be questioned and overcome in order to improve Chicanas’ situation.

There is still a continuous effort on the part of Chicanas to maintain their identity and have people recognize how feminine issues have different and important facets to them when dealt with within the context of minority women. (NietoGomez, "La Femenista" 90)

In NietoGomez's words, the battle between loyalists and feminists came as a direct result of the lack of information regarding Anglo and Chicana feminist movements in terms of the similarities and disparities between both groups. Besides, she denounced the sexist racism behind the notion of depicting Chicana feminists as unable to create change on their own without imitating white feminists. NietoGomez defended that what Chicana feminists attempted to was to improve the relation between both genders by overcoming sexism, and, as a consequence, their activism would unite the Movement even further. In her opinion, Chicana feminists had to apply Marxist-Leninist ideology to help improve women's situation within the community and they had to search for women's history in socialist countries in order to comprehend the function of sex roles and racism so as to apply to their Chicana/o context. Chicana feminists were regarded as women who hated men. By labeling Chicana feminists' as men-haters, these activists were portrayed as women whose purpose was to weaken the Movement by questioning the opposite gender instead of improving relations among all their members. Moreover, Chicana feminists were also addressed as women's libbers and lesbians. Such denominations put into question and attacked these women's racial and sexual alignment to the traditional values as defended by *El Movimiento*. According to feminist Sonia A. López these names often came from men "who felt their 'machismo' threatened" (105). In other words, such classifications hinted to Chicanos' anxiousness as

members of a society whose racist-sexist system constantly undermined them as colored individuals and as heterosexual males. “Is it your real fear, my brother, that I be used against our Movement? Or is it that I will assume a position, a stance, that you are neither prepared nor willing to deal with?” (Nieto 209) As Consuelo Nieto’s question implies, Chicanos’ concern in relation to Chicana feminists was charged with racial, sexual, and class-related notions he had been a victim of, his entire life, and, so, it frightened and enraged him. Thus, Chicana feminists were faced with the duty of following *El Movimiento*’s requests to claim their rights as first-class citizens; but, at the same time, they were discouraged from questioning the sexist attitudes implemented by U.S. hegemony and perpetuated by traditional Chicana/os. Ironically, Chicana feminists were forced to choose between defending their rights as racially and culturally oppressed Chicana subjects, or as feminists who were mistreated on race, class and gender based discriminations. The terms “Chicana” and “feminist” were presented as mutually excluding, and, hence, Chicana feminists were asked to give up their claims as women in favor of the community’s claims as a culturally specific group. However, as mentioned earlier, not only men rejected Chicana feminists, but some Chicanas did, as well. Following the male discourse and based on a more traditional stance in relation to gender roles, some Chicana activists preferred to delegate the issues concerning women, because “[w]hen a family is involved in a human rights Movement, as is the Mexican American family, there is little room for a woman’s liberation Movement along” (Longeaux y Vásquez 31).

The persistency of Chicana feminists within *El Movimiento* to denounce their oppressive status, then, was met with direct disregard and animosity by

both men and women of the community. However the challenges they posed to the homogenizing voice of the leader became greater and they started to receive support little by little. In a similar manner to what their feminist antecessors had done, Chicana feminists began publishing their own newspapers and newsletters, such as the journal *Hijas de Cuauhtemoc* and they also worked very much on establishing classes in Chicano Studies programs. *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* and *Encuentro Femenil* created a vital Chicana feminist print culture in which new political identities, discourses, and strategies were constructed and debated. This print culture forged a Chicana feminist counterpublic that opened up spaces for Chicana dialogue across regions, social movement sectors, activist generations, and social differences.

All in all, the awakening and the tenacity of Chicana feminists responded to the fact that their work and importance within *El Movimiento* was either ignored or diminished. In this sense, Chicana feminists felt that they were capable of more important works and that their involvement and participation in the Movement was not sufficiently recognized. Besides, when gender related issues were presented and, hence, sexist roles were challenged and denounced, Chicana feminists were disregarded or ignored. According to activist Elena Hernández, “Raza relationships based on equality” (85) were something to hope for in an uncertain future not the actual present. Furthermore, she addressed both Chicanas and Chicanos when she stressed the importance of encouraging Chicanas’ potential and when she requested Chicanos to recognize and respect it. However, accepting Chicana feminists as a necessary sector within the Movement was hard to receive by the rest, if the tactics used to discredit them are taken into account. As literary critic and

activist Marta Cotera declared, “[i]f minority women, specifically Chicanas, scream loudly, it is because we have been doubly oppressed. Because of this, we do often demand priority for our needs” (“Among the Feminists” 214). Consequently, Chicana feminists created different literary spaces from which they were able to discuss their own experiences with racism, classism, and sexism. This literary realm also provided a stage from which Chicana feminists rose consciousness about issues related to the Chicana as an active participant of *El Movimiento* fighting within the larger context of U.S. society.

The conference in Houston was followed by a number of other similar meetings, such as the Chicana Regional Conference at Whittier, California in 1971; La Conferencia Femenil in Sacramento, California, in 1972; and different programs and projects for “barrio women” (López, Sonia 106) in Los Angeles. In Sonia A. López’s opinion, however, such phenomenon failed to get across the most oppressed segment of Chicanas who needed a revolution the most; that is, the working class Chicanas. More specifically, in the scholar’s words, those women working in the fields, factories and service jobs were disregarded in favor of the youth involved in the Student Movement. According to her, Chicana activists failed because instead of educating and organizing the working Chicanas, the effort was focused in education reform. Another drawback regarding the conferences organized at the time was the temporary effectiveness of such gatherings. Apparently, the thrust of the meetings diminished the moment the activist returned to their community.

Critic Maylei Blackwell states that “[r]e-membering is a vital act in creating political subjectivity, and Chicana feminists have developed a significant repertoire of remembrance” (11). The political activism performed by

some Chicanas involved recovering information from their past which had been erased by the official history. In Blackwell's account, this act of "re-membering" involved the search for information related to the subject positions of *Mexicanas* and Mexican American women in the past, which helped them stay whole through the difficulties forced upon them. They also looked for instances of active participation in the production of their own history, where their cultural community was placed at the center, and, thus, provided them with the space from which to improve the world they lived in. In this line, Chicana historian Emma Pérez has committed her work to the archeology and recovery of the Chicanas' past. She dismisses the works of white scholars, male and women, in regard to their assessment and study of women of color. In order to defend her basis for rejection, Pérez presents her personal experience as a scholar, trained in the Western European tradition, to denounce its relation with conquest and colonization. This association, then, renders scholars incapable of connecting to the language and history of the colonized and suppressed community. In their collaborative project, scholars Martínez and McCaughn also bring attention to the historical abuses forced especially upon women in the Americas and they describe how as a direct result of colonization, women were removed from a subject position into a passive and suffering object position. What is more, in their article, "Chicanas and Mexicanas within a Transnational Working Class," the authors show the violent and permanent descent, secured by the practice of patriarchy and racism brought along by colonization, of women to a powerless status in society.

It is to this colonial past, as well, that NietoGomez refers to when she states that "[t]he roots of the psyche of la Chicana lies deep within the colonial

period in Mexico” (NietoGomez, “La Chicana” 48). As she describes, different historical periods and methods of oppression presented a very unique identity for Mexican women. Such identity was constructed in order to fulfill a predetermined role within a very specific society. The feminist critic mentions different power systems such as the conquest, the *encomienda* system and the colonial Catholic Church to explain Mexican women’s characteristics according to racist, classist and sexist value axis. Physical features, which privileged white European features imposed by the Spanish *conquistadores*, devaluated the racial Indian woman. Furthermore, the uneven class relations between a patron and his slave woman depreciated her position within the society. Finally, the rape of the Mexican Indian woman Doña Marina, *Malinche*, by the *conquistadores* paralleled their violent appropriation of everything native, and marriage became the means to perpetuate the conquest. In NietoGomez’s words, these methods of subjugation were later internalized as models for the Mexican male in their illusion of becoming free and strong agents. This history of violence and oppression was protected and aided by the Catholic Church, which added enduring and impossible female roles as ideals for Mexican women to further preserve a patriarchal hierarchy. Other Chicana activists, such as Mirta Vidal and Enriqueta Longeaux Vasquez, stated that the repressive history of Mexican women had its origin in the European colonizers. That is, in Vidal’s words, before the Europeans set foot in the Americas the Indian woman was a highly cultured active individual who enjoyed a privileged position in the community. NietoGomez added the *mujer buena* and *mala mujer* roles established by the colonial society to represent the white, reclusive, passive woman and the active Indian woman involved in the community. This

distinction, NietoGomez explained, responded to the colonial values and reflected its consequent racist, classist and sexist hierarchy. Later on, the Catholic Church reinforced these ideas in their religious depiction of the ideal woman and the tainted woman. The original Indian woman, who enjoyed a respected position in society, and was politically active, became a thing of the past. Later societies, both Spanish and European, kept women oppressed; what is more, the *machismo* that was widely promoted as a Mexican trait, “should be labeled an ‘Anglo thing’” (Vidal 23).

Marta Cotera’s historical studies of a more recent past trace back the origin of Chicanas’ active political involvement. In Cotera’s words, the very nature of the border with its migration connected Mexicana suffragists and Chicana feminists’ activities with their history and developments, making it difficult to separate one from the other. She recorded varied female led feminist instances that prove her statement of an active Mexicana and Chicana political activism, such as Jovita Idar’s and Soledad Peña’s *Liga Femenil Mexicanista* and the *Club Liberal de San Antonio* feminist organization; the strikes of Monte Berry and the Pecan Shellers during the 1930s; or the names of other Chicana activists, such as María L. Hernández, Emma Tenayuca, Luisa Moreno, and Manuela Sager. Moreover, Cotera placed Chicana feminist activities within the contexts of the entire Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement from 1848 to the 1970s. By doing such study, the scholar established the antecedents for Chicana feminist activities within Mexican history and separated from the Anglo feminist movement. This testimony stressed the malicious nature of the accusations made by many Chicana/os against Chicana feminists as selling out to Anglo feminism. At the same time, it substantiated the fact that, following the path of

their predecessors, a gender-conscious agenda within *El Movimiento* would be a culturally and traditionally appropriate action to take. Thus, Coteras' research showed what Chicana Enriqueta Longeaux Vasquez claimed that "[o]ur Raza woman will take her place in the social and cultural struggle and this will be nothing new to her, it will be as natural as giving birth" (111). That is, modern Chicana feminists, struggling within the Movement, needn't look for role models beyond their own community, but they had many examples in their history to draw upon.

With such active and politically cognizant recovery of the past, Chicana feminists turned to their Pre-Columbian tradition in their search for alternative female roles that would voice, after being rewritten, their modern concerns. By reappropriating this tradition, Chicana feminists asserted their legitimacy within *El Movimiento* and, further, found the courage to challenge certain values they considered had been biased misinterpretations of their tradition. Among these recovered female legends there was Doña Marina, an Aztec princess, better-known as *La Malinche*, who, according to one of the most popular versions of the legend, was considered a traitor to her community for having children with the Spanish *conquistador*, Hernán Cortés. The fact that *Malinche* was raped by Cortés after being sold as a slave by her own mother has been overlooked in traditional Mexican culture in order to keep the legend alive, and to turn *Malinche* into the symbol of treason instead of that of a victim. In such a nationalist understanding of *La Malinche*, activist Adelaida R. Del Castillo expresses her concern when accusing *La Malinche* of treason:

[O]ne wrongly assumes that there was a “patria” (similar to the patrias of today). The fact is, there were many Indian nations within the Aztec Empire and these nations were always attempting, through one rebellion of another, to regain their former independence. (125)

Despite its negative portrayal in traditional Mexican culture, modern Chicana feminists have recovered the figure of *La Malinche* and redefined her as an independent female figure that succeeded in surviving to different misfortunes thanks to her intellectual ability. These feminists have often cast aside her image of a sexualized victim and have presented her, instead, as an active woman enjoying her sexuality. Moreover, *La Malinche* is also celebrated as the mother of the first *mestizo* creature and, thus, the origin of *mestizaje*. By such reappropriation, Chicanas invalidated the traditional believe in which *La Malinche* was considered to have “betrayed her primary cultural function-maternity. The figure of the mother is bound to a double reproduction-that of her people and her culture” (Alarcón 63). What is more, the linguistic skills credited to *La Malinche* also turned this figure into the perfect symbol for Chicana feminists who were regarded as traitors because they dared raise their voice, and decided to welcome relationships beyond their Chicana/o community; thus, bridging different cultures. Not surprisingly, then, the character of *La Malinche* also became a very attractive figure to represent Chicana writers and to be included in their literature. As an example of this literary trend, in *Chasing Shadows* (2000), one of the three contemporary literary works studied in this chapter, Chicana writer Lucrecia Guerrero compiles a number of short stories, which in a similar manner to the storytelling tradition, through which women

passed on and kept the community's culture alive, the author brings light to different modern time's issues occurring at the fictionalized border town of Mesquite, in Arizona. These stories gather different concerns regarding marginalized individuals and their day-to-day struggles as part of a discriminating U.S. society and a particularly oppressive community. In the following passage, the character of Consuelo is introduced:

He's too close to the house at the top of the hill, Consuelo thinks, up there where the woman they call La Malinche lives. It is said that although this Malinche originally emigrated from Mexico, she thinks she is more gringa than the gringas themselves.
(165)

As can be interpreted from these words, Consuelo is worried about the disappearance of her son, Joaquín de la Torre, who is described in the story as a Chicano who is politically active and involved in illegal activities related, probably, to helping undocumented immigrants cross the border. Consuelo is afraid that her neighbor Cookie, whom she names *La Malinche*, might have reported Joaquín to the border patrols and, hence, his disappearance. Including the figure of *La Malinche* and turning her into a modern time's traitor female is one of the ways Chicanas participate in the reconstruction of feminine cultural symbols in order to keep their past traditions alive. Although, the figure of *La Malinche* has been reinvented in different ways by different Chicana authors and scholars, in this case, Lucrecia Guerrero maintains similarities that parallel this character to the traditional interpretation of the legend. Nevertheless, in the case of *La Malinche* from Mesquite, later in the story, the reader has the chance

to sympathize and understand her actions as her tale reveals her to be a victim of the U.S. racist sexism. Therefore, similar to the original legend and as I will later analyze, the character of Cookie becomes but an example of the way in which colored women are treated with suspicion, and forced to choose between bad choices in order to survive. Although Guerrero's *Malinche* does resemble the traditional interpretation of a traitor figure, it is also true that by providing Cookie, *La Malinche*, with a voice and giving the audience the chance to learn her story, her betrayal is portrayed as a survival method within an oppressive system.

Another cultural symbol regained by Chicana feminists, in general, and Chicana writers, in particular, was the legend of *La Llorona*. This myth recounted the story of a woman who, in despair for her lover's betrayal, decided to kill her own children by drowning them in a river. As a result of such a terrible act, she was condemned to roam the rivers looking for her dead children. Different variations as for the reasons behind her crime, or the motives why she was forced to roam the rivers are common. However, the idea of a mother pushed into insanity and into committing the infanticide has remained in the collective memory as a warning for young women. Similar to *La Malinche*, however, modern Chicana feminists have recovered this legend and reinterpreted it in more positive terms. Once again, Lucrecia Guerrero includes the figure of *La Llorona* in her story and, hence, an alternative interpretation of this figure is provided.

"Many years ago, before she lost her daughter, she didn't go around talking to the wind. But after Margarita disappeared, Pilar changed. Now they say she's like La

Llorona, roaming, searching for her child. How can a mother accept losing her own blood, eh?" (167)

In this passage, the narrator is still Consuelo who, while waiting for her son Joaquín to turn out, continues describing her neighbors from Mesquite. In this case, it is the figure of *La Llorona* that she mentions and similar to what happens with the character of *Cookie/Malinche*, the author provides Pilar/*La Llorona* with a voice. It is in Pilar's own account that the disappearance of her daughter is explained not as a crime in her mother's hands, but as a father's condemnation, which not only denied freedom to her daughter, Margarita, but to his wife, Pilar, too. In this instance, Guerrero rewrites the legend of the crying woman and alters some facts, but the basics of the legend are maintained. The idea of a woman going insane after her daughter's disappearance is present, and the punishment she is condemned to fulfill, which consists on wandering and roaming around, is preserved as well. In this story, however, the daughter, Margarita, does not die, but runs away from home. Pilar, respecting her husband's wishes and commands, does not challenge his authority and spends most of her life daughterless. By including these legendary feminine figures and translating them to contemporary border town lives, Guerrero not only recovers Chicanas' cultural history, but she adapts it. Through this appropriation, she strengthens the legends by giving them voice and, thus, rendering them comprehensible from a modern perspective. Besides, by showing the reader a new interpretation of *La Llorona* and *La Malinche's* sins, Guerrero empowers these female figures and denounces the fact that, as victims of different oppressive value systems, their truth was never revealed.

One last Chicana/o cultural symbol is *la Virgen de Guadalupe*, which resulted from the fusion of the Virgin Mary and the native goddess Tonantzin. The figure of Guadalupe embodies the cultural and political compromise between the conquered and conquerors, and, more specifically, between the pagan beliefs and the Catholic Church. The merging of these two antagonistic groups brought, on the one hand, the ideal motherly figure the natives could relate to, and, on the other hand, the colonizers added their own biased values that would define their ideal mother. However, in later years and when recovered by *El Movimiento*, Guadalupe was turned into a female figure that “has come to symbolize transformative powers and sublime transcendence” (Alarcón 61). By originally symbolizing values that belonged, partially, to both the conquerors and the conquered, the figures of *Malintzin* and Guadalupe represented examples of the one-sided narratives common in the official history and its resulting discriminating value system which passed on from generation to generation. Hence, the effort of Chicana feminists to recover and re-write these symbols, and to make them active participants in the discussion of modern Chicana/o issues, is of utmost importance. It is through this collective project of recovery that Chicana/os take back their place in history and they redefine a collective culturally celebrated Chicana/o identity for the present. Once again, Lucrecia Guerrero rewrites a legendary figure by portraying a more positive aspect and by locating her in a currently recognizable reality. Such redefinition of this female figure allows Guerrero to present modern Chicana/o concerns regarding varied issues related to gender, ethnicity, and border problematic:

“Sometimes my mother and the other women give them water,” he says, “but you got to wait until it’s real dark, even then, these days it’s like patrulla’s got as many eyes as centipede’s got legs. [...] Next thing you know, they’ll start saying you ain’t got papers to be here and drag you away and make all kinds of problems for everybody.”
(32-33)

In this passage, Tonantzin, the new kid in Riquis’ neighborhood in Mesquite, is standing at the fence which divides the U.S. and Mexico, and giving water to the desperate people on the Mexican side. Naming this girl Tonantzin, the author, recovers part of the native feminine figure and reinterprets her to fit in this 21st century border town’s tale. In this case, Tonantzin is also portrayed as symbol of innocence as she is presented as a Chicana little girl, who despite her poverty and, hence, limited power within the U.S. society, does not doubt in helping her less privileged neighbors on the Mexican side. Through this tale, Guerrero shows the reader essential issues related to the unequal living conditions on both sides of the border. Besides, the author has chosen a specific group of characters, women and young girls, to represent this instance of Borderland solidarity. These women are aware of their risk, but, still, they feel unable to ignore their neighbors. Tonantzin is warned by Ricky, but she also ignores his advice. Thus, in Guerrero’s tale, different matters are put up front. On the one hand, it shows the interest in recovering and redeeming women figures such as *La Malinche* and *La Llorona*; and, on the other hand, it also rewrites a modern version of Tonantzin. This representation embodies some of the features of the original goddess, and as a 21st century symbol, she also represents the alliance between neighbors from both sides of the border. Furthermore, Lucrecia Guerrero makes an important statement in feminizing the

challenging forces of border towns that struggle against both U.S. hegemony and traditional confining Chicano value system.

In the complex environment of the early years of *El Movimiento* then, Chicana feminists found themselves struggling not to be absorbed and illegitimated by neither the Chicana/o Movement nor the Anglo feminists' in their particular requests. Chicana feminists were concerned about the many types of discriminations resulting from the sexist racism present in the U.S. society. As feminist literary critic Tey Diana Rebolledo states, Chicana feminists found themselves fighting against at least two critical trends. On the one hand, there were the traditional Chicana/os who despised their feminism, and, on the other hand, Anglo feminists dismissed their particular struggle on racist grounds. Despite these difficulties, Rebolledo describes these Chicanas' work as a prolific and greatly productive project through which they shook the strains that confined and objectified them (*Women Singing* 118). These Chicanas became political agents in their search to understand and perform as active Chicanas within society, and also in their self-representation. They put themselves at the centre of their literary production creating, thus, a literary space that allowed them to perform transgressions of different kind. Therefore, they expected both Chicanos and Chicanas of the Movement to face the constraining consequences that sexism implanted within their community.

In Chicana feminist Marta Cotera's opinion, there were two broad trends that were brought up among the Chicana feminists. The first one would relate to the importance of conducting all-women organizations, instead of the mixed ones, to allow Chicanas to become political agents within the Movement. Chicana feminists found that their role within mixed organizations offered limited

opportunities for leadership whereas in all-women organizations their chances to fulfill their potential would increase. Cotera also mentions the special nature of Chicanas' requests, gender and sexuality-related issues, which might have been overlooked by Chicanos and that an all-women organization could focus on, such as sexual education, child care, rape, etc. On the other hand, activist Anna NietoGomez advocated for Chicana/os' double responsibility in matters that had negative implications for the whole Chicana/o community, but were too often set aside as women's matters. Among other subjects, NietoGomez stressed the importance of health-related needs, such as birth control and abortion clinics. In this trend, she emphatically stated the imperative of community based centers in which these "programs will be culturally, educationally, and politically oriented to the needs of the Chicana in a Chicano community" ("La Femenista" 91). As the Chicana activist believed, these issues affected the community as a whole, and, hence, denying these rights would encourage a sexist and self-serving system that did not reflect all the Chicana/os' needs.

Other Chicana feminists posed similar emphasis on the importance of more "culturally relevant curriculum" (de la Torre & Pesquera 208) in order to achieve a bilingual education that would secure a more culturally balanced education for Chicana/o children. By doing so, Spanish-speaking children would be positively encouraged for their knowledge instead of belittled by it. The importance of presenting a more inclusive perspective on the history and culture of the U.S. was imperative to maintain a healthy educational environment for every child, so Chicana/o children would not feel marginalized in their learning process. Moreover, an important factor in Chicanas' poor labor conditions was

located in the educational system itself, which failed Chicanas in providing better skills that would secure their growth into more competitive professionals. That is, Chicanas' professional success was obstructed because "[t]eacher and counselor actions channeled Chicanas into nonacademic programs offering a lower quality of instructions" (Segura 212). In addition, according to Anna NietoGomez, there was a high percent of dropouts before the tenth grade and before students could learn some basic skills, such as typing, business English, shorthand, that would offer them better job opportunities in the future. Besides, monolingual education was deficient in filling the gap many Chicanas suffered in relation to the English language. Consequently, their lack of oral skills limited their success in the necessary steps in getting a job, such as application interviews and oral interviews. These linguistic and training limitations condemned Chicanas to become part of the unskilled labor market in which low-paid, long hours and unhealthy menial and manual jobs were the only available option.

Another gender-related source of oppression that Chicana feminists fought against was labor. As Chicana activist Linda Aquilar denounced, "[a]s far as the Chicano is concerned, the role of the Chicana has not really changed. It has merely been transferred from the home to the office" (137). These words mirror the fact that sexism became one of the main issues denounced by Chicanas in relation to their participation in the paid labor force. They claimed that although they participated in the family's income with their work, they were still perceived as the nurturing, passive women, defined as a sexual being rather than as a working equal. It is also true that Chicanas had been relegated mostly to menial jobs which follow the traditional gender-role values. What is

more, Aquilar claimed that Chicanas were more easily employed by Anglo men than by Chicanos. In her opinion, Anglo employers did not only feel unthreatened by working with Chicanas, but, on the contrary, their masculinity was enhanced by it. Such stance shows the perpetuation of racist sexism imbedded in the post-Aztec history of the Americas and which continues to be reinforced in the present through modern media. Furthermore, this attitude seems to have been internalized by U.S. oppressed communities, such as the Chicana/o, to the extent that their employers keep perpetuating the very system that has objectified and marginalized them. Other Chicana activists, such as Rosalie Flores, centered their demand on the farm workers' deplorable labor conditions, and, thus, they rallied to request day care services and medical centers for their long hour schedules, and a more supportive farm legislation. Moreover, Flores also encouraged political activism in order to improve the field workers' working conditions, such as stopping the use of pesticides while people were working. All in all, these were some concerns brought by Chicana feminists. Although some of them were more directly connected to the way gender constrained their day-to-day experience, they were all part of a system of injustices that had kept the Chicana/o community down. It is in the clear disregard for such discrimination along gender lines that scholar Angie Chabram-Dernersesian places the failure of the Movement. In her opinion, *El Movimiento's* exclusionary value hierarchy, where gender specific concerns were placed at a secondary level, provoked that "the 'us' of cultural nationalist discourse was more often that not a 'he' and not a s/he" (168). Consequently, this division pushed some female activists to begin thinking whether these topics would be better discussed in all-women organization or in mixed groups.

Although this might not seem such an urgent concern, what it was of outmost importance was the fact that these matters were the result of an oppressive system, which should be fought by every member of the Chicana/o community.

On the basis of *El Movimiento*, the defense of the traditional family was what gathered everyone as a community. This apparently unproblematic structure everyone could rely on, nevertheless, hid a set of complex and potentially contradictory connotations that are necessary to keep in mind. On the one hand, since the colonial period and with the centrality of the Catholic Church, women's responsibility was to be good mothers and wives. Such functions came with an ideal that would emulate the Virgin Mary or Guadalupe. During the Movement of the 1960s, the need for the ideal family was considered key to achieve political success, but, at the same time, the traditional gender roles were still perpetuated and desired. As Enriqueta Chávez said "we can continue being good mothers and wives, because in the strength of the family lies the strength of the movement" (78). However, activist Beverly Padilla, believed that not every Chicana might be willing to repeat the traditional patterns, and, so, there had to be the possibilities of letting Chicanas choose what they wanted to be. The critic felt that the very essence of choice was often absent from Chicanas during *El Movimiento*, and this matter needed to be condemned. In a similar line of thinking, Chicana scholar Consuelo Nieto also denounced that "[f]or a Chicana bent upon fulfillment of her personhood, this restricted perspective of her role as a woman is not only inadequate but crippling" (208).

On the other hand, the issue of motherhood implied some notions that Chicanas were concerned about and that were briefly mentioned above, such

as the right to abortion and the control of their own body. While traditional Chicana/os considered that such matters were unquestionable, new voices began to be heard from the Chicana feminists who defended the necessity of securing their bodies by working to reduce the high mortality rates during childbirth or the nonconsensual sterilizations that too often took place. This demand turned to be one of the most controversial issues presented by Chicana feminists. The debate arose from the belief that Chicanas' right to abortion and the control of their own body was an attack to both their Catholic and Latino heritage. Thus, these matters were sensed as a direct challenge to the Chicana/o traditional values and their cultural heritage. Consequently, even a hint of "an individualized nonmaternal voice [...] has been cause to label them *malinches* or *vendidas*" (Alarcón 63). Besides, it must be kept in mind that a woman's body was associated with motherhood and, thus, the choice of not being a mother was viewed with suspicion and as a direct disregard for tradition. In addition, some Chicanos' sense of manhood was also at stake when Chicana feminists claimed the control over their bodies. This complex subject is also included in Lucrecia Guerrero's *Chasing Shadows* and, hence, this literary work provides an inside perspective from both points of view, the man's and the woman's.

As she changed over the years, Lázaro's beatings became more severe and he insisted on increasingly stiffer girdles. Finally she told him that she had dreamed more than once that that piece of synthetic armor had stretched until it wasn't only her hips being bound, but her spirit; she wasn't able to breathe, to move- a live woman wrapped up like a mummy. Before she finished her sentence, he twisted her waist-length hair around his hand, slammed her forehead against the wall to remove her stupid thoughts. (44)

This passage encapsulates the Chicanas' need to claim control over their bodies, and the way this stance affected some Chicanos' by making them anxious about their manhood. In this story entitled "The Girdle," Lucrecia Guerrero describes the abusive relationship of a young married couple. By beating Amparo, Lázaro is somehow claiming his power over her body and punishing her for his frustrations as a marginalized subject within U.S. society. The lack of power Lázaro feels in relation to U.S. hegemony is transformed into abuse at his own home, and his obsessive demand that Amparo wears girdles that constrain her body. The girdles turn Amparo's body into a property that only Lázaro can possess. Such constriction reflects Lázaro's desperate attempt to desexualize Amparo along U.S. racist and sexist society: "Don't go to work, forget the Anglo" (Guerrero 46). In his effort to desexualize Amparo by forcing her into girdles every time she goes out, Lázaro perpetuates the racist and sexist notions he is trying to avoid. The catharsis comes when Lázaro's own body is injured in a working accident and he is constrained to a wheelchair. This event unleashes different reactions in relation to the body and, consequently, to these characters. The fact that he has lost control over his body provokes an intense fear of losing his power over Amparo's. As a consequence of not "owning" Amparo's body, Álvaro becomes anxious about his manhood. In other words, being in a wheelchair has not only restricted Álvaro to a crippled body, but it has also weakened his concept of manhood. The paradox is presented when Lázaro's paralyzed body guarantees Amparo's freedom, both physical and psychological. This reappropriation of her feminine body stimulates many

changes in Amparo and turns her into a woman that learns to enjoy her body and overcomes her past fears.

First of all, Amparo begins an affair with another man, Manuel, who asserts the celebration of her sexuality. However, it is also true that her lover also likes to describe her as a body to possess “I want him to know you belong to me” (Guerrero 46). On the other hand, Amparo begins to question her situation, and fantasizes with the idea of running away with her daughter and Manuel. Finally, she understands that what she really wants to accomplish will not happen if she continues seeing Manuel because when they are together she feels she is not in control of the situation, and, thus, decides to leave him. Furthermore, she resolves to go back to school, something Lázaro has forbidden her to do, in order to become a secretary and, later, move with her daughter to a better house. This new house represents a safe place from which Amparo and her daughter will decide and design their new life. With such ambitious plans in her mind, Amparo returns home to Lázaro with the intention of patiently waiting for him to die and, then, go on with her new life.

According to activist Alicia Sandoval, “many Chicano men have been led to believe that the major way for them to validate their manhood is to father children” (205). As a consequence, the claim of Chicana feminists to control their body was received by part of the community as representing a threat towards Chicano manhood, which echoed that of U.S. racist and sexist society. Having Chicanas request the control over their bodies was interpreted as a challenge to Chicanos’ idea that the strength of *El Movimiento* was rooted in *la familia*. Hence, in this traditional understanding of the importance of the family, women’s goal should be marrying within the community and having children in

order to increase the number of proud politically active Chicana/o citizens for the future. In this context, the women's body was perceived not so much as women's position, but as the means for the community's survival. Thus, every little attempt to challenge this confining role was seen by the most traditional Chicana/os as Anglo feminist attacks. Contrasting opinions were heard regarding the issue of women's right to have total control over their body. On the one hand, Chicana feminist Enriqueta Longeaux y Vásquez defended that power over the body and the related issues arising from it, such as sex, abortion, contraception and pregnancy were the individual's matters. Other feminists as Beverly Padilla, however, defended that these concerns were a collective matter and, therefore, should be considered and treated as a community's problem. According to Padilla, these issues might feel personal rather than collective because, traditionally, they were regarded as private affairs and it was decided not to talk about them. The dangers and violence that Chicanas were prone to, were manipulated so as to control Chicanas' life. Beverly Padilla perceived this abuse as the perpetuation of the oppressor's interests to keep all Chicana/os down.

In the evolution of the Chicano movement, then, the concerns of Chicana feminists became critical. As Chicano critics Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar portray, Chicana feminists did not find satisfactory representation in the two movements they felt compelled to by race and gender alliances. Calderón and Saldívar place the feminist Chicana in a complex conundrum forced to draw up an alternative ideology and identity that would surpass "the nostalgic plan of the past and the stereotypical Anglo feminist plan for the future" (76). In other words, the traditional male-centered section of *El Movimiento* encouraged an

unequal representation of its participants along gender lines, while the Anglo feminists overlooked the ethnic and class differences that Chicanas endured under Anglo hegemony. Critic Maylei Blackwell brings attention to the feminist activism carried out through history by *Mexicanas* and Mexican American women. Blackwell stresses the fact that Chicana feminists had been active way before the Chicano movement, as well as after the Movement's decline around 1980s. Furthermore, she is adamant in correcting the popularized notion that the second wave women's movement was led mostly by white and middle-class women, disregarding the active participation and contribution of women of color. In other words, while Chicana feminists suffered fierce criticism in regard to their association with the Anglo feminist movement, the truth is that, according to scholar Marta Cotera's study, their relationships, though complex and difficult, existed since 1848. Before continuing with Cotera's conclusions, it is interesting to include Anna NietoGomez's analysis on the conflicting and opposing historical backgrounds of each feminist group:

The Anglo woman is a product of Protestant and imperialistic Anglo-European capitalism. The Chicana is a product of Catholic societies which still bear the marks of Counter-reformation feudalism and colonialism. ("La Femenista" 91)

This passage highlights the deep differences in the origins of both groups and thus, it is not surprising to learn about the conflicts that originated from the very beginning in the relationships of these two movements.

Cotera's study states that during the period between 1890 and 1920, the women's movement overlooked the overt discrimination suffered by a great

number of women. These women of color were persecuted by several antilabor and antiminority ideologies present in the women's movement of the time. Moreover, the antisocialist and anticommunist discourses popular in the dominant discourse of the U.S. also targeted the working-class women of color. During the 1930s and 1940s, the radicalization of conservative trends limited even further the possibility for Chicanas' political activism. However, according to Cotera's research, the constant attempts from some Anglo women and Chicana/os to improve their relationship turned the 1950s into a more fruitful era for Chicana activism. Similar to the different events occurring at the time, the Chicana ideology underwent varied changes and redefinitions that would facilitate their activism during such delicate times. In other words, and as described by scholar Marta Cotera, "a more subdued, club-women reformist approach channeled through female auxiliary groups" ("Feminism" 228-9). This new trend discarded the more provocative ideologies of socialism and communism in order to adjust to the new context. The goals of this renewed activism worked on behalf of modern Chicana/o concerns, such as improvements in education, work opportunities and voter education. Another fact regarding Chicana feminists and women's movements that must be acknowledged is that Chicanas, as well as other minority women, did not enjoy the privileges of the suffrage amendment after much later than Anglo women did. The reason behind this discrimination can be located on the very racist, classist and sexist value systems that perpetuated an uneven society in the U.S. Colored, poor and immigrant women did not gain the right to vote until the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Such delay was argued to be based on the fact that these women did not fulfill the necessary literacy and education

requirements or the mandatory proof of citizenship that many U.S. born Chicana/os were afraid to put at risk. What is more, the right to vote was denied to Chicanas through the U.S. Southwest until 1976, and imprisonments and deportations were common among the Chicana/o activists in Texas, California and the Midwest.

Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the history of the relationship between Chicanas and the women's movements to completely understand the complex nature of this association. In a similar manner to the experiences of Chicana feminists themselves, differences and confrontations took place within the women's movements, too. According to Yolanda Orozco, there was a rift in which two general tendencies formed. On the one hand, there were those women who founded the National Organization for Women (NOW). These women worked for the government and their aim was to examine the status of women in governmental agencies. On the other hand, there was a younger generation who was active during the Civil Rights Movements and who had more leftist politics than their antecessors. This later group, called white radical feminists or socialist feminists, represented, in Orozco and Cotera's opinion, a more similar, encouraging, cooperative group to that of the Chicana feminists. Nonetheless, Cotera believed that these Anglo feminists had to be reminded that all minority women did not belong to the same unprivileged class stratum or face the same problems, but that minorities had varied history, traditions and cultures, and, consequently, they struggled against or in favor of different issues. Ambivalent and conflicting opinions around Chicana feminists and Anglo feminists arose from different Chicana activists who more often than not, preferred to align with Chicano activists than to Anglo feminists in order to

fight in favor of educational reforms, welfare system, birth control, abortion, and labor conditions and opportunities.

The most prominent tendency among Chicanas was the idea defended by feminist Elizabeth Martínez that every member worked actively for *El Movimiento*; that is, an activism that understood the success of the liberation as an achievement attained by both men and women working together. However, Martínez was also conscious that no improvement would be possible unless Chicanos granted Chicanas better roles within the Movement that would show their political commitment against sexism, as well. Elena H. García defended similar arguments to Martínez, and she believed that while Chicanas and Anglo women shared similar difficulties, Chicanas should work within their cultural context in order to confront their particular points of view in relation to gender related concerns. García concluded that granting Chicanas their own context would help them develop a more assertive self. Moreover, and similar to Martínez's opinion, García also requested an improved role for Chicanas within the Movement that would go beyond the traditional roles of wives and mothers. Along similar lines, Elena Hernández considered that it was Chicanas' duty to improve the communication and understanding with Chicanos in order to be able to fight together as a community. She came to the conclusion when she stressed that "we cannot afford to fight against our men" (85). At the same time, she was also critical about Chicana/o prejudices towards any issue related to Chicanas' self-awareness. In activist Adaljiza Sosa Riddell's opinion, a very important matter that resulted in the conflicting relations between Chicano and Chicana feminists was originated in the Chicano's own problematic with his own identity as an oppressed male individual. In other words, the lack of control over

how he was defined by the U.S. society prevented him from creating equal relationships with Chicanas. Riddell defended that by overcoming the anxiety caused by their limited control over their image, and, by accepting Chicana feminists as part of the community, Chicanos would be able to defeat the Anglo system that had belittled them.

However, there were also some activists who saw the women's movements as "an ideal avenue for bridging the gaps between different ethnic groups and promoting a better understanding among ourselves" (Gutierrez 212). In Corrine J. Gutierrez' opinion, working together with the women's movements was not an option, but an obligation so as to ensure any improvement in a common cause. She stated that privileging ethnic alliances instead of gender cooperation, whether Chicanas, Black or Anglos, would be a setback for feminists. What is more, she defended that only by an all-women front that included ethnic and class variation would women obtain first class citizenship as individuals.

All in all, although only a few opinions about the relationship between Chicana feminists and the women's movement have been gathered here, they summarize what the Chicana majority thought; that although they were conscious of the improvements that needed to be implemented within the Chicana/o community, they agreed in fighting along with their cultural partners. As Elizabeth Olivárez clearly described "[e]quality to most women liberationists does not mean being treated like a man, but obviously it means having equal opportunity as an individual" (135). However, when Chicana feminists asked for more active and leading roles within *El Movimiento*, their request brought suspicion among the most traditionalist Chicana/os, and they ended up either

dismissed or despised by the community. Consequently, Chicana feminists found themselves in the doubly discriminatory position of being rejected and stereotyped by both Chicanos and women's movements. In the end, and as this dissertation attempts to show, the Chicana feminist found herself caught in the middle with only inadequate choices available: "[t]here I was considered a radical racist Mexican militant, yet with the Chicano radicals I was considered a sellout. I was caught in the middle, wanting to help but with neither side allowing me" (Chávez, Jennie 37).

Chicana feminist literature and the very act of writing have proved to be powerful remedies to recover and give voice to the long silenced Chicanas. As literary critic Tey Diana Rebolledo explains the fact that Chicana/os come in contact with different cultures provides them with the possibility of varied experiences regarding cultures, perspective and languages that might, however, confuse and unsettle them. Yet, Rebolledo focuses on the more positive side that these encounters provoke and that is the great potential of finding different "survival strategies" (*Women Singing* 128). Among these strategies, literature must be considered a very valued one by Chicanas in order to struggle through alienation and to speak up against the subjugation they have endured through history. According to Rebolledo, writing becomes a political and social means through which Chicanas compel to be listened, and they assert their presence in the records of U.S. history and society. In a similar line of thinking, feminist critic Yarbrow-Bejarano declares that writing for Chicanas became the means to define themselves as individuals and, also, to articulate their collective participation and individual characterization through their subjectivity. Besides, the literary genres they choose to write in are also a

reflection of their unique subject matter, language and perspective. Through their writing, Chicanas strengthen their position as active subjects in the political arena of the community, where they participate as part of the group rather than as independent individuals. "They also illustrate that Chicana identity is something to be discovered rather than passively inherited" (Chabram-Dernersesian 37). In other words, the Chicana identity is a performative one, which, then, readapts according to the context. Therefore, Chicanas embody a dynamic association of values and traditions that are redefined in relation to constant interaction among different individuals inside and outside the Chicana/o community. It is, thus, significant that unlike Chicanos' construction of a homogeneous identity in the '60s, Chicana feminists embrace a more multifaceted identity along class, race, gender and sexuality lines that will accommodate to the context of different subject positions.

The goal of Chicana feminist writers, then, is to become agents in acquiring a voice to denounce their concerns and in deciding the way in which they want to be defined. That is, traditional ways of defining Chicanas based on racist, classist and sexist axes fail to cover the complex and conflicting values within the developing Chicana subject. In their search for their own voice and creative space, Chicana/os appropriate their own language, topics and spaces. This must be done in order to present their alternative understanding of reality and themselves as active agents. In order to do so, scholar Chabram-Dernersesian stresses the imperative of challenging and innovating not only the content, but the form of Chicana/o literary production. Thus, further variations occur when Chicanas transform their position as object into active subjectivities. This agency allows them to present themselves in a previously unattainable

vocal position by “replacing the discourses of carnalismo and compadres [...] with the discourses of feminism and comadres” (Chabram-Dernersesian 42). Switching Chicanas’ rhetoric production does not only put into question the ethnocentric literature that has kept them silent, but also provokes a challenge for feminism as it is presented by Anglo women.

Feminist Chicana Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano also highlights the role that Chicana feminist criticism must perform. According to her, criticism must bear in mind the way Chicanas’ experience is intrinsically connected to their exposure to class and race-related exploitation and to their participation in an alternative cultural community that is considered a minor one. Chicana critics must present the coexistence of gender, culture and class axis in the works of Chicana feminists in order to dismantle the long-standing believe of, both, Chicano and Anglo feminist discourses, that these notions were mutually exclusive. It is, thus, as Yarbro-Bejarano describes, the particularity of Chicana feminists to struggle with an identity that is structured around elements that are problematic with each other. She depicts the writing experience of the Chicanas and *mestizas* as a process of self awareness, and the acknowledgement of a complex identity that does not serve the individual purpose of the writer, but a collective one. As the literary critic states, the Chicana writer “seeks self-empowerment through writing, while recognizing her commitment to a community of Chicanas” (“Chicana Literature” 217). In other words, it is her search to define an accurate collective identity for the Chicana that drives her into writing stories about herself as part of a community. Hence, her subject position as a Chicana spokesperson comes from her particular location in the community, and not as an individual. As historian Emma Pérez also illustrates,

Chicana feminists fight to recover the history and stories of women of color as a subjectivity that is doubly silenced by her gender and race. Thus, the Chicana feminist's work tries to reclaim the records that traditional history and white feminism discarded from the official narrative.

These writers were not only interested in examining their subjectivities and their identity in-process, but they were interested in "scrutinizing the assumption that root her own cultural influences, unpacking so-called tradition and political institutions that shape patriarchal ways of seeing" (Rebolledo, *Women Singing* 118). Questioning the validity of traditional gender roles is at the origin of Lucrecia Guerrero's character, Dolores Durán, who is a teacher at Mesquite's school. She has worked hard to secure her independence through a professional career unlike most women in her town, who chose to either work in unskilled jobs or to depend on their husbands for their survival. Consequently, she shows contempt for these women and their passivity. She has led a life that has strongly challenged the traditional female roles that had turned women into dependent beings. Nevertheless, when the reader encounters the character of Dolores, she is lonely and desperate to meet a man who will treat her as an equal, and love her for what she is, and not for what she possesses: a body or money. In this context, Dolores perceives that her town is a stale territory where it is impossible to meet men who behave beyond traditional gender roles. Her desperation is justified by the unsatisfying relationships she keeps with both men and women from her town. When she was young, men desired her for her body; now that she is older, the only attraction they seem to feel is toward her money. On the other hand, women around her remind her too much of her urgency to pursue a college education and a professional career as a teacher

as a way of escaping her destiny by tradition. Thus, the community of Mesquite and society in general, however, pressures her for being a single woman and, hence, at the end of the story, Dolores decides to follow the advice of her lover's wife, and seek a solution through an adviser on the Mexican side.

Encouraged by this adviser's premonition, Dolores returns to her annual Christmas retreat at Hotel Arco Iris in Guaymas, Mexico. The timing and the location of this retreat is interesting if we take into account that the characters that annually meet at the hotel do so at Christmas, when families traditionally reunite and celebrate. Furthermore, the city of Guaymas, a Mexican town close to the U.S.-Mexico border, becomes a suitable location for people from both nations who seek the company they fail to enjoy in their home towns. The fact that the clients pay for their stay and company problematizes the issue of connecting with people who have also broken with tradition. Among the clients, Dolores recognizes previous clients such as Bill, a crippled man who according to Dolores is looking for someone "poor enough to pretend to see him as he wants to be seen" (Guerrero 131), or a "too-thin business-woman from Tucson" (Guerrero 131) who pays for male company every night, or the "history professor from Mexico City" (Guerrero 131) who, leaving her respectable family behind, goes to Hotel Arco Iris every Christmas to pay for some sort of male-bondage relations. All in all, the solitude forced on Dolores by her community for breaking free of traditional restrictions pushes her to look for love in a different location that happens to be a symbol for capitalist tourism. At the end of the story, Dolores ends up giving in and deceiving herself into the romantic idea of traditional love pretending not to see the economic exchange in every relationship that takes place at the hotel:

Dolores presses her hand over her eyes and indicates the candle with her chin. "My eyes," she says. "They're delicate, you understand." He smiles, leans forwards, and spits on the tiny flame. (Guerrero 133)

Dolores' independent lifestyle and the disapproval she received because of it, parallels the experiences of those Chicanas who acted too assuredly within their community. These Chicanas, who dared question the community's value system, were also regarded as nonsupportive of La Raza, and, hence, *Malinchistas*. However, Chicana feminist writers' ability to communicate and translate multiple cultures by placing themselves in different subject positions is what defined their writing in alternative ways to the traditional Chicano literature. Chicana feminists welcomed any attempt to embrace the apparently opposite roles of becoming "objective interpreters" (Rebolledo, *Women Singing* 120) of subjective interpretations of their own experiences. By finding themselves immersed in a multicultural environment, Chicana feminist writers were able to navigate and shift from one culture to another, from one language to another, and to reinterpret the history that had disregarded them. By writing their personal perceptions, Chicana writers became the spokespersons of social and political issues from a perspective which showed an alternative understanding to the traditional one. In other words, "[w]riting, then, has become the symbolic border that writers cross at will" (Rebolledo, *Women Singing* 130). Such statement by Rebolledo, perfectly defines the Chicana feminist's experience in that their distinct subject positions allowed them to drift from one cultural space to another. What is more, through their literature Chicana writers built a literary

bridge into the realm of existence for those who were forgotten. By mastering the linguistic expression, they often empowered the very literary genres that were previously regarded as womanly and, thus, less serious by tradition. There are many instances in the Chicana literary history, as studied in the previous chapter, where such so-called minor literary genres framed subversive attempts to question the system. The freedom of the written language allowed Chicana feminists to create an alternative space where cultural and traditional borders were blurred. By recovering the voice that was denied to them, they challenged the cultures they found themselves caught in. By writing and being read, hence, Chicanas shifted from voiceless passive subjects to assertive agents that were able and willing to bridge individuals both within and outside the traditional community. In other words and echoing theorist Maylei Blackwell's study "Chicana feminists by connecting to a genealogy of Mexican feminism on both sides of the border" (18) celebrated a particular Chicana feminism that, although influenced by other cultural and women's movements, had the particularity of overcoming national and ideological borders. As a result, it produced a body of literature which proved to be both historically relevant and culturally provocative. Adding, to the literary corpus that might be included in anthologies, which, as Blackwell states, contributed to promote a critical consciousness and a community structure that allowed feminists to discuss relevant subjects and to become agents in their life narratives.

As mentioned in previous chapters, since its inception, the frontier has been heavily charged with conflict and meaning. Different treaties were signed between United States and Mexico in order to settle claim to the lands. Such treaties attempted to mitigate the conflicting relationships between the citizens

of both nations. The conflicts in the border area, however, continued well until the end of the 19th century, when according to theorist Mary Pat Brady, as the result of many confrontations between U.S. sheriffs and Mexican police, various neutral zones were fenced down by the Mexican officials along border cities. Shortly after this, similar actions were implanted by the U.S. government. These physical representations of power separating border individuals from each other had a great ideological impact among the border inhabitants. By fencing the border, both nations encouraged a system that would further promote the establishment of an unequal development on both sides. Consequently, the sharp contrast between both nations would become key to the development of the border during the 20th and 21st centuries.

During the 20th century the border area underwent drastic transformations. While, during the first half of the century, this area was sparsely populated and, thus, considered of little interest to both nations, the second half of the century brought radical changes in terms of labor. Consequently, the number of inhabitants in the borderlands grew at dramatic speed. One of the first important novelties in labor organization came from the *Bracero* Program implemented in 1942 as the result of a great demand of manual labor in the United States brought by World War II. These laborers' work notably improved the economy of many border towns on the American side. Nevertheless, when their contracts expired, the laborers were asked to return their permit and to go back to Mexico. Some laborers, escaping Mexico and its reality, managed to somehow stay in the U.S. in order to avoid the extreme poverty and unprivileged living conditions of Mexico. This is the context that Lucrecia Guerrero brings the reader in the following passage:

In Ohio, after she married Bill and escaped the tomato fields, it was easy to maintain her winter-skin shade of sallow tan (lightened with a generous layer of ivory Angel Face powder). Now they live in Arizona. The western sun, harsh as truth itself, normally forced her inside, out of the light that could turn her an Aztec brown. (11-12)

The narrator of this passage, a Mexican woman called Cookie, recalls the way she escaped Mexico's poverty-stricken future by marrying a U.S. citizen when she became pregnant of him. Cookie personifies the multilayered forms of oppression that native *Mexicanas* undergo both in Mexico and the U.S. This excerpt shows the internalized racism that native Mexicans suffer in their home country, where only menial jobs are available for them. Once Cookie decides to leave all that behind and crosses over to the U.S. side, she realizes that the subjugation and marginalization she has left behind is very present in the U.S. not only in the public space, but in the private one, as well. Her husband, Bill, reproaches her getting pregnant on purpose to force him into marrying her. His scorn translates in her solitude at home, compelled to live a secluded life as a friendless housewife without any help from her husband or daughter. Cookie alienates herself inside the house due to her fear of her skin showing her origins and, hence, she escapes from the sun and the whole neighborhood. Her withdrawal is even greater after moving to Arizona, where she finds herself surrounded by the very people she wanted to separate herself from.

Cookie's teenage daughter despises her for rejecting her Mexican origins, so that her scorn parallels that of her father's. However, while in Bill's case, he feels she has trapped him in a life he did not deserve, in the daughter's

case, her attraction towards a Chicano neighbor, Joaquín, is what makes her so eager to claim her mother's roots. Her demands, nevertheless, come from the privileged position that her light skin offers to her; that is, as a light-skinned U.S. citizen, she enjoys the choice to choose her cultural roots purposefully, but she is not restrained like her mother. Cookie, on the other hand, is obsessed with erasing her past and starting a life without the racial, class, and gender constrictions suffered in Mexico. Yet, her 20th anniversary in the U.S. and the move to the border triggers her encountering the people, the smells, and culture she alienated herself from. Her effort to prove her "Americanness" and, thus, her right to claim her citizenship is constantly challenged by her own body, her Anglo husband, and her spoiled daughter. Cookie's anxiety reaches its peak when a friend of Bill, a border patrol, requests her to demonstrate her loyalty by reporting on her neighbors. So, Cookie's right as a citizen is never granted under the U.S. racist, sexist and classist value system. She is caught in the middle of conflicting allegiances toward her original culture which oppressed her in the past, and the U.S. culture which subjugates her in the present, and will continue to do so in the future. As a result, Cookie ends up hunted by her past, and bargaining her present and future by isolating herself from her community and from the U.S. society in general.

As exemplified by Guerrero's stories analyzed so far, the importance of studying the politics of the border area, in order to take a grasp of the elements behind the particular geography of border cities, is critical. In this context, scholar Lawrence A. Herzog claims that the border becomes a line that defines not only different nations, but urban geographies that have grown out of disparate cultural systems and characteristics. What makes these border

settlements even more exceptional for this critic is, on the one hand, the “intriguing bicultural urban spatial arrangement” (7) that result from the constant interaction in the day to day life of their inhabitants, which cuts across practical, social and economic levels, and their very physical vicinity, on the other hand. Herzog describes the U.S.-Mexico border area as a strategic location for specific economic enterprises, such as tourist facilities, services and trade, in general. The enormous economical profit brought by this specialization also affected the very urbanization of the border cities, which have become an extraordinary setting where disparate realities come into contact. In his opinion, the economic and social differences of both nations and their cultures share this Borderland and, hence, the collision of such disparate realities meeting has its imprint in these border towns.

Another key factor in the drastic transformation of the border cities, during the 20th century, was the implantation of the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) in 1964 with the purpose of reducing unemployment in the border cities of Mexico. While the *Bracero* Program required labor workers to work the fields of United States, the BIP established a high number of *maquiladoras* or assembly plants that required manual work by a great number of people within a factory. This program aimed to replace the labor source of the *Bracero* Program that was by then coming to an end. One of the greatest economic advantages of *maquiladoras* was the result of the U.S.-Mexican Twin Plant Agreement thanks to which raw materials were imported to Mexico duty free with the condition of being exported back once the product was manufactured in *maquilas*. The economic profit for both nations was enormous due to the cheap labor expense of the Mexican workers and the high number of

employment produced by this program. These profits rapidly increased when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was established in 1994. This economic agreement signed by the United States, Mexico and Canada accomplished the world's largest free trade area, with 450 million people involved and with around \$17 trillion worth of goods. As a result of these labor agreements and implementations, the U.S.-Mexico borderlands transformed from an empty and barren area into an overcrowded profitable trilateral zone over a short period of time.

As scholar Claire F. Fox contends, right after NAFTA was signed, northern Mexico became the favorite location for international investment in the country: "82 percent of *maquiladoras* were located there and employed over eight hundred thousand workers" (4). Her study states that the total sum of *maquiladoras* in the six Mexican border states reached 23,000 in the first four years of the NAFTA agreement. This sudden over industrialization of the border turned the U.S.-Mexico borderland, in the scholar's opinion, into a valuable case study to examine the way in which apparently contradictory ideologies, such as nationalism and transnationalism might coincide in the same geographical space and historical moment. That is, Fox comes to the conclusion that these exceptional conditions put into question the relevance or the perceivable existence of a border. This statement is backed up by the constant interactions taking place between the communities on both sides of the border, which provoke what Fox terms a "spatial contiguity" (39) which challenges traditional nation-state confines. She concludes that these exceptional urban settlements have become either a positive or a negative representation of the NAFTA agreement depending on the political stand of the reference, which praises the

hybrid culture resulting from it or denounces the animosity borne from witnessing the stark differences between both nations.

It must be mentioned that the U.S. is not the only country interested in exploiting this tax free area located in the U.S.-Mexico border, but according to Judith Adler Hellman, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, among others, have moved plants to this region and even further to the south of the Mexican country. Thus, the core of the real problem lying behind the rise in the number of undocumented migrants into the U.S. is placed, according to the critic, at the aggressive economic policies that the U.S. has managed to implement all around the world by taking advantage of its command in the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

In agreement with the later perspective, Cultural Studies scholars Justin Akers Chacón and Mike Davis emphasize the organized violence at the origin of the implantation of the U.S.-Mexico border. First of all, Chacón and Davis remind the reader that what is deeply disturbing is not how present and common state oppression has been towards the Mexicana/o and Chicana/o individuals, but the “centrality of institutionalized private violence” (15) in the recreation of repressive racial and social regulation. They state that it is the neoliberal stand of the U.S. which has provoked that the economic gains be favored to “social sustainability” (89). Consequently, the whole U.S. economic system depends on the receiving of cheap labor, Mexicans most of them, in order to maintain and improve their profits. However, this economic system, dependable on a transnational work force to succeed, is always silenced by the public national rhetoric, which denies the long history of U.S.-Mexico migration encouraged by both nations. Mainstream discourses portray Mexican

immigrants and Chicana/os, in general, not only as the undesirable Other, but as a criminalized one. Stripping the history and explanation at the core of every immigration pattern, U.S. hegemonic rhetoric displaces the blame for every social malady from the compulsive neoliberalism to specific cultural communities. This strategy incites massive hysteria for the loss of the welfare society and places the blame on the very victims of the U.S. aggressive capitalist system. According to Hellman, the amount of money that the U.S. economy received from people without papers is at least \$10 billion. This money, the critic states, is collected through the Social Security taxes that these people will not benefit from, as they fear that lacking official citizenship denies them eligibility. As Chacón and Davis describe, “concomitant with the ‘denationalization’ of the global economy is the ‘renationalization’ of politics” (95), and, hence, public discourse revolves around methods of reinforcing the borders to “protect” the U.S. from “alien” immigration. As the scholars highlight, the legal incorporation of Mexican laborers into the working class could provoke their concurrence in union activities and political process. This unionized activism would represent a serious danger to the abundant gains of the corporations.

Chacón and Davis continue analyzing the various economic agreements that the U.S. has signed with Mexico, and which have lead to the one-sided profitable border industrialization. As an example of the radical changes and the widening of unequal conditions between U.S. and Mexico, the authors explain that while an average Mexican worker won about one-third of an average U.S. worker, after the impulse of aggressive neoliberalism, this difference has increased as much as a Mexican worker earning a one-eighth of his U.S.

counterpart. These scholars also contend that the low wages and poor conditions have engendered the profile of *maquiladora* workers. That is, men from the interior of Mexico risk crossing the border dismissing the *maquilas* on the Mexican side in order to secure higher salaries, while women stay at these assembly lines enduring terrible conditions. They underline the politically and socially convenience of such industrial layout which secures minimum wages for workers on both sides of the border and, at the same time, avoids any group uprising from the workers. Miriam Davidson's sociological study, carried in the twin cities of Nogales, in Arizona and Sonora, shows the complex situation lived by its inhabitants regarding the violence and policing of this area from both smugglers and Border Patrol agents, which provoke striking and continuous violations of their rights. Davidson focuses on the exceptional danger women find themselves in the highly controversial industry of *maquiladoras* and how the very nature of the setting incites the conflict and violence where free trade and militarization stands on. As Chicana writer Ana Castillo denounces, it is the "[l]ack of conscientización [is] what makes the maquiladora an ideal worker for the semi-legal, exploitative operations of multinational factory production" (*Massacre* 38).

However, Chacón and Davis consider that the worst effects of border militarization have resulted from Operation Gatekeeper initiated by former President Bill Clinton in 1994. As part of this operation, the scholars mention the enforcement of neoliberal policies in Mexico and Central America, and also a border militarization that has driven migrants to cross the border in more dangerous areas, where heat and the geographical design of the place have provoked a drastic increase on the number of deaths. While the documented

numbers among the migrants crossing the Arizona desert was low before 1994, according to Judith Adler Hellman, this amount has increased up to more than three thousand after that date. This rise is the direct result of the dramatic militarization and surveillance that regular entry points have suffered, and, thus, migrants are forced to try alternative and more dangerous spots to cross into the U.S. In Hellman's opinion, these extra burdens in the crossing of the border have only slowed the traffic. That is, those who cross into the U.S. now stay for longer periods in order to save the money to bring their families and to avoid the dangers of the crossing. Therefore, the greater militarization and surveillance of the U.S.-Mexico border has pushed migrants to stay longer in the U.S. Additionally, Chacón and Davis denounce that while the Minutement Project obsesses over the control and blockage of the thirty-seven Mexican access spots, the seventy-nine Canadian access points are poorly controlled. The fact that this militarization will not stop the migration one bit is clear for these scholars, who state that such enterprises ignore, or choose to overlook, the fundamental needs suffered by those who decide to cross the border.

In their study, Chacón and Davis also condemn the opportunistic inclusion of domestic terrorism in order to portray a menacing image of the immigrant worker. Although a migrant working force has always been part of the U.S. history, attaching this new set of threatening implications to the immigrants has increased nationalist and discriminatory attitudes in the U.S. society. The extreme fear of terrorist acts to take place again in U.S. grounds has proved very profitable for the political and economic interests of corporate America, and, as these critics claim, although no terrorist has ever been apprehended crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, mainstream discourse and media exploit

citizens' fear to displace the real reasons for the migration, the loss of welfare society and the threat of terrorist attacks against U.S. soil and citizens. Moreover, they continue explaining the political profit gained by both the Democratic and the Republican Parties. They claim that the Democratic Party is to blame in aiding the focus of the polemic at the border. Aligning with this idea, Hellman also pinpoints Hillary Clinton's racist attitude and disregard for non-Anglos when she describes how on March 8, 2006, she chose to be photographed with a group of Irish undocumented immigrants and, then, appeared at a meeting concerning the difficult situation of undocumented immigrants. She also agrees with Chacón and Davis, when she accuses the Democratic Party of ruling both houses of Congress and carrying on with legislations that could be considered more malicious than those passed and discussed by the previous Republican Party.

Modern border writers who have placed the border at the center and/or as the setting of their literary world have included different topics that reflect the concerns of the Chicana/o community as well as its connection with the geopolitical boundary and its Borderlands. During the revival of the Civil Rights Movement, border literature centered on the fundamental symbol of Chicana/os mythic homeland Aztlán. Therefore, border literature subscribed the interest of the Movement on the nationalistic claims and the rhetoric of Chicana/o identity. However, border literature also reflected some dissenting and alternative representations of the concept of the Borderlands. By the end of the 20th century, border writings focused more on the outcomes of the dramatic industrialization set at the border and drastically altered the lives of "borderlanders" (Donnan & Wilson 4). These changes present in the everyday

life of these dwellers came as the result of constant crossings of labor forces, the effect of U.S. hegemony among the Mexican American population on the American side of the border, and the introduction of the notion of a hybrid identity.

Sociologist Claire F. Fox stresses the importance of the audience to put aside the medias' portrayal of the U.S.-Mexico border and to focus on the real, physical and psychological effects this political construct has among the border inhabitants on both sides of the border, who might cross it in their day to day life or find themselves crossed by it. Either way, the agency or subject position of its inhabitants are in any way affected by the many social problematic happening, not accidently it must be said, in this area; that is, the direct effects and damages provoked by the pollution, militarization and the massive urbanization of the borderland. Fox explains that the varied ideological representations of this area during and after *El Movimiento*, created a cultural and political community rooted in this interpretation. This redefined site, renamed as Aztlán or the Borderlands, "erased the border in the first instance, and valorized it as a luminal zone in the second" (46). The scholar, hence, is critical with the ideological interpretation of this area in relation to the political objective regarding the situation of Chicana/os in the hostile U.S. society. According to Fox, these Chicana/o scholars seem to overlook the immediate reality and problematics of the area in return for an abstract and ideological conceptualization. What is more, she states that they have made usage of the U.S.-Mexico border to portray a space where a hybrid subjectivity is produced which represents the borderlanders' ability of crossing and embracing varied "cultural, linguistic, racial, or sexual systems throughout their lives" (199). Fox's

criticism seems to originate in the excessive attention paid to the conceptual and metaphorical experience of living in the Borderlands and overlooking the more real, repressive and constraining forces and circumstances taking place in the area.

On the other hand, scholar Claudia Sadowski-Smith brings attention to different border writers who write from the border and about the border. Among the many well-known Chicana/o writers, such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Cantú, Rolando Hinojosa, Arturo Islas, Helena María Viramontes, to mention a few, Sadowski-Smith includes the three authors that are included in this chapter, Lucrecia Guerrero, Ito Romo and Richard Yañez. As the scholar states, and in contrast to Claire F. Fox's statement, border writers present the border not only as a location, but as the very theme of their work. Besides, they also include the more symbolic representation and tradition of the mythical Chicana/o homeland, Aztlán. Hence, the U.S.-Mexico borderland becomes the content and the resort to provoke Chicana/o literary experimentation. Nevertheless, Sadowski-Smith stresses the differences among these writers and she connects them to the writers' generational differences. During the 80's and 90's, border writing was more concerned about the effects of a shifting border and how the constant crossings, physical and conceptual, affected and challenged traditional nation-state understandings and the concept of citizenship. At the same time, some writers encouraged an indigenous and feminist Chicana identity as native to the borderlands, such as Anzaldúa and Moraga, among others. According to Sadowski-Smith, the writings of the 21st century, and, hence, the works of Guerrero, Romo and Yañez presented here, are more concerned about the consequences that different modifications

regarding the U.S-Mexico border as a geopolitical construct have in the lives of Mexicans and Mexican Americans living on both sides. Therefore, these three authors and their literary works focus on the direct effects of globalization and the U.S. empire on the Mexican American communities at the border. Sadowski-Smith claims that these authors and their works take special attention in showing the increasing severance growing in recent years between Mexicans and Mexican Americans. This deep breach keeps increasing as the result of the U.S.-Mexico border's overmilitarization and overindustrialization, and is reflected in her words in the "spatialized gendered, class and political differences within US. Mexican communities" (22). That is, the scholar believes that these works of fiction are more interested in depicting and denouncing the factual living conditions, be them physical or emotional, than the more political interest regarding the border's connection to the Chicana/o homeland and identity formation. It is my believe, however, that not addressing issues of homeland, cultural or identity concerns does not decrease the political intend of these literary works, and, thus, issues such as the *mestiza* identity and cultural revisionism are as present as in previous more direct discussions of the topic. In other words, portraying the border situation and denouncing U.S. neoliberalism in contemporary Chicana literature encourages the multiple political and cultural interpretations and readings of these works.

As stated by the work of literary critics Jesús Benito and Ana María Manzananas, what is widely known as Border Theory is not limited only to the studies of Chicana/o literature and culture, but has become a center point from which to analyze and reinterpret other cultural and literary productions regarding different non-Anglo communities within the U.S. The alternative and

empowering Borderland approach that Chicana critic Gloria Anzaldúa coined has become essential to current literary studies, in which traditional arguments and perspectives are disregarded in favor of more urgent concerns by marginalized subjects. As they affirm, this new theoretical frame allows “a revisionist position which sees literatures and cultures not as finished and self-contained projects isolated from other influences, but as constructs based on interaction and dialogue, and which evolve and unfold relative to each other” (3). In other words, literature becomes a dynamic and changing frame in which the different participants and subject positions revise their experiences, and, through which, interconnected influences encourage new interpretations. Following these scholars’ analysis, then, and echoing Anzaldúa’s study, the border moves beyond its physicality. Hence, to deeply comprehend the border’s dynamics, Border Studies should avoid simplistic readings based only on its spatial essence, and examine it in relation to the social constructions provoked by and around it. Such interpretations provide the notion of border crossing a more compelling meaning and consequences in the lives of border inhabitants. This act, as the scholars describe the crossing, incites productive contacts that embrace contrasting outcomes. Besides, Anzaldúa stresses the importance of elevating the concept of Borderlands away from its conceptualization of “contact zones, liminal spaces or cultural force fields” (4), and to transcend them in order to include a more universal understanding existing in various places and time frames. Benito and Manzananas embrace the psychological, spiritual and sexual Borderlands that have been widely narrated in the writings of Chicana/os, Native Americans, African Americans and the Asian Americans, as well. Acknowledging the presence of various Borderlands in the identity formation

process and experiences of other non-Anglo individuals in the U.S., allows us to study the concepts of border crossing and Borderlands in terms of transgressive actions and/or oppressive silencing. In other words, depending on the agency or objectification suffered by the individual who either crosses or is crossed, the border compels the individual to speak out or to be silenced. That is, as Benito and Manzanos explain, border literature is “a transgressive discourse whose aim is to render possible, within the fixed cultural, literary or linguistic bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted” (13). However, critic Claire F. Fox states that such usage “rarely tie[s] to the US-Mexico border region” (2). Norma Klahn differs from Fox in that she considers that different Chicana feminist fictions represent issues of identity formation and its relations and connection to space in varied manners. Locations become very pertinent in the identity construction process of the Chicana feminist as she experiences borders –physical, geographical or psychological- in remembering her past. The importance of geographies, both social and symbolic, is at the core of her perception of society. Thus, Klahn names this kind of accounts as “narratives of place” (116) where identities are formed in relation to geographies which are themselves, reminders and witness of a specific history, discourse and community. This point is clearly represented in the following story, “Rio Grande,” by Richard Yañez included in his work, *El Paso del Norte*:

The moon that loomed earlier was lost behind rivers of clouds. Whether I looked right or left, El Paso and Juárez appeared the same –dark and dirty and dwarfed by mountains. I didn't know if I was losing or gaining my rights. (90)

In this story, the importance of space to the construction of identity is very clearly described. As the events occur, the author presents the reader the toponymy of the place where the actions take place at the same time as the reader internalizes its high connotative meaning: “Rio Grande,” “Avenida Juárez,” “Santa Fe Bridge,” etc. The story is set in five different places whose literal and literary development the reader is able to visualize. Although the physical aspect of the story shares importance with the characters themselves, it is necessary to mention that the border that sets both nations apart is perceived not just as a spatial rift, but as a temporal one, as well, “[a] full moon hung over the Sierra de Juárez on the other side. Its dirty-orange reflection played in the full river that cut us from the Third World, a whole other time zone” (Yañez 83). The distinction between these two nations, thus, entails a greater separation than the physical one, and it is these two spaces and times which our main character inhabit, swinging between both positions until he chooses a version on his own.

Literary critic Carmen Calíz-Montoro describes Borderland literature as that which at the same time includes such geographical setting and, then, moves beyond its specificity to deal with issues that are not specific to the area. According to this scholar, the physical and the emotional are connected, but, at the same time, do not limit each other. Furthermore, this Borderland is never static, but suffers constant transformations and changes, which provoke contradictions. As Calíz-Montoro describes, Chicana/o Borderland aesthetic is a location where “a battleground of identities” (14) takes place. She also includes the non-site-specificity of the Borderland experiences when she states that more and more individuals have become used to living without and within

borders as the borders themselves have turned more common and artificial. As a result of this increased bordered reality, where borders become more subtle and stronger at the same time, Calíz-Montoro admits the apparent contradiction involved in this statement. However, she names such situation as living in the “borderlessness” (44) and believes that the contradiction of this statement is the proof of the constructedness of the systems of exclusion.

In a similar trend, literary critic Mary Pat Brady describes Chicana border crossing narratives as the attempt to overcome the many restraints forced upon borderland inhabitants by the border system. Brady, similar to Calíz-Montoro, states that the temporal and geographical characteristics of the border are displaced from the narratives in order to present a more active relation between the border crossers and the border structures. She denounces the myriad ways in which the border “attempts to disarticulate people from the signs of their subjectivity” (152) in their urge to strip the individual of any agency and individuality. As a consequence, the very existence of the border systems is dependent on the “dis-remembering and dismembering” of the individuals to be able to impose itself. The scholar states that Chicana/o border writers perform an act of challenge when they narrativize the crossing as a part of the identity construction process in which the oppressive policy of the border is rejected. Besides, she furnishes the act of crossing with new meaning in that it involves the acknowledgement of historical reports, personal memories and national inventions that have its effects in an individual’s identity formation. By doing so, Brady connects Marta Alarcón’s concept of “subjectivity-in-process” and Anzaldúa’s “mestiza consciousness” to the exceptional conditions set upon the crossing of U.S.-Mexico border. Aligning her concept with the other two

feminists, Brady stresses the hybrid nature of Chicana/os as border-crossers beyond time and geographical realms, which is in constant redefinition and interconnected with varied elements that affect it in return. Such conception of the border-crossing experience, proves Brady's statement that "[m]aking identities is integral to making places; places get made partially through identity-making activities" (152).

At the beginning of the story of "Rio Grande," Joe, the main character, describes the Borderlands from a distanced point of view and he echoes the U.S. hegemonic discourse where everything Mexican is perceived as suspicious. Moreover, the presence of this physical border represents the hybridity of the two nations, and as a result, the story is populated by individuals who do not dwell on neither side of the border, and that are perceived as suspicious by both: "While you have fifty-fifty chance of the U.S. Border Patrol being professional, I'm certain, the odds are less with the Mexican police" (Yañez 85). There is no doubt that the physical border becomes another character in the story and not just the setting where the character's many bi-national crossings occur. These crossings reflect the multiple interactions and negotiations that will define Joe's identity as a border subject. When he is present at a police raid in the Kmart's parking lot, the eyewitnesses seem to sympathize with the immigrants that are rounded up by the police. One of them is white and the other one is described as Chicano, but the racial loyalty is set aside by the sympathy that the main character feels toward the "illegals." The tension grows when two of them, a man and a woman, manage to escape. It is, then, when the police brutality is divided in two fronts: on the one hand, the "gringo" goes after the Mexican male, and, on the other hand, the Chicano

pursues the Mexican female. This representation of the forces of order as oppressive, hence, adds the violence set on gender basis to the already existing racial conflict. In this story, then, the reader learns that the abuse of power can come from different racial, gender and national sources. Meanwhile, Joe places himself sometimes at the center and other times at the periphery of power. He seems to have internalized U.S. inequality and superiority when facing a Mexican individual. But as the night goes on, and so does the story, his multiple preconceptions weaken and it becomes harder for him to locate his loyalty within a U.S. society that discriminates him.

This awakening takes place as the result of constant crossings, contacts and experiences during a weekend's night. Almost at the end of the story, when Joe crosses the bridge for the second time to go home, he finds himself in the middle of a pacific demonstration on the U.S. side of the bridge where a group of young Chicana/os claim the unity of both sides of the border, and the dissolution of the differences that this border represents. Joe's lack of interest and contempt toward the demonstration mimics the behavior of those Anglo youngsters that back home from the weekend's party are also crossing the bridge, but with whom Joe clearly does not identify with neither. When the police show up, however, Joe overcomes from his passivity and tries to help the protesters. This ideological awakening is described as a nervous tingling at the beginning of the story in the Kmart's parking lot, and ends up becoming much obvious in the physical pain caused by the brutal beating that Joe receives from a female police officer. His coming to terms is so strong that "when I asked for my watch and ID, a Border Patrol agent said they'd been misplaced. I know I'll never get them back" (Yañez 91-92). The loss of his watch and ID mirrors a

greater loss, as its metaphorical meaning might refer to Joe's loss of his previous understanding of reality and who he was.

The presence of these border hybrid identities has its most well-known advocate in Gloria Anzaldúa, whose groundbreaking work on the notion of multicultural identities recovered the celebrated Chicana/os' indigenous past. She was also the driving intellectual force behind the concept of *la frontera* as the feminist topography that would challenge and surpass the symbol of Aztlán. The Borderlands became, thus, in Anzaldúa's hands the inclusive and redefining space that would in turn make possible the construction of a new feminist hybrid identity for Chicanas. Border literature from early 21st century continued to portray the exceptional conditions taking place in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands and the consequences they had in the communities on both sides of the border. The multilayered realities of these borderlands are carefully portrayed in the literary works included in this chapter. I have chosen Richard Yañez and Lucrecia Guerrero's short stories entitled *El Paso de Norte* (2003) and *Chasing Shadows* (2000) on the one hand, and Ito Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge* (2000), on the other hand, in order to underline these works' mirror-like ability to reflect the complex and urgent issues happening in this area. The choice answers to my interest in including different literary genres in order to show the variety and ability of Chicana/o literature. In the case of Romo and Yañez their settings are real border towns, while Guerrero prefers to create the fictive border town of Mesquite in Arizona. The short stories by Guerrero and Yañez, and Romo's lyrical novel, structured in short narratives, compose a vignette-like depiction of border life and they all evoke the female storytelling tradition mentioned earlier. What is more, not only does the form resemble

female tradition, but most of the characters in these works are women. Consequently, although different issues reflecting racial, class and national identities are displayed in these works of fiction, the issue of gender is foremost in order to understand border dynamics.

Among the most important topics in modern Chicana/o border literature is the depiction of everyday lives and cultures throughout the Borderlands. Under the ordinary commonalities of day-to-day activities lies the complex negotiation of Chicana/o identity in this geopolitical marker that symbolizes a separation that was politically imposed. According to Patricia L. Price's interpretation of Belden Lane, "placelessness involves a loss of physical and emotional contact with the day-to-day activities" (84). In the U.S.-Mexico borderlanders' case, it is important to keep in mind that the space they inhabit is, at the same time, separated and united by a border which typifies the arbitrary nature of nation states' spatial divisions. Therefore, belonging to a borderland created by a border, which in itself confines and opens nations, provokes a particular identity among its inhabitants that defies any traditional modes of nationalism.

Moreover, U.S.-Mexico border writing "attempts to account for representational space and the representation of space, their interrelationship and their links with social practice" (Saldívar 91). That is, these writings stress the idea that spaces are shaped by social practices and, thus, different spaces enable the birth of different identities. The interrelation between space and social practices that would define border individuals are presented in the apparently unimportant commonalities of day-to-day border life. However, this first impression is immediately altered by the representation of a culture that challenges the traditional monocultural value system imposed in the U.S.-

Mexico borderlands by the state powers of Washington and Mexico DC. The established confining borders are crisscrossed along the different stories that offer the reader a glimpse to alternative representations of national, racial, class and gender identities. The redefinition and cross-examination of these social constructions by U.S.-Mexico border dwellers also take place through the recovery of traditional symbols and myths, and their redefinition in the practice of everyday life. Figures such as *Malinche*, *La Llorona* and Guadalupe are, once again, some of the female symbols that inhabit these Borderlands along with the fictional characters of the story. If “[s]ymbols give people a cognitive map of the world” (Donnan & Wilson 65) then, the incorporation of these legends help border inhabitants to define their identity based on notions of dynamic and fluid spaces.

It is important to recall that Chicana literature in general has analyzed the role that internal borders such as gender, class, race and sexuality have in the production of space. By challenging these traditionally dichotomous systems, Chicanas have been able to redefine a space that is more comprehensive and which grants a more democratic use. A clear example of this last statement would be the focus of much border Chicana/o literature to the ways different spaces are experienced by women. In other words, living in the borderlands and experiencing the physical crossing as part of their daily routines enable border individuals to shift between different internal borders. Consequently, because of the peculiarity of the borderlands, the value systems of each nation are not as rigid as they would be in a more defined national area. The characters portrayed in border literature usually represent the ambiguity and dynamism of different identity axes resulted from the frequent travelling between two nations

and the proximity of it. Thus, such physical and psychological crossings are the perfect symbol for the fluid and in-progress border identity. Brady develops this idea when she states that:

For just as subjectivity-in-process implies that subject formation involves multiple temporalities, these crossing narratives also indicate the extent to which the production of space- in this case, the production of a particular national border –entails the production of subjectivities. (52)

Echoing this critic's notion that subject formation and the conceptualization of space are mutually defining, Ito Romo's *El Puente/The Bridge* spins around a unique dynamic locus that defines the U.S.-Mexico border, and this is the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo. Many Chicana/o critics have equaled the crossing of this geopolitical border with a symbolic internal crossing that allows individuals to develop their identity beyond the nation-state concept. Thus, crossing the border might, at the same time, become a simple routine or a revolutionary factor in the development of a border individual's identity. In the lyrical novel by Romo a kaleidoscope of border women are presented and their lives examined around the time they are crossing, or about to cross the U.S.-Mexican border. This mundane action turns critical to their lives because of the shocking discovery that the river has turned red overnight and, thus, all the media's attention, national and international, is focused on this borderland which is usually neglected. In a similar way in which the red color brings the attention of the fictional media, Ito Romo's novel stirs the attention of the reader to the complex lives of women living in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. What is more,

the singularity of the crossing act is taken to its extreme when life and death occur right in the middle of the crossing as described in the following passage.

The tempestuous sky that swept in from nowhere that afternoon suddenly burst open with a crack, and the thick downpour of hot South Texas rain mingled with the warm water of Soledad's womb, dripping slowly down her legs as she walked toward the American side to have her baby. (119)

In this excerpt, Romo presents Soledad's crossing as a dramatically conscious choice. The moment she realizes she is about to give birth, she starts crossing the border bridge toward the American side. Nothing else is told in the novel about this character, but her name and her daring act give hints about the reasons and the background of this character. The reader becomes conscious about the advantages or expectations Soledad might have for having her baby born in North American soil. She might feel that such a risky crossing is necessary in her attempt to improve her life. Having a baby born right in the middle of the border might also symbolize the border-crossers' rebirth and hope of transformation. Furthermore, the border also becomes the site of death in the case of the character called Pura. The proximity of this character's death is clear to her, as well, and this is why she flies to Mexico in order to remember and recover her memories one last time. In her way home, Pura sets her foot at the border in the middle of all the excitement and she dies of a heart attack while her last thoughts address the familiarity of the mulberry smell coming from the river. This scent brings her childhood memories of her parents' house by the river, and so, Pura, who flies to Mexico with the purpose of remembering, dies

with a sweet childhood memory in mind. Another elderly woman is represented by the character of Estela through whom the author brings different realities together as can be seen in the following excerpt:

Estela left her husband of fifty-seven years at the age of seventy-five. She packed a couple of housedresses into her plastic mesh bag and walked to the American side of the river, following the same route she took everyday- only this time it was for good. She would never come back to this damned Mexico and her damned Mexican husband. (47)

As explained in this passage, on the one hand, crossing the border for Estela is part of a routine in her daily life at the borderlands. However, her story represents one of the clearest examples in which the singularity of border crossing is taken to its limits. The moment the reader encounters Estela, she is crossing the bridge. This physical action parallels her emotional break with her traditional values and her enduring harsh life as the result of such value system. Estela plans killing her husband and, thus, taking revenge for all the emotional and economical abuses she has undergone as the faithful wife and mother she has been. At seventy-five, however, she decides to take action and so crosses the border to the American side. The purpose of this crossing, however, is not to escape from Mexico, but to prepare his husband's dinner, poison it, and, then, after crossing back the border to set the table and to tend to his husband in a vindictive farce of tradition. In other words, crossing the border to the American side to buy and prepare the meal represents Estela's transformation into an active subject, which comes only at the expense of the attempted killing of her husband.

The site of the border with its political implications directly affects the border-crossing experience in cultural, economical, and legal terms. Due to the proximity of bordering nations to each other, their value systems come together and/or crash at the Borderlands. In Mary Pat Brady's words "Chicana/o writers have studied the mechanics of a border that is neither static nor monumental but is instead a process implicated in terror and revenue collection" (82). Consequently, its inhabitants are forced to restructure their values, and to redefine their identities and the system they are based on. Although examples of the positive or constructive possibilities that border crossings entitles are real, it is, nevertheless, of great importance to analyze the negative aspects of the border and the violence in which it stands without impunity. This violence comes as a direct result of the U.S. and Mexican governments' profitable policies through history which persist despite every alleged attempt from both governments to end it.

Due to the special features of the border as the site where a nation ends and the other begins, the border offers new possibilities of profit. Taking advantage of the different values and politics of each nation, border inhabitants and governmental forces take advantage of this political construction. Prostitution and immigration are two examples of these lucrative, but questionable businesses that survive and evolve under the domain of both nations. In these cases, the individuals involved in such activities do not pretend to challenge the state power for an ideological purpose, but on the contrary, the profit collected by these enterprises depends on the existence and strength of the border as a nation-state marker. The advantages of these activities and, therefore, both nations' interest in perpetuating them, become remarkable when

their economical gains are considered. Besides, the ambiguous nature as to their legality or illegality provides the U.S. and Mexican government arguments to increase employment in the border-related enforcement, such as police, army and immigration officials. These border-confining measures coexist with very strong political discourses from both nations regarding the need to eradicate such surreptitious activities; nevertheless, “an enduring plotline persists: the battle between good and evil” (Price 122) promoted and enforced by both nations. At the border, then, the connotations of good and evil are redefined by the border subjects that engage in what is regarded as illegal venture, and by the government agents who promote this legal breach through their ambiguous policies. Accordingly, the border becomes a structure in which opposing notions regarding legal and illegal economies are gathered, and, thus, “border crossings implicate the twin narratives of inclusion and incorporation on the one hand, and of exclusion and dispossession, on the other” (Donnan & Wilson 107). This is why crossing the border implies that the individual questions her/his value systems in order to redefine her/himself or so as to make profit in this unique site.

As crossing the border becomes part of everyday life, such physical dynamic brings an ideological reconfiguration that puts into question the validity of nation-state definitions based on the “fixity in politically delineated space” (Donnan & Wilson 109). In other words, crossing the U.S.-Mexico border incites these individuals to challenge traditional nation-based identity constructions, and allows the crosser to take advantage of the economic and political inequalities created by the border. Related to this line of thinking, the character of Cindy in Ito Romo’s novel, *El Puente/The Bridge*, witnesses and abuses the

unequal conditions suffered by the inhabitants on the Mexican side of the border:

Cindy felt like leaping out of the chair and running all the way back across the bridge, but she knew that this situation was perfect for her plan. Since the doctor did all the work herself, all Cindy had to do was destroy the impression, the mold. [...] Who were they going to believe, a hardworking American girl like herself or some two-bit Mexican dentist who couldn't even afford to have a decent office on Guerrero like all the other dentists that serviced the Americans? (25)

She also personifies the U.S. citizens' superiority complex when dealing with Mexicans and Mexican Americans perpetuated by a racist system. Living in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands makes its inhabitants aware of the disparities of each side, so, Cindy plans to take advantage of the extraordinary situation occurring there. The red waters of the Rio Grande attract the attention of U.S. media, and Cindy, in her desperation to overcome her poor life and get noticed, decides this is her chance to become famous and to leave her present life behind. However, her success depends on her tricking a Mexican dentist on the other side of the border. Therefore, crossing the border enables Cindy to implement the racist U.S. discourse even outside the national boundaries. Cindy places herself above the Mexican dentist even though her working class background would assign her a lower position to the educated and professional dentist. The poverty present in the dentist's office mirrors the unequal conditions of both nations, and, so, the proximity of the border allows American citizens to impose their racist, sexist and class discriminations not only on non-Anglo citizens in the U.S., but also Mexican citizens in their own country. In other words, the

U.S.-Mexico borderland presents multilayered realities that go beyond the geopolitical border, and, thus, enable or disable its inhabitants in very distinctive ways.

The story of Cindy shows the stark differences between people living on different sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. These dissimilarities make the crossing a shocking process for the underprivileged. Therefore, in Cindy's case Othering becomes the means of exploitation that is available to her as part of the more privileged community within the Borderlands. However, when comparing her situation to that of mainstream U.S. society, Cindy represents the unprivileged working-class woman. Nevertheless, living in the borderlands and crossing the border, she becomes the oppressor rather than the oppressed; thus, the border enables her with a privilege unavailable for her in her own nation. However, this empowering instance does not last long when her face is shown by cameras recording the red river and she is publicly ridiculed by a popular TV show in mainstream media and become the Other on which U.S. hegemony strengthens itself. In this story, thus, Cindy plays the trickster figure presented by scholar Patricia L. Price in relation to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. As Prices explains it:

The trickster provides an example of a character who, by definition, navigates uncertain topographies, and whose knowledge can be extended to the sifting matrix of space and power on the U.S.-Mexico border. (148-9)

Hence, the trickster takes advantage of the fact that the border implies a weakening of state force and control, and, thus, it can be challenged. As a

consequence of this relaxation from state powers, then, different activities are regarded in a more dissipated manner. Price considers as tricksters different kind of individuals from wanderers to thieves; hence, any individual who transgresses the boundaries both physical and ideological of both fulfill this role. At the same time, she includes the very border as a trickster figure in the sense that it shifts and changes in opposition to any other traditionally defined place. Therefore, if the place itself might be considered as vague and hard to confine, then, the individuals who live and cross it become the personification of fluidity and multiplicity. What is more, the characteristics of this geopolitical boundary turn even the most common practices in border daily life into actions that provoke effects beyond the reality of these individuals. Common errands such as shopping and doing groceries become an exceptional experience at the border which includes the shifting economic and cultural values of both sides. That is, shopping at the U.S.-Mexico border might provide economical, cultural, and class profits that go beyond the regular interaction between buyer and seller. Obtaining specific items or services might provide a cultural and symbolic plus to the buyer, be it Mexican or North American. However, not only products are purchased in the borderland; but human beings as well. The following section will focus on two of the most profitable, but morally problematic human exchanges taking place, and, in fact, enforced by the very existence of the border: prostitution and migration.

The unequal labor market conditions on each side of the U.S.-Mexican border are key for the success of this business in the borderlands. The poverty of Mexico forced many immigrants to move to the northern cities located close to the border so as to make a living. The BIP attracted great numbers of

unskilled laborers in search for work. The desperate conditions brought by poverty in Mexico, provoked in great part by U.S. politics and wars, pushed many immigrants to move to the border area. Nevertheless, the severe poverty on the Mexican side of the border and the impossibility of everyone working at the *Maquilas*, along with the fact that even those who worked were poorly paid, made the border a “perfect” setting for the flourishing of prostitution. This business based on power disparity between the worker and the buyer, not only perpetuates the racial, class and gender discriminations existing in each nation, but it has become, over time, a well structured and succeeding business, in which the states and its agents have been implicated. Following Donnan and Wilson’s study on border prostitution, there are two main types of prostitutes depending on the location they work from. On the one hand, there are the *clandestinas* who do not depend on anyone and work on their own. This “freedom” allows them not to be so place-bounded and they can work in different locations. On the other hand, there are the *ficheras* who work for a particular bar and, thus, must pay for their “protection.” It is this last kind of prostitution that becomes central in the following passage from Richard Yañez’s “Rio Bravo. (A corrida)”:

She glanced at the security guard, who had one eye on the TV, and she took the money and stuffed it in her bosom. [...] With no words said, she stood on her tiptoes, kissed him on the cheek, and went and sat on the security guard’s lap. As Chuco approached the front door, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the man reach inside her blouse and grab more than just the money. (79)

As seen in this passage, and anticipated also in the title's explicit sexual reference, the exploitation these often underage prostitutes suffer is unquestionable, and the social and economical helplessness they endure make them ideal victims. The characters of Yañez's *El Paso del Norte*, similar to Ito Romo's and Lucrecia Guerrero's, live in a physical border where social, linguistic and cultural crossings take place in their everyday life. But we cannot limit this work to issues related only to the Chicana/o community, Richard Yañez depicts a reality that exists and is repeated in different places all over the world where subjects do not play a unique role, but alternate between impersonating enduring subjects and oppressive agents. In the story of Río Bravo, the reader catches a glimpse into a bar set on the Mexican side of the border where prostitution is part of the regular transactions between the owner and the clients. The main character of the story, Chuco, an ex-gang member, has crossed to the Mexican side to temper his rage after arguing with his girlfriend Xochitl.

The reason of the argument is Xochitl's sense of responsibility as a daughter to take care of his drunken father. Her internalized gender role shows the perpetuation of a tradition in which women find themselves trapped between the past impersonated by their abusive male relatives, and the present and future they share with similar male partners. In this case, Chuco's urge to escape what he considers an unfair situation, concludes in him getting drunk and beaten in a bar on the Mexican side. More importantly, this tale portrays the terrible conditions in which women and young girls have to make a living in order to survive. Clear racist-sexist stereotypes that undermine colored women are key to the success of prostitution at the border. This exploitation is not only

perpetuated by the American soldiers, who happen to be a great part of the bar's consumers, but, also, by Chuco himself. His excitement and attraction towards the dark-skinned young prostitute is what causes an older prostitute to beat him until he loses consciousness. Chuco's longing for this teenage young girl parallels the racist-sexist values of Anglo society towards colored women as sexual objects, and thus, Chuco's fixation on her shows his internalized race, class, and sexist discrimination.

By working in a bar, prostitutes are apparently offered a more secure workplace. Inside the bar, various individuals play different roles in order to maximize the economic profit, often at expense of decent working conditions. To secure the "protection" of the bar personnel, these prostitutes' scarce gains diminish when they pay their fee. As a consequence, this protection-abuse cycles help perpetuate prostitution as the girls can barely survive in such hierarchically organized exploitation. What can be learned in Richard Yañez's story is repeated by Donnan and Wilson's study in relation to the U.S. and Mexican governments' part in the development and maintenance of this business, "both indirectly by facilitating the conditions under which it was able to flourish, and more directly by the interest which they eventually took or failed to take in its regulations" (94).

According to these scholars' study, it was the American military that apparently came with the idea of out-of-town locations for prostitution during the occupation of Chihuahua in 1916. Supposedly, the reason behind this relocation was to secure the health of the American soldiers by protecting them from the extension of venereal diseases. Later on, and according to Donnan and Wilson's research, in 1918 prostitution was relocated, once again, across the

border in Mexico so as to respect the moral reform happening in the U.S. Altogether then, these historical facts do not only show the deep involvement of the U.S. army in relation to the business of prostitution as it has become now, but it is also valuable in providing a new interpretation of what is rendered acceptable or not in the public discourse. That is, the fact that the importance of placeness to the security and profit of prostitutes is at the core of the business. Besides, out-of-town areas limit the freedom of prostitutes while guaranteeing and even enhancing the exploiters' power. It is in the interest of politics, then, that prostitution is located across the border, not only so as to continue its existence, but also to be able to profit, in moral and economical terms, by locating it in the less privileged side of the border. Hence, "[s]witching jurisdiction –which often involved only a short bus ride- could thus render the illegal legal" (Donnan & Wilson 94). During the mid 20th century, prostitution continued to be a lucrative and state-organized business which was now placed under the jurisdiction of the Mexican government. In these years, the complicity of U.S. and Mexican governments pervaded as most of the clients belonged to the American servicemen located in the military bases close to the border. This allegiance is, thus, on the very bases of the origin of prostitution on the border and its long history up to today. Both nations have profited from this business while often publicly condemning it.

In a similar manner to what happened with prostitution, the reality of migration between the U.S. and Mexico is a certainty that both nations have been interested in encouraging and maintaining in direct and indirect ways. The *Bracero* Program taking place during the mid 20th century is one of the clearest examples of the binational profits aroused from the crossing of borders in both

directions. On the one hand, the U.S. government found a cheap labor force that would supply their temporary lack of manual laborers to work their fields, and, on the other hand, the responsibility of providing jobs to the poor northern states in Mexico was greatly lightened by the migration of Mexican laborers to the U.S. side of the border. The economic gains brought by the laborers helped to provide to their communities back home and, thus, improved their neglected condition. Therefore, it is no wonder that criticism has resulted from the discrepant measures taken by the U.S. government in relation to the crossing of undocumented migrants when “publicly declared policy towards them is regularly subverted by the requirements of managing everyday political and economical realities” (Donnan & Wilson 99). Once again, resembling the politics toward prostitution, the public demands a more severe border control in their fear of the Other migrant. This fear, implanted and encouraged by the U.S. nationalist discourse, however, demonizes this necessary bulk of cheap labor that benefit U.S. businesses and economic systems by working in substandard labor conditions that no U.S. citizen will agree to perform. This ambivalent attitude, then, creates an ambiance of uncertainty where the borders between legal and illegal are blurred. As a consequence, these borderlanders’ status becomes also undetermined. This issue stays unresolved and, hence, becomes a source of anxiety in the case of individuals who fear the consequences of bringing attention to their status. In the following excerpt from Ito Romo’s *El Puente/The Bridge*, this matter is dramatically displayed:

There was no one she could call except the police, and the police could probably do nothing for her since he was on the other side. And the police on the other side, well,

they would only try to get money from her; she knew that. As soon as the sun comes up, she thought as tears rolled down her cheeks, I'll go across the river and find him myself. (115)

For the character of Sofia, the border becomes not only the path into the unknown in relation to her husband's whereabouts, but also fills her with fear for her well-being. Her husband's daily journey to the other side of the border has become part of their life as it is for a great number of workers who cross the bridge in both ways on everyday basis. Besides, it is the very border which secures their economic income. However, this boundary turns threatening the moment her husband disappears. The border symbolizes the passage into unfamiliar zones where Sofia does not feel secure or protected. At her home, however, the same anxiety chokes her in relation to the Mexican police. Thus, Sofia is forced to do the crossing on her own and to try to find her husband without any help from law enforcers. The illegal situation of most day laborers on the American side turns them into perfect victims of exploitation and abuse in the hand of their bosses, and they become individuals with no saying or voice. Therefore, both nations indulge in keeping the border related crimes among the unprivileged communities on both sides of the border.

The U.S.-Mexico borderlands are a paradigm of how subversive economies are necessary to maintain the economy, value systems and regulations both nations stand on. According to Donnan and Wilson, this subversive economies are inherently contradictory in that its survival depends on the existing of a geopolitical boundary that is challenged; that is, if the U.S.-Mexico border did not exist and the crossing from one nation to the other was

legal and free the gains collected from prostitution and immigration would end. This loss would represent an economic setback that neither nation is willing to accept. Consequently, U.S. and Mexican governments are both responsible in enforcing the border structure through group or individual measures that perpetuate the violence and repression happening in it.

As scholars Elizabeth Martínez and Ed McCaughan explain, the long tradition of migration between Mexico and the U.S. was based in an unbalanced relationship between the two nations, which, then, profoundly conditioned their trading requisites. Moreover, the NAFTA passage and the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) stressed even more the unequal economic relations and the U.S.'s aggressive trading, which resulted in the disparate economic gains of the U.S. in exchange to the even worse labor conditions of Mexican nationals. All in all, then, the relation between these two nations could be described as Mexico representing the labor force necessary to carry on with U.S. agrarian and industrial businesses. According to these scholars, although this labor force operates beyond national borders, their labor conditions and profit is determined by the unequal positions "within the capitalist world-system" (34), which both countries stay face to face, the superiority of the United States as the result of the historical exploitative relations toward Mexico. Martínez and McCaughan describe this Mexican work force as a stateless bulk that functions in a transnational context. This condition has produced a distinct labor force that goes beyond national alliances which base their existence on the capricious needs of economy. The tradition of this particular working class has been present since the beginning of the 1900s and it has not limited to the U.S.-Mexico border area, but has expanded as the capital needed, all throughout the

Southwest. Such peculiar condition results from, on the one hand, Mexico's believe of solving the problem of unemployment in the country and which promotes emigration, and, on the other hand, the United States, whose economic superiority depends on the work performed by these people they, nevertheless, despise. Following this line of thought, Martínez and McCaughan describe the role colonization has played and continues to play in order to maintain these unequal relations between these two nations. First of all, colonization was the means by which the Southwest became part of the U.S. territory and, then, developed into the setting where transnational enterprises took place and transnational workers established. Beside, when studying the Mexicans and Chicana/os' current conditions in the U.S., these scholars denounce that they suffer the exploited conditions that people in colonial contexts have suffered around the world. They have arrived to this conclusion by describing these workers not so much in terms of nationalities, but by moving beyond geopolitical locations and by stressing their position as a culturally different community within U.S. hegemony.

Unfortunately, violence at the border is not restricted to the way state power or enforcements oppress marginalized individuals in order to gain profit from them. According to the latest trends of thought, violence in relation to environmental dangers affects the same underprivileged communities that labor-related violence does. In other words, the border itself seems to purposely fail to prevent the human currents across the border in order to profit by it. Neoliberalism is constructed on the basis of borderless and aggressive capitalism propelled by globalization through different industrial and post-industrial programs. This massive and uncontrolled industrialization along the

border has brought great ecological damages that are translated into polluted air, water and lands. Once again, U.S. and Mexican nations denounce its existence while, at the same time, fail to acknowledge their direct involvement in creating such a discriminatory and deadly situation. The centrality of this ecological disaster is paralleled by the importance that the issue of ecocriticism plays in Ito Romo's novel. As mentioned earlier, the whole set of stories are interconnected by the time and geographic position that every character share. Besides, the event that has so many people gathered around the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo River is the unexpected, and, thus, suspicious coloring of its waters:

She really did not care about her own drinking problem, but if what they said was true, then she had to get some water for her little granddaughter who was born with a spinal defect. [...] One of the doctors, the one from the American side, said that it was probably because Perla's daughter had drunk water from the tap during her pregnancy instead of the water from the plastic jugs. (62-3)

As this passage presents, the right of everyone to clean water is one of the most important rights ecofeminists are fighting to secure. The polluted air and water of the U.S.-Mexico border towns are a direct result of the radical industrialization of this area, and the lack of infrastructure and housing. People living in the *colonias* -residential areas that lack most of the basic infrastructures- or even regular border towns are forced to use this contaminated water to wash themselves and cook their food. In this passage, the reader encounters the character of Perla, who lives on the Mexican side of the bridge and makes her living as an alcoholic prostitute on the American side.

She is an outcast in her own community for being an old female prostitute and a drunk. It is in her way back to her husband on the Mexican side that Perla runs into her friend Dora, also an alcoholic, and learns about the Rio Grande being red. In Perla's case, unlike other characters' of this novel, the Rio Grande does not represent a bad omen or an accusation for her behavior, but an opportunity to defeat them. When she learns about the red river's healing powers, she does not think about herself, but about her granddaughter. She feels somehow responsible for her spinal defect. An American doctor pointed the tap water Perla's daughter drunk during her pregnancy as the probable reason for the child's health problem. The red Rio Grande then becomes the only hope for Perla's guilty conscience. It is in Nature, in the fluidity of this third-space where Perla relies. The polluted water that has caused her granddaughter's illness has changed and has become her last hope for a cure. In this story, Perla interacts with the Rio Grande by retrieving some water in her emptied beer can for her granddaughter.

The main purpose of environmental justice initiatives is to make sure that communities which are clearly discriminated within the U.S. society on the basis of race, class and gender systems do not also become the recipient of discriminated environmental contamination. According to the studies pursued by these ecological initiatives, the risk of being exposed to environmental pollution is increased by the race, class and gender discriminations implanted by the politics of U.S. hegemony. It is the objective of these initiatives, then, to defend the rights of the non-Anglo poor to live in environmentally safe conditions, and to enjoy and have access to the advantages of natural resources. In short, their goal is to eliminate the "racist and sexist implications in the unequal distribution

of economic wealth and in the neglect for people of color's health and well-being" (Adamson, Evans & Stein 374).

The conclusions brought by a study directed by the UCC-CRJ (The United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice) in 1987 showed that race was the leading factor that contributed to a higher number of commercial hazardous waste facilities in the nearby area to where people lived. Thus, the colored non-Anglos are racially discriminated to suffer health risks and denied access to natural resources. On the contrary, the privileged Anglo minority is doubly rewarded by the U.S. racist-sexist system to enjoy a cleaner environment and to access to the wealth of natural resources. In environmental justice promoters' words, the importance of a healthy environment is not only crucial for the individual's health, but it also provides the communities with a sense of well-being. Hence, different community-based activities and projects are more easily planned to encourage an active neighborhood environment. These studies prove the direct relation between social oppression and environmental issues within the U.S. society. The construction of certain landscapes and its narratives in order to build a specific discourse of inclusion and exclusion has been previously explained in relation to different place-based nationalist discourses along the history of the U.S. Therefore, it is not surprising to assert that similar distribution along "us" and "them" systems have been used to decide who is more likely to suffer the negative outcomes of overindustrialized and polluted areas. When environmentally hazardous sites were built in order to privilege the few white, how far from them would pollution be located and who would suffer its aftermaths was decided, too. In other words, U.S. nature or wilderness is described as being "*culturally constructed*

locations” (Adamson, Evans & Stein 183) that have been forced upon the less privileged communities along race, gender and class axis. This reality is clearly reflected in Ito Romo’s *El Puente/The Bridge*, where industries from both nations spill their waste without any regard to its inhabitants, oftentimes, the same workers who make such industrial profit possible. According to environmental studies, the changes pursued in the physical landscapes sometimes enable its participants’ political perception and participation. That is, improving the location where daily activities take place encourage its inhabitants to get involved in changing some of the fundamental issues, such as housing, education and unemployment that perpetuate their marginalized position within society.

On the other hand, and parallel to *El Puente/The Bridge*’s argument’s message, ecofeminists denounce that in the eurocentric society of the U.S. women have been diminished and regarded as less important from the moment the Europeans set foot in America. In this tradition of conquest, nature has often been regarded as feminine and, thus, concepts such as conquest and subjugation reflect a clearly uneven attitude towards women. Women and Nature, as they have often been portrayed in traditional male-centered literature, have been exploited and, then, portrayed as objects to possess and tame. In this sense, throughout different studies, ecocritics denounce that minority people have been feminized so as to favor abuse of a different kind in relation to local, national, and international policies. Consequently, they have not only been denied participation or profit, but have symbolized the scapegoat *per se*. The studies show a connection between environmental and women’s exploitation, as well as any other poor and colored minority’s. Thus, by

underlining such similarities, ecofeminists try to voice their complaints and show the need for new social and political agendas that will protect women and minorities from discriminations of different kind. Although environmental racism has often been recognized as the main issue in relation to discriminative exposure to ecological risks, ecofeminists claim that there are other issues to take into account, such as gender. It is this gendered discrimination that Romo denounces throughout the narratives of border women. In this case, the character of Tomasita, who opens and closes the novel, becomes unintentionally the main protagonist of the U.S.-Mexico Borderland and its injustices:

She finished washing her dishes and emptied her washtub into the Rio Grande, far to the west of the city, where the houses were barely houses, close to the small stream that came from the huge American factory. [...] Her husband had begun to complain about a pain on either side of his face right under his ears during that cold, cold January, two years after he had started working as a waste disposal superintendent for six dollars a day for the new factory. Two purple bulbs kept growing, as if he had the plague. (128)

She is, thus, the unconscious agent, that by turning the Rio Grande red, has succeeded in calling both nations' attention to the long forgotten U.S.-Mexico border area. The life of Tomasita and her death are the perfect example of lifelong victims who have to endure and survive countless racist, classist and sexist abuses. Along with all these discrimination, Tomasita and her husband become the victims of border violence translated into the pollution and militarization of this geopolitical boundary that used to be a source of life. Thus,

all Guerrero, Yañez, and Romo's characters and, especially the character of Tomasita, offer an excellent opportunity to provide a literary voice and visibility to those who suffer the most. However, they are also the ones who are hardly ever heard. In Teresa Leal's words "writing about the natural environment and on contamination and globalism continues to be very, very elitist and inaccessible" (Adamson, Evans & Stein 25). Unfortunately, the real reasons behind this borderland pollution are never presented in the mainstream discourse. On the contrary, it is the victims that are blamed for the economic instability of the United States. The role of aggressive capitalism, defended by both U.S. and Mexican governments despite being fully aware of the economic and health problems caused by it, is deflected and turned into a racist discourse. Romo's literary work offers a picture of border communities and the denunciation of several critical issues taking place there. These female characters and their lifestyles, and the bridge over the Rio Grande, become the site for the recovery of a new "place-based identity" (Adamson, Evans & Stein 75).

In addition, ecofeminists claim that "[c]apitalism has unleashed this incredible environmental degradation and our body is an environment" (Adamson, Evans & Stein 23). In this sense, when health risks are mentioned the body is directly attacked and put at risk. Chicana feminists have always defended the right to control their own body. Ecofeminists prove that such freedom is not only ideologically and culturally put into question, but that it is directly denied by the very real consequences that colored women's suffer as victims of environmental racism and *machismo*. What is more, different analyses address the issue of cancer as a feminist matter that goes beyond the

health realm and threatens the very essence of being a woman. Jim Tarte's article, "Some Live More than Others. Cancer, Gender, and Environmental Justice," underlines the importance of those parts in a woman's body that are removed because of the cancer. These body parts happen to be the most objectified, fetishized, and despised parts of a woman and, consequently, their removal might cause a terrible identity crisis on the woman who has been raised by a discourse in which women's reproductive organs have been ideologically coded. So, the effects of environmental injustice directly attack the very idea of womanhood as traditionally constructed. The reality of the fact that women are often viewed as a body, as a source of pleasure is dramatically described in Richard Yañez story:

"Yes, you can. You will. You have what men want." "Cállate el hocico. You don't know."
"Need ... Need ... Need ..." The voice became a vibration. A ringing. A wailing. A fleet of sirens trapped in her head. The alarm forced her out of the house. She ran. Screamed. Covered her ears. The louder the noise became, the faster she went. Everything around her a blur. (108)

In "Lucero's Mkt.," the author presents the character of María del Valle, known by her neighbors as María la Loquita, a middle age woman who lives alone and poorly on alcohol and tobacco. These three features, gender, age and marital status, automatically alienate María under a patriarchal system where women are defined not as individuals, but in relation to their family and community. This alienation from the public sphere suffered by women in order to secure the centrality of male is described by scholar Mary Pat Brady's following statement:

[W]hile public space is constructed to invite full participation, to invite all to identify themselves as fully vested citizens, it can guarantee its status only by withholding certain rights and privileges from the majority. Public space “belongs” to men (albeit to some men more than others) because women are ostensibly at risk in it; women therefore may not claim public space as theirs to navigate freely. (128-9)

Connected to the unwilling and forced isolation of women, María’s dislocation is caused by different reasons that are, at the same time, interrelated. The character of María has a daughter, Delia, and grandsons, but they hardly appear in her life, “[e]ver since her daughter moved to the other side of the freeway- ‘I want to teach where kids go to learn, not to be vagos’” (Yañez 96). Delia’s distancing does not only represent a physical one, but, also, an ideological rift as she tries to escape from U.S. society’s discourse’s stereotypes. The distancing, and as a result, the loneliness of those who stay within the community appears to reflect a generational trend, as a similar strangeness and separation takes place between another character in this story, Rafael, the owner of the market where María does her groceries, and his son. In both cases, the younger generation gets annoyed and consciously ignores the world of their elderly favoring a life that is remote physically and emotionally. In other words, the youth not only does not belong to the community of their parents, but they reject it:

When he’d bought the store, he debated with his son whether or not to carry cigarettes, especially with the number of kids in the Lower Valley. “They have enough problems,” he’d told his son, the accountant, who said cigarettes, like beer, were a matter of profit. (97)

But it is after Tavo's disappearance, María's dog and only company, when her world collapses and when her physical and mental alienation as a woman and human being becomes more pressing. In the past, her loneliness was interrupted by her various lovers. It seems like she did not care much about their departure, but her promiscuous life further stresses her isolation within the community. In relation to her lovers, María appears to resign equally to their presence and their disappearance: "This was a relationship she'd resigned herself to, like so many others in her life, Manny. Vincent. Jesús-Felipe. Eugenio" (Yañez 101). It is necessary to mention the dependency suffered by some women toward men in marginalized communities, even more, in older generations where women lacked any economic possibility. In the case of María, however, the reader learns that she worked as a teacher at a school. Consequently, it seems that her relationships are more the result of her need for human contact, no matter how poor and limited. Although it does not seem as if she benefited much from her relationships with men, she is still portrayed as a sexual object both without her "consent" and also willing to when it serves her needs.

Later in the story, the reader meets the masculine voice in María's head that leads every and each of her movements. This is a male voice that echoes the sexist discourse that is present in both U.S. discourse and in traditional Chicana/o discourse. This voice reduces María to her female body and forces her to use it to provide him with the things he wants. On the other hand, this story also offers an example when it is María herself who takes advantage of her sexualized body to get what she needs from Rafael. In this case, however, it

is also a male's point of view that reduces María to a sexual object. "[H]e admitted to himself that she'd only been nice to get what she needed" (Yañez 98). In one way or the other, from Rafael's humble perspective or María's inner voice's, she ends up always reduced to sexual characteristics. It is necessary to point out María del Valle's mental isolation. The voice that is inside her head and which leads her life is a masculine voice: "[a]nd like this daily ritual, she could count on the first thing that she heard every morning being the voice" (Yañez 95). María describes it as the first voice she hears every morning and from what it seems the only one because "[p]eople kept their distance from crazies. She accepted that" (Yañez 96). This inner voice is not only María's only company, but is the one who starts and ends everything. It has the last word and it is only at the end of the story that María disobeys it just once before she disappears.

María's physical isolation seems to be the source of the mental alienation which provokes her ultimate solitude, and which directly has an effect on her physical disintegration. It is not only that she is alone, but her body, the unequivocal proof of her physical existence, is collapsing and becoming the reflection of her mental instability. By the time the reader comes to the end of the story, María's body has lost her fight against her mind, "[h]er body shook. Her fingers corked her ears. Piss ran down her legs and puddle on the floor" (Yañez 107). It is important to stress that the very body that has defined and confined her is something María has never come to enjoy. Her body has been the reason for the others to feel attracted or repulsed by her. María herself has accepted it as a functional being with biological needs. A shell to live in and from where to look at the life around her "[w]hile whichever man she'd brought

back home from the Bronco Ballroom and let into her bed [...] focusing on the clock took her mind far from where her body was” (Yañez 101).

In the end, in order for María to enjoy such mental “shelter,” she needs to listen to monotonous and fluid sounds such as the water of the gardens or the shower. This is a sound that belongs to the past and that soothes her, although the reader never learns which past memory it refers to. It is not only her place in the community, but the solitude she yearns for that is interrupted by the voice in her head. It is not the link of the body with her mind that is broken by it, but it is María’s scape from her female body that the voice blocks. Thus, it does not only interrupt her refuge, but it forces her to destroy her physical body. By the end of the story, the voice has destroyed her physically and, by extension, as an active woman within her community.

The drastic changes undergone by the geopolitical construction of the U.S.-Mexico border have, certainly, removed this location from the mythic Chicana/o homeland, Aztlán of *El Movimiento* during the 1960s. Appropriating this *locus*, Chicana feminists intended to reconstruct, by rewriting heroic figures and narratives, their cultural and historical past. This endeavor’s final goal was set in the promotion and encouragement of a distinct and proud “cultural nationhood” (Rebolledo, *The Chronicles* 105). With the introduction of the idea of the Borderlands by Gloria Anzaldúa, Chicana feminists adopted this notion of border identity which embraced and celebrated differences and heterogeneity. Inspired by this concept of *mestizaje*, Chicana feminist began to write inclusive stories that overcame the constraining narratives of traditional Chicana/os and Anglo-Europeans. What was crucial in this process of recovery was the presence of Chicana feminists not only as object of study, but as agent in their

writing. This change in the author's perspective would definitely improve the account and testimony of *sus comadres*. In the case of Chicana/o writers, the audience became equally important and, therefore, it was their purpose to make the audience participate in the story, and, hence, provoke critical discussions over varied concerns. It was with this purpose in mind that the stories for this chapter were chosen as representatives, to some extent, of the complexity of female border subjects. Many Chicana/o authors have tried to reflect and analyze through their literary work the variables that are present in different border individuals that live this U.S.-Mexico borderland, this *Nepantla*. The study of short stories offers the reader little pictures, static illusions where border individual's inner struggle to define themselves can be studied in a context in which any attempt to mark the limits fails. If there is anything definite to take into account, it is the dynamic and hybrid nature of border identities as they struggle to adapt to the constant physical, social and political changes of the place they live in.

Chapter 4. Queering the City, Rewriting *Chicanidad*.

But it is historically evident that the female body, like the Chicano people, has been colonized. And any movement to decolonize them must be culturally and sexually specific.
(Cherríe Moraga in *The Last Generation*)

While the connection with a place becomes crucial in the process of developing an identity, it is also true that some geographical sites might become repressive. The U.S.-Mexico border is an example of such a complex place, and one which has become crucial to the study of modern Chicana writers. Throughout the rich theories and literatures produced by Chicanas, the “1,950 mile-long open wound” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 24) separating both nations has become a setting, a character, or a powerful concept, which incorporates the manifold experiences undergone by the Chicana/o community, in general, and Chicana feminists, in particular. In theorist Elizabeth Jacobs’ words “[w]omen’s connection to and relationship with the land is an integral part of Chicana feminist praxis and plays a significant role in reclaiming a place within the nation’s borders” (150). In other words, the reappropriation of the U.S.-Mexican border has become not only a challenge to hegemonic nationalist discourses, but also a powerful geographical symbol, which questions identity positions defined through gender, race, class and sexuality. In this trend, the U.S.-Mexico border has emerged as the *locus*, literal and conceptual, where queer Chicana identity is studied.

Although the focus of this chapter is the analysis of queer *chicanidad*, such enterprise would be flawed if other communities and experiences are not

examined and included. It is, therefore, essential to integrate the connections that have taken place among different women of color, in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of their struggle, and, also, to strengthen their cause. In this line of study, then, voicing different communities' needs is the first step in order to build alliances that will not homogenize individuals, and, will, by studying their different perspectives and practices, solve previous misunderstandings. As Black, lesbian, feminist, poet and essayist Audre Lorde states "what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect" (40). According to Lorde, Black women must raise their voice in their struggle to defeat their oppression within a racist U.S. society where both, their invisibility and visibility has been historically perpetuated through the "depersonalization of racism" (42). The feminist continues denouncing that, during the 1960s, such discrimination took place within various ideological communities where Black women should have found alliances, such as the cultural Black movement and/or the women's movement. As she declares, it is the women's responsibility to voice their concerns and analyze them in the context of their lives. Besides, Lorde also warns about the dangerous divisions forced upon Black women, established by members of the same community who had internalized them as their own. As a consequence of this persecution from within, Black people failed to achieve alliances that would improve their situation as colored people. The centrality of the spoken word and of the act of claiming a voice is crucial in Lorde's political activism as her adamant statement expresses that "it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence" (44). Hence, keeping the voice down, being quiet, or dismissing the

voices from individuals outside the community is what, according to her, must be overcome in order to succeed.

Although Lorde promotes a politics of encounters among different people, she is also very clear about the importance of acknowledging and bringing those differences to the front because of their potential for revolution. On the one hand, she describes the injustices brought by Black men upon Black women when they claimed that feminism was not worthy of their cultural movement, and, also, when they accused Black feminists of betraying their racial heritage. As Lorde states “Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface” (60). That is, she defends that as Black women, they are subjected to experiences that directly affect their lives as racialized women, experiences that Black men often disregard as less important. Similar to what happened with Chicana feminists, Black women’s sympathy towards gender-related issues was met with suspicion within the Black community, and the women were accused of selling out to the white Anglo system. On the other hand, Lorde is also critical of Anglo feminists who expect all women to fight gender discrimination as a homogenous group without first confronting the many differences that set them apart. It is in this context that Lorde declares that “[i]t is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, Black and Third World women, and lesbians” (110). In other words, she defends a feminism that is based on actual praxis and, thus, must include the acknowledgement of the differences among women of a different race, class, and sexuality living in the U.S. Hence, Audre Lorde’s work, as a Black feminist scholar, seems not only to give voice to those who traditionally have been

silenced, but she also urges to structure feminist theory around the practices of everyday life. It is her purpose to turn women from passive objects to active agents through the praxis of her feminist theory rooted on women's experiences. That is, Lorde calls for identification of differences among women, and to use them as a celebratory source of discussion that will allow an improved understanding of the workings of racism, sexism and homophobia in the U.S. society. As a result, women's alliance will help define who they are as gendered individuals, and, will also strengthen their political activism. The poet also states that it is the responsibility of Black men to educate themselves about Black women's concerns, and thus, men should not expect women to spend their time and energy in such enterprise instead of doing their work. Similarly, Lorde also criticizes white women's tendency to group everyone under the umbrella of sisterhood. This tendency, according to her, dismisses colored women's particularities and is used to their advantage by white feminists in order to claim a shared commonality among women.

Related to Lorde's celebration of difference, theorist Jana Sawicki presents her concept of "politics of difference" (18) through which she intends to present an alternative to feminist theory. Sawicki aligns Audre Lorde with Michel Foucault in that both theorists underscore the importance of difference as a disruptive force, or, as the cause of insurgency. Although the position of a Black woman as Lorde and a white man as Foucault might appear to be in opposite extremes, Sawicki defends that both scholars place sexual liberation at the center of their theoretical work and activism. Parting from this point, then, Sawicki's reading of Foucault invites to combine the French philosopher's genealogy with feminist theory. Similar to Lorde, Sawicki first highlights the

importance of discussing the dissimilarities among women so as to overcome the uncertain project of feminism in their attempt to dismantle patriarchy's discriminative values. However, as both feminists, Lorde and Sawicki, make it clear, Anglo feminists have often failed to acknowledge the powerful effects that racism, heterosexism and classism has among women of color. Thus, Sawicki joins women of color who challenge the dominant feminist activism which does not concern with their particular backgrounds. It is in Foucault's work where the scholar finds instances of resistance, within and between subjects, which parallel what takes place within dominant feminism. She also remarks Foucault's focus on the importance of studying the politics of everyday life, and the notion that individuals cooperate "in reproducing systems of domination despite our conscious protests against specific forms of it" (10). In a similar manner, literary critic AnaLouise Keating also collects an analogous idea from queer Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa where "she rejects facile oppositions between oppressor and oppressed" (*Women Reading* 45). In Keating's reading of Anzaldúa, she believes that as participants of a system of domination, individuals are rarely located in static subject positions all their life, but shift under different circumstances, and, thus, unique subjectivities become hard to exist.

Nevertheless, Chicana historian Emma Pérez's interpretation of Foucault's analysis is not as positive and women-conscious as Sawicki's. In Pérez's opinion, Michel Foucault, along with well-known psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, are "theoretical imbeciles" (*"Sexuality"* 163) as the result of their total disregard and misinterpretation of women. According to her, Foucault's work elevated men and addressed them through

the subject he chose and through the language he used. Pérez's strongest criticism towards Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* is originated from his lack of acknowledgement of the fact that European white men have enjoyed the privilege of imposing their power, be it racial, sexual, political and/or social on women throughout history in order to perpetuate patriarchal control. Therefore, the *Tejana* historian states that it is at this void from where Chicana historians began their recovery project.

However, as scholar Marivel T. Danielson states, and whose position I align with, in any attempt of queer study which focuses on the importance of the body it seems necessary to include the work of both Michel Foucault (1972), and his genealogy of sexuality, along with Judith Butler, and her theoretical challenge to traditional gender binaries, in order to present a more comprehensive analysis. Although their popularity in white academia might render them suspicious in relation to the study of women of color, I believe that their work, especially that regarding sexuality and gender as they have been constructed through history must be included along with the work of scholars of color.

According to Michel Foucault's account of the history of sexuality, sexual repression began around the 17th century coinciding with the birth of capitalism as a new economic system. Thus, Foucault equates the control over sexuality with the economical transformation of the time, and with the birth of privileged class, the bourgeoisie. The economic reason behind such sexual restraint was to secure the productivity in the industrial inception and to control the behavior of the citizens by forcing an ideologically interested discipline on them. The 17th century, hence, revolved around "the exclusive promotion of adult marital

sexuality, the imperatives of decency, the obligatory concealment of the body, the reduction to silence and mandatory reticences of language” (Foucault 115). In other words, sexuality became policed and monitored through different aspects of everyday life such as language, body and behavior. Paradoxically, it was through the denial and repression of the aforementioned aspects that the new ideology was implanted. That is, through silencing discourses, covering up the bodies, and restraining citizens’ behavior.

At the beginning of the 18th century, following Foucault’s study, a specific strategy was introduced so as to formulate a very sex-specific education and power. This methodology focused on four areas which would help define a new conception of sexuality. The first strategy called “[a] hysterization of women’s bodies” (Foucault 104) analyzed these bodies and described them as highly sexually charged. The feminine body was defined in relational terms and with a socially conscious aim: to guarantee society’s fertility within the context of the institution of the family and as the producer of children. However, the imperative role of the feminine body in order to secure reproduction was at the same time underevaluated with the introduction of the image of the hysteric woman. A second strategy, in the production of sexuality, as described by Foucault, was through the “pedagogization of children’s sex” (104) which stated that all children participated in sexual activities and that this behavior had physical, moral, individual and collective dangers. It is important to stress that the burden of avoiding the “dangers” brought by children’s sexual activity, and which affected not only the individual but society as well, fell almost completely on the figure of the mother. The third strategy presented by Foucault relates to the “socialization of procreative behavior” (104) which through political and medical

discourses presented procreation as the only appropriate sexual conduct of socially responsible and healthy individuals. Finally, Foucault describes one last tactic used from the 18th century on to police sexuality, that is the “psychiatrization of perverse pleasure” (105). In order to implement this strategy, once again, medical discourse was key in defining which sexual instincts were perverse, non-regular, and, thus, in deciding how to “correct” them. All in all, these strategies succeeded, to some extent, in producing a sexuality which would, by its implementation, secure the perpetuation and prosperity of the new capitalist system.

In the Victorian era, the capitalistic understanding of sexuality continued as before. Sexual practices were framed on a reproductive context and sexuality, hence, was limited to the private sphere of home. The bourgeois family was appointed the guardian of regulated sexuality and its existence was ironically promoted through its silencing. However, following Foucault’s work, some exceptions were necessary and these allowances existed within capitalist and medical realms. This is how brothels and mental hospitals became exceptional sites where non-normative sexuality was practiced in exchange of money or in the name of science. Out of these restricted *loci*, sexuality was controlled paradoxically through specific modes of discourse, and transgressions were punished by forceful interventions of different kinds, either judicial or medical. The astonishing oxymoron of these societies, thus, was that “they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*” (Foucault 35).

In volume one of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault proceeds to describe the conception of the 19th century-homosexual as “a personage, a past, a case

history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (43). Similar to what was believed about women, everything regarding the homosexual male was related and affected by his sexuality, and they were also studied and deployed in medical terms by psychology and psychiatry. Male homosexuality was believed to be the result of an inner inversion of gender. In other words, it was perceived as “a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul” (Foucault 43). It was in the 19th century when homosexuality was first acknowledged as a sexual identity and not just a sexual practice. The acceptance of its existence did not, however, provoke understanding and acceptance. On the contrary, it prompted new forms of control regarding sexual practices. This tendency of a higher policing and persecution of specific sexual identities was implanted through discourse, as well. Homosexual men broke their silence and made themselves heard in order to request their sexual identity’s legitimacy. They spoke up to demand the de-medicalization of their identity and to cease to be considered a “perversión.”

Nevertheless, although some homosexuals did publicly request to be included and accepted by society, the discourse of silence and the practice of invisibility were still central to homosexuals. According to queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedwick the gay closet is not just present in their lives, but for many of them it is fundamental in their social interactions. For Sedwick scholar, the closet’s presence is core to gay people, and it might also confine the people around them in such a way that when some decide to come out they acknowledge the prospective harm that such outing may bring to people around them. Therefore, according to the queer theorist, coming out of the closet does

not permit gay people to disregard the closet. On the contrary, the scholar states that the closet still plays a central role in the lives of gay people and of those they have come out to. Thus, in order to avoid marginalization for the queers and their relatives and friends, silence is forced upon them. This economy of silence, when it relates to sexuality, has been happening since the 17th century and is one of the main reasons, along with oppressive discourses, that has incited the gay closet. In Sedwick's words, the reason why silence becomes as effective and transformative as discourse is based in the fact that ignorance is as powerful and multiple as knowledge.

Returning to Foucault's historiography on sexuality, it is important to revise how sexuality was controlled through an intensification of the body and, thus, because "deployments of power are directly connected to the body" (151-2) analyzing its depictions will provide a clearer view of who benefited and who suffered from this exploitation of the body. As sexuality was confined to the house and its practice privileged in the marital context, then, sexuality was divided in husband-wife and parents-children axis. Because the centrality of the family in the deployment of sexuality was so crucial, Foucault considers that "sexuality is 'incestuous' from the start" (108-9). Such term reflects one of many other "perversions" studied in the medical field during the 18th century. The total involvement and power of medicalization in relation to sexuality was clear from the beginning of this new economy of sexuality. What is more, it was through doctors, educators and psychiatrists that specific sexualities and bodies were condemned, and, on the other hand, reproductive sexuality was privileged. An extreme example of the relation of medicine and sexuality is introduced by queer Chicana author Leticia Luna Lemus in her second novel, *Like Son*. In this

novel, Frank, the transgender protagonist, embarks in a physical and emotional journey in order to come to terms with who he really is. In this journey, he will come across his estranged dying father, on the one hand, and a mother who lives in constant self-denial, on the other hand. Frank will also be forced to remember and face his traumatic childhood under an addicted and abusive stepfather. Thus, in the following passage the “incestuous” nature of sexuality, as Foucault described, is dramatically portrayed:

He also had a thing for secretly snorting pharmaceutical coke lifted from hospital holdings. Hippocratic Oath and all human ethics out the window, by the time I was nine, Chip had taken to drugging and fucking his prepubescent stepdaughter in the middle of the night. And my mother dared to ask who I was? Well, I'd been the little girl who woke inexplicably groggy and aching and sad in the mornings, who still managed to always keep her braids combed tidy, to tuck her shirt in, to say thank you and generally sit politely when told to. I'd been the one who worked like a dog in school to get high marks so my mother would be proud of me. I'd been the strange kid who cried at her desk before elementary school exams from the anxiety of trying to be perfect. (62-3)

In this passage, Frank describes the abuse he suffered during childhood in the hands of a drug-consuming stepfather with the suspiciously semiconscious knowledge of his own mother. In a gruesome simile to the 18th century notion of family-based medicalized description of sexuality gathered by Foucault, Frank locates the origin of his bodily sufferings, which directly affected his development into a transgendered young man. The idea that his transgender identity might be the result of this sexual abuse is hinted later in the novel when the protagonist refers to his longing to be a boy as the right and safe thing to be.

Maybe, the awareness that his female body was prone to abuse conditioned Frank's sexual identity to the extent that he decides not to become the racialized and sexualized female body that U.S. mainstream discourse is written on.

As the family was used as the nucleus where sexuality was studied, it was within this same family that "the psychiatrization of sex" (Foucault 120) began. According to the French philosopher, it was the figure of the "'idle' woman" (121) that was first sexualized. Apparently, the role of this woman as representative of the morals and value of the whole family, and the responsibilities set upon her provoked the development of "'nervous' women" (Foucault 121), which consequently, lead to the medicalized figure of the hysteric woman by psychiatrists of the time. In other words, the women, as the nurturers of the family, became accountable for the sexual practices of the household and that of the couple and their children as well. At the same time, they were also the most persecuted by the capitalist and patriarchal society. Therefore, the exploitation and psychiatrization of the feminine body became both part and consequence of the new economic system, which policed sexuality in order to secure economical profit and standards.

At the end of the 19th century, homosexuality was publicly accepted as a sexual identity instead of the earlier conception of "perversion" in which sodomy was a sexual practice. Nevertheless, although generally acknowledged, Sedwick stresses that such understanding of homosexuality, although progressive at the time, followed the idea that homosexuality derived from an inner gender inversion. In other words, it was believed that gender and sexuality defined each other in relational terms. Yet Sedwick considers that gender and

sexuality, although inextricable to each other in that they can only be defined in relation to each other, are still not the same thing. Therefore, she lays out a new understanding of gender and sexuality that will better represent the practices of the 20th century western culture where both notions might be analyzed as separate concepts similar to what is done with gender and class, or class and race, when they are studied. The theorist continues arguing that the very existence of homosexuality or heterosexuality wholly depends on the perpetuation of the traditional binary gender system, but that there are other sexual choices that might not. In other words, she criticizes the fact that gender definitions have been built in relational practices, and that each of them is constructed as long as the other exists.

In Sawicki's reading of *The History of Sexuality Volume One*, Foucault describes the process which caused the modern individual to perceive her/himself as a sexual subject. Through different discourses played throughout history, individuals were made to believe that sexuality was key to self-understanding and, thus, in order to solve any disorder, "we must uncover the truth of our sexuality" (22). Consequently, individuals' personal sphere became "psychologized" (22) and, hence, open for the professionals to study and label. It is this intervention in the personal life that prompted Foucault to believe, as Sawicki interprets him, that resistance against different kinds of power must take place at the microlevel of society. In this term, she describes Foucault's choice for genealogies as the means to give voice to the marginalized. That is, recovering history becomes the tool to present resistance and to voice those who have been silenced. Although Foucault centered around individuals, such as "the mad, the delinquent, the abnormal, the disempowered" (28) this political

endeavor clearly parallels Chicana feminists' project of historical recovery studied in the previous chapter. What is more, Sawicki underscores the way in which Foucault's genealogy brings attention to the sexual variations across class, race and age axes, which dominant Anglo feminists oftentimes overlooked. However, as Sawicki interprets Foucault, he was concerned not so much about how restricted sexual expression was throughout history, but about the way in which sexuality, as we understand it nowadays, was defined by power. She claims that according to Foucault "individuals have been repressed *through* sexuality" (39), specially, through specific discourses in the human sciences and its application, as well as, in the everyday practices. This is especially true in the case of women, and this is why, according to Sawicki, Foucault intended to write a volume in *The History of Sexuality* entitled *Woman, Mother and Hysteric* that would directly deal with the history of women's bodies. However, this work, which would specifically deal with the way discourse and practices have monitored women's body, was never written. In Sawicki's opinion, Foucault probably believed that it would be more appropriate if feminists, as specialists on the subject, wrote about these histories instead of him (68).

As Foucault's genealogy of sexuality shows, different discourses have limited the way in which individuals have come to define themselves in connection with their sexuality. According to the French philosopher, the sexual practices of everyday life and, thus, related to the private sphere of individuals, are also the result of such discourses. However, scholar Debra J. Blake brings attention to other kind of discourses, such as history and memory. In her opinion, although these two are different kind of discourses, they are deeply

connected with each other and, thus, affect and mold each other. In the previous chapter, it has been already studied the way Chicana/os built their cultural activism through the recovery of their own history. In this trend, Blake relates history and memory when she states that through memory individuals come to terms with the present and, then, transition to the future. Moreover, she claims that without memory, history would be nonexistent, and, at the same time, in the absence of history, memory is not enough. To underscore her point, and aligning with Sawicki's inclusion of Foucault's genealogy in feminist theory, Blake introduces Foucault's concept of "countermemory" (22). As she explains, this term refers to the way memory and history are interconnected. They participate in the political undertaking of oppressed communities throughout the U.S., in promulgating the histories that have been absent from the official narratives. Therefore, applying memory in the recovery of hidden history is central for the recovery project of communities that have been marginalized across race, gender, class and sexuality lines. Thus, memory becomes instrumental in defining identities, both individual and collective.

Queer theorist Judith Butler took the issue of sexuality, in general, and gender, in particular, to a highly provocative analysis in her groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble*. In this work, Butler warns feminist theorists against not questioning gender as it has been passed on us by tradition. She encourages the possibility for gender to expand and to be questioned in order to avoid perpetuating the traditional compulsory heterosexuality which firmly maintains and limits the understanding of gender to a binary system. Furthermore, Butler's provocative idea that gender is performative clearly challenges the notion that an inner gender exists. She claims that gender is manufactured and

perpetuated through discourse, acts and a specific body disposition. The performativity of gender helps Frank, the protagonist of *Like Son* in Luna Lemus' novel, to come to terms with his sexual identity and to confront his father with an alternative understanding of Francisca, his daughter, into Frank his son. However, Frank's father's illness literally prevents him from facing such performance, perhaps, reflecting his inability to part with his idea of his little daughter.

Not that my father could see it, but his little girl had become a young man. Starting junior high, I'd wound Ace bandage tight around my chest to flatten my thankfully negligible breasts. [...] I'd mastered counterbalancing most physical evidence of ever having been born a girl. The careful staging our waitress unknowingly tested with her impatient stare: a baggy long-sleeved black T-shirt over a tight Hanes undershirt over a wife-beater over an extra-small binder; boxer shorts peeking out from under low-slung oversized black Dickies cinched with an Army surplus canvas belt; a bulky dark gray hoody sweatshirt, hood down. I pulled the visor of my baseball cap further over my face, shuffled my skater-sneaker clumsy feet, and cleared my throat to deepen my voice for a response. (18)

In this passage, Frank describes in detail the performativity that Butler refers to in the creation of traditional gender division. In this case, the traditional gender performance is subverted in that Frank, who was born a girl, accomplishes to carry out the opposite gender to her biological one. However, it is also true that the male-gender he exhibits and expresses is a marked and clichéd one. So, does his gender defiance move beyond the confining and limiting traditional

binary, or does his gender performance reinforce traditional female/male dualism?

Similarly to what it was done with sexuality from the 17th century on, gender was also constructed in direct relation with sexuality and was presented as a fact through discourse, behavior and the body. It is, thus, the purpose of Butler's *Gender Trouble* to question the "natural" essence of gender and "to counter the violence performed by gender norms" (xxv). Butler challenges the notion of a "feminist subject" as well as the feminist theory that developed from the acceptance of such subject. The theorist's suspicions arise from the fact that Woman as a subject has been created based upon discriminating perceptions that have secured her subjugation throughout modern history. Moreover, she stresses the necessity of going to the roots and analyzing how the very category of Woman was constructed and disciplined before working on how to provide women a space in language and politics. In addition, she considers it necessary to bear in mind that the very system feminists seek to be empowered in, is the same one that subjected them. So, gender construction is not only flawed, but it has been created in relation to race, class, and sexual possibilities. This is why, according to Butler, different representations of gender, sometimes even contradictory ones, have been presented through different historical contexts. The different axes crossing through the experience and daily survival of women of color must be taken into account in order to understand the differences among women. Women of color do not only feel they have to overcome their gender restrictions, but racial and class constraints are central to their subjectivity. In the following passage, the compulsory need of Frank's mother to excel in a racist, classist and patriarchal U.S. society

shows the unattainable and harmful standards that are set for colored women and which, even when they succeed, are left with a self-hatred that contaminates every relationship she has. Most of all, hardest of all, the one with her own son, Frank.

Still, as much as she'd done me wrong over the years, and damn how she'd done me wrong, I knew that from a public view –not as I saw her –she did seem quite the Wonder Woman. Presumed blue-collar girl from the 'hood, my mother was the first Mexican-American woman ever to graduate from Yale Medical School. Class of '75. And she didn't just graduate, she graduated with honors and acceptance to one of the most prestigious surgery residencies in the country. My mother was an academic and medical genius. She even had impeccable bedside manner. Eventually, she found her true calling and became a sought-after plastic surgeon. And through it all, she was beautiful with big dark brown eyes, a thick mane of shining black hair, and a quick smile. She was the perfect poster girl for a model minority against-all-odds success story. (Lemus, *Like Son* 52-3)

In this excerpt, the flaws of the construction of Woman along with the racial, class and sexuality axes, as claimed by Butler, are strikingly obvious in the character of Frank's mother, in that they show the conflicting forces at the basis of the process of becoming a woman in the highly racist, sexist, classist hegemony of the U.S. She has become a highly accomplished woman who has internalized oppression to such extent during her problematic upbringing that cannot break free of her subjugated position. This subjugation pushes her to force all her frustrations and weakness on Frank in such a vicious manner, that she leaves him completely vulnerable in what should be a safe home. Furthermore, once Frank graduates and decides to leave the house, and has

completely succeed in embodying what feels like his true sexual identity, she regards him as someone she wants to separate herself from. By repudiating her son, Frank's mother denies her motherhood, and, thus, disregards her achievement as Woman as defined by traditional patriarchal standards where motherhood is the ultimate purpose. Such gesture and behavior could be paralleled to Frank's "escape" from his female bodies with the purpose of overcoming the suffering that it has inflicted on him. When Frank goes back to her mother's house to return her the love letters she wrote to Frank's deceased father and her ex-husband at the end of the novel, she does not even open the door, somehow symbolizing not only her denial of the present as Frank's mother, but also of her past as Frank's father's in-love girlfriend.

Therefore, "it becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler 4-5). If a fixed notion of gender is non-existent and, thus, the feminist subject resulting from it cannot be placed at the basis of feminist politics, Butler encourages the birth of a new feminist politics. This reinterpretation will question a traditional and constraining understating of gender and identity. As a consequence, the notion of an identity-in-process will serve as the cornerstone of the new activism. According to the feminist theorist "gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (8). However, as described above, traditionally, a binary system of gender was established and enforced as directly reflecting sex. But if following Butler's assumption, gender turns to be a culturally and historically constructed variable, and, thus, it does not depend on sex, this will lead to the acceptance of her notion that Man and "masculine," and Woman and "feminine" do not have to

correspond to a specific body type. In other words, a female or male body should not presuppose the constructed genders of man and woman, masculine and feminine. Recovering French feminist Simone de Beauvoir's notion that gender is "constructed," Butler asserts Beauvoir's idea of agency in appropriating a gender more than being one. However, Butler adds that this appropriation might not always imply that women will assume the female gender and men the masculine one.

That gender is constructed "is not to assert its illusoriness or artificiality, where those terms are understood to reside within a binary that counterpoises the 'real' and the 'authentic' as oppositional" (Butler 45). Thus, Butler does not deny its existence, but tries to understand how the discursive production is able to insert and maintain a clearly unequal binary relation, and to show the way in which this discourse allows the privilege of specific genders by deeming them "real" and naturalizing them. In her reading of Beauvoir, Butler states that the only marked gender is the feminine one and that men and the universal person were viewed as one while women were constructed in relation to him. However, Butler reminds us that even if women were the only marked gender, it does not mean that this is a coherent and unique marker, but that different cultural, social and political peculiarities affect the category of women. Thus, the notion of women-in-process originated from Beauvoir's understanding of the process of becoming a woman versus being born one, appeals to Butler in that it favors the constant redefinition of previously culturally unintelligible gender deployments that ultimately challenge the hegemony.

The nature of the relation between gender and sex, if there is any, is an idea that set 20th century French feminists Simone de Beauvoir and Monique

Wittig apart. These two theorists differ in their interpretation of these two axes. According to Beauvoir, although a woman becomes one, she is born with a sex. Hence, being a sexed individual is a necessary part of being human as far as there is no human being without a sex. However, Beauvoir is clear in that sex does not prompt gender, but that a specific cultural construction of sex is what becomes the gender, which is acquired by the sexed human being. Accordingly, Butler appropriates Beauvoir's statement of gender being a culturally constructed changeable notion of sex and defends unlimited gender possibilities. "[I]n other words, 'women' need not be the cultural construction of the female body, and 'man' need not interpret male bodies" (152). Furthermore, the American theorist defends that the traditional binary gender system proves not only to be confining but insufficient, and, thus, the possibility of a larger number of genders should be acknowledged. Feminist theorist Monique Wittig, on the other hand, believes that sex itself is as constructed as gender is, and that both of them exist as equals to each other. Moreover, as Butler reads her, Wittig considers sex as an already gendered category. Following this line of thinking, the French theorist believes that the only reason for different sexes to be distinguished have been to, thus, create a gender binary which will secure and perpetuate heterosexuality. In other words, the very system of discourse and ideology that has controlled sexuality since the 17th century created the dual distinction of sex and gender that would naturalize heterosexuality as the only plausible option. Therefore, following Wittig's proposal, Butler opens the possibility for individuals to "become neither female nor male, woman nor man" (153). If sex is as constructed as gender is, then, not even the "male/female" distinction resulting from different sexes that Beauvoir accepted is relevant

anymore. For this reason, Wittig's premise states that individuals do not just appropriate the "man/woman" genders, but their sex too, as she considers both categories irrelevant and coerced anyway.

Moreover, and reflecting the 18th century idea that female bodies were sexually saturated, in Butler's reading of Wittig's work, the French feminist asserts that sex has been discursively produced in order to suppress and oppress women within an unequal heterosexist system. This system was implanted as a control mechanism that deemed amoral and perverts those who walked out of the heterosexual system. As a result, not only women were placed in an unprivileged position in relation to men, but gay and lesbians who challenged heterosexuality were targeted, as well. It is with this belief in mind that in Butler's reading of Wittig, she compels for new discursive productions that will rewrite and reread bodies and sexualities, independently from the restricting and heterosexist notions of sex and gender. Wittig does not only claim the rights of women, gay men and lesbians, but she demands the urge for a counter discourse that will allow these marginalized individuals to become speaking and active agents. She stresses that the actual linguistic system is based on and works to perpetuate "compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler 157) and, hence, it is necessary to create a discourse that will "counter the globalizing heterosexist episteme by a reverse discourse of equal reach and power" (Butler 163). This contention will allow for the creation of homosexuality without the restraints and values of the heterosexual frame.

A similar idea is proposed by Chicana author Ana Castillo in her article "La Macha: Toward a Beautiful Whole Self." According to her, women in the past had no role to emulate as lovers, and this is why they ended up imitating

those enacted in heterosexual relations, which she considers as “antithetical to human evolution” (36). Therefore, the butch/femme dichotomy reflects women’s restricted agency in social and political matters, and not the way women would love if society was not structured along patriarchal and heterosexist designations. In this line of thinking as well, Chicana feminist Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano also believes the fact that “destructive heterosexual patterns” (“Primer encuentro” 144) have been internalized by lesbian couples. In her account of “*Primer encuentro de lesbianas feministas latinoamericanas y caribeñas*,” Yarbro-Bejarano explains that most of the discussion between the participants revolved around the way in which these practices have perpetuated detrimental roles. She continues describing the personal experiences of some of the participants, and how after coming out as lesbians, they performed the butch or femme roles in their first relations. As they become more confident in their sexuality, however, they admitted to overcoming the necessity of these roles. At the end of the discussion, as the critic witnessed it, the women agreed in that they wished to discharge these pre-established labels and, also, the possibility of switching among different roles. Yarbro-Bejarano brings attention to the fact that this yearning for shifting positions might be related to the specificity of Latina lesbian culture, which promoted a more marked “prescriptiveness of role behavior” (145) than non-Latinas. Moreover, she also points out that the participants’ class consciousness might be behind their general dismissal of butch/femme roles. That is, as these roles are more common among working-class individuals, and the participants in the conference belonged to the middle-class, then, Yarbro-Bejarano considers the possibility that it was class discrimination rather than their interest as lesbians to overcome destructive

heterosexual practices that drove these women to criticize the mentioned sexual practices.

Nevertheless, Butler alerts about Wittig's "purification of homosexuality" (165), which she considers troublesome as it does not seem to align with various lesbian and gay discourses in that they do not feel themselves located outside the structures of heterosexuality, but as a challenging movement within that attempt to recodify the traditional cultural practices that have alienated them. Categories of sex and gender are constantly and prolifically reinscribed in the usage of terms, such as *butch*, *femme*, *queen*, *queer*, *dyke* and *fag* through lesbian and gay discourses. By redefining the traditional gender and sexual identities, lesbian and gay rhetoric succeeds in positively portraying new sexual identities that subvert heterosexuality by proliferating its descriptive possibilities. Yet, Butler insists that rejecting Wittig's "purification of homosexuality" (165), and staying within the larger heterosexual axis does not imply that different gender and sexual transgressions fall into mere replicas of heterosexuality. Accordingly, Butler offers the example of the butch identity in lesbian relations through which the traditional notion of masculinity is put into question and rewritten through its appropriation by a "female body" (167).

The erotic power of this deployment, according to her, lies on the transgression taken place and not in the similarity to heterosexual dynamics. What is more, the transgressive nature of such performances is based on the ambiguity of elements which move beyond traditional gender divisions. Gender ambiguity, hence, becomes the attractive trait and political challenge that dismiss the restrictions of acting within a binary gender system and which Frank, the protagonist of *Like Son*, finds highly stimulating:

A sharp ridge halfway between her pointed chin and angled collarbone bobbed slightly. Her shoulders were beyond broad. Hips vertical hard lines. I stared at her all night and bought myself a celebratory beer once I decided that at one point she might have been a he. But not anymore. Rice-paper skin with no sign of a beard. Ageless face holding the hand of her boy turned girl. Polished postal uniform shoes, pressed vintage brown slacks, black turtleneck, and a poised stance kept wide. [...] Truth be told, she was the most delightful prince I had ever seen. (Lemus 13)

The erotic power of transgression as described by Butler is strongly present in this passage. The attraction and satisfaction of the protagonist, Frank, does not only come from the good looks of the young woman in the bar, but more specifically, as the celebratory beer expresses, from the realization that she had been a “he” in the past. Therefore, Frank’s sexual attraction is heightened by the physical traces of a performative subversion as the ridge between her chin and collarbone, her broad shoulders and the vertical hips prove, turning her as Frank describes it into a “delightful prince.” This transgression, as exemplified through this literary quote, brings attention to the forged nature of heterosexual constructs, and how the notions of original dynamics and copied ones do not exist but as illusory. In other words, “gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” (Butler 43). All in all, Butler differs from Wittig in that there must be a complete breach between heterosexuality and homosexuality in order to achieve a free and “untainted” homosexuality. She believes that Wittig’s radical separation of heterosexuals and homosexuals hints the very binarism she so passionately condemns. On the contrary, Butler states that “there are structures of psychic homosexuality within heterosexual

relations, and structures of psychic heterosexuality within gay and straight sexuality” (165).

Audre Lorde’s call for the power of the erotic seems necessary at this point in order to include colored women’s interpretation of such feeling as it becomes entwined with their transgressive political activism. As the essayist claimed, “[t]he erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (53). According to her, this liberating power, located within women, was constantly erased and persecuted in order to destroy its revolutionary energy and keep certain communities subjugated. To achieve so, Lorde stated that, oftentimes, the erotic was wrongly equated to pornography, its opposite, and, thus, women dismissed its potential for change. In her opinion, pornography enacts the destruction of true feeling while the erotic encourages us to achieve greatness through real feeling in whatever we attempt to do. The activist invited other feminists not to separate the spiritual, which she described as the psychic and emotional, from the political. Lorde underlined that these two concepts, the spiritual and political, were not perceived as interrelated as a consequence of the flawed understanding of women’s erotic knowledge. She declared that these two sites are actually bridged by the erotic. Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa also encouraged the importance of the spiritual and political in women’s activism in order to overcome their marginalization as Chicana/os. She also, along with Lorde, encouraged alliances among different individuals who shared a common goal. Thus, Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa agreed with the idea that the power of the erotic turns women into agents of change, which improves our world and

which is self-affirming as well. Moreover, Chicana feminist historian Emma Pérez also underscored the necessity of a revision of history that would recuperate a reading of racialized desire, which would clarify and interpret the dynamics, choices and consequences, of modern cross-racial desire. According to scholar Sandra K. Soto's interpretation of Pérez's work, the historian's interest in the reinstatement of the erotics is related to the tendency in queer theory to represent race, ethnicity and nation within white erotics. Thus, in order to achieve a representative queer Chicana theory, the erotics of the brown woman is essential.

Making gender trouble, as Butler's work states, would entail to overcome the traditional and naturalized gender binary system in order to challenge male superiority, and it would, thus, allow for more equal representation and more open sexual and gender identities. Genders have always been enacted and maintained through different bodily acts and gestures. Therefore, the learned body movements and responses become, at the same time, the reflection and the source of gender. The embodiment of gender is "*performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler 185). Following this statement, Butler resolves that the performative nature of gender, then, proves that gender has no existence without these acts and gestures that have themselves been regulated in order to establish a specific sexuality that would secure reproduction. Consequently, the theorist denies the existence of an inner truth or false gender by considering its existence a mere result of purposeful heteronormative discourse in an attempt to secure traditional understanding of gender as part of primary identity.

Engaging the performative nature of gender then, Butler includes drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities and considers them transgressive acts, which underline and mock traditional gender performances and compulsory heterosexism. In these performances, the queer theorist distinguishes between “three dimensions of significant corporeality” (Butler 187) which would consist on the anatomical sex of the person, the gender identity, and the gender performance which are present and distinguishable in drag. It is, according to Butler, in the parodic imitation of gender where its illusory and imitative nature is shown. “The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original” (Butler 188). In other words, by viewing drag as Butler proposes, these performances weaken the notion of true gender identities defended by hegemonic culture, and underlines the strong impact of discourse in constructing rigid gender possibilities. The idea of ever existing true or false genders becomes irrelevant and, thus, individuals become free to perform their gender with no restrictions as to the validity or appropriateness of it. Nevertheless, Butler asserts that her purpose is not to encourage unlimited number of gender possibilities, but to focus on the ones that have been considered inappropriate, invalid or unacceptable, and to include them along with the traditional gender binary although being careful to always draw attention to their “fundamental unnaturalness” (203).

The importance of reading and writing the body is analyzed by Butler as she reads both Foucault and Nietzsche’s concept that the body represents the surface where cultural values are inscribed. Following this metaphor of the body

and the act of inscribing, the feminist theorist recalls the role of history in writing the body, and, hence, the need to reappropriate and rewrite the body to collect the cultural values. Applying such metaphor in defining a “proper” sexuality, it is interesting to see how feminist such as Beauvoir, Wittig and Butler herself also defend the need of such prewritten body where new meanings must be inscribed in order to free the body and the sexual identities forced upon it by traditional ideologies. The American theorist also incorporates British anthropologist Mary Douglas’ analysis which “suggests that the very contours of ‘the body’ are established through markings that seek to establish specific codes of cultural coherence” (Butler 178). If as Butler states, the body is a synecdoche for the social system, Douglas’ allusion to the idea that all boundaries and margins are considered dangerous could be interpreted as the general believe that social margins are sites where the system is most in danger. Following a similar line of thinking, Butler includes British historian and AIDS activist Simon Watney’s conception of people with AIDS as the representation of “the polluting person” (Butler 179-80) in nowadays societies. Bearing in mind the interested and unreasonable publicity in which AIDS has been described as a disease affecting gay citizens portraying a clearly homophobic and prejudicial image of the illness, Butler considers that an intended connection was done between the illness and the sexual transgression of homosexuals as opposed to a heterosexist system. As a result, a simile was drawn between the “polluted” (Butler 180) sexual practices and the dangers that this could bring to the social order. The boundaries and borders, be it the body or the social system, are constantly deployed as permeable sites in which danger, sickness and transgressions might flow. The permeability of borders is

crudely and literally personified in the bodies of those affected by AIDS, and the media and mainstream discourses constantly reinforce the pollution and dangers brought by these bodies. Besides the human bodies, the idea that national borders have become permeable sites, where threats to national body are located, has become part of the mainstream discourse in recent years. As a consequence, racist and homophobic behaviors are being naturalized in mainstream media and its echo in everyday life is used to attack specific communities. This attack is carried out with the active consent of the people in charge by grouping different “fears” in the same subjects as shown in the following passage from *Like Son*, where the protagonist remembers one more denigrating incident from his childhood:

Fifteen years later, I'd been dealt enough jabs –including one incident in junior high when a group of kids threw handfuls of pennies at me, called me a “beaner queer whore,” and were only reprimanded by the lunch supervisor to *Sit down and eat* [...] His attire and grooming was passive resistance of a most dignified form. (Lemus 15-6)

As can be seen from the above excerpt, the hysteria that national borders have turned into porous sites from which dangers and illnesses are entering the U.S., is unfortunately embodied on marginalized communities which are already struggling to access a decent and respectful lifestyle. Mexicans, Mexican Americans and queers, among others, are specifically targeted and blamed by racist and homophobic national discourses for the problems of the country by localizing their source in (im)migration and queer realities. Black lesbian Audre Lorde also denounced the “antilesbian hysteria” (48) taking place within the Black community and dividing it in much the same as what happened with

Chicana lesbians within the Chicana/o community. According to her, the criminalization of lesbianism is used in order not to face and discuss the real problems that the Black community faces within the U.S., that of racism and sexism. The activist condemned that this hysteria was but another strategy to confuse the Black community into fighting among each other, and not creating a common force against the real issues and dangers they faced as a racialized community. In other words, she stated that struggling against each other only brought harm and weakened the Movement. Besides, Lorde also defended the presence of “women-identified women” (49), those who managed without male support to succeed and fulfill their destinies, within the community and throughout the history. Thus, it made no sense to consider Black lesbians a threat to the community or “un-Black” (121). Aligning with what happened within the Chicana/o community, Lorde claimed that such counterproductive attitude is common among oppressed communities, where there seems to be the belief that there is just a restricted quantity of freedom to share among them and, hence, a hierarchy of priorities is established which can only be kept through the deprivation of others.

Moreover, in the above excerpt from *Like Son*, the general paranoia is painfully expressed by uniting race, gender and sexuality in one single source of all the maladies of modern U.S. society. This persecution targets the same marginalized individuals in the long history of U.S. colonization with its “beaner queer whore” directed to and by kids in an education setting, such as a high school. Such a prejudiced attitude proves the length to which bigotry is internalized and generalized from a very young age among U.S. citizens. The anger suffered by the oppressed after constant battering and contempt in their

everyday life, can, however, become a revolutionary tool in itself. In Audre Lorde's analysis of anger, the feminist scholar developed the notion of anger as a source of energy and activism. She explained that if anger was transferred to action in order to improve the future, it became a releasing performance. What is more, she claimed that it was through the procedure of turning anger into action that the oppressed individual learnt who the friends and enemies were. The possibility of such accomplishment is what made Lorde consider that anger was full of knowledge and power. However, she was very careful in distinguishing between anger and hatred. According to her, it was not just the source of each feeling that set them in opposite positions, but their aim as well. On the one hand, hatred resulted from the fury of those who did not partake in the oppressed people's purposes, and so, its aim was destruction and death. Anger, on the other hand, rose from the grief of misunderstanding among equals, and its objective was change. Beside Lorde's positive interpretation of the possibilities of anger, she was also adamant about the importance of not hiding or disguising one's anger in order to spare the guilt of the other person. Thus, she was critical about the feeling of guilt as she considered that it was a feeling that often promoted "ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness" (130). In other words, Lorde felt that, too often, guilt was used as an excuse not to act upon something or not to face one's own involvement in maintaining inequality and oppression.

As expressed by the above passage in *Like Son*, and by Lorde's theory of anger, the colored body of non-normative sexual identities becomes the center of violence in the Anglocentric and heterosexist U.S. society. This body is often regarded as the synecdoche for the national body that the hegemonic

discourses call for closing and banning. The queer body, as represented by mainstream discourse, embodies different “dangers,” and, thus, becomes the perfect symbol of different sites that are deemed dangerous and polluting: the city and the border. Different Queer Studies have focused their analyses in these locales in order to examine the way in which queer identity has been constructed and implemented in the general discourse of law and medicine. At the same time, cities and the border prove to be sites of struggle, where new constructions of queer identity have been possible, and where positive appropriation of previously derogatory terms are produced.

Similar to the way in which gender and sex have been rewritten in order to add more embracing possibilities of inclusion, the very essential notions of space and time, in which human beings base their life, have also been redefined by queer theory. According to queer critic Judith Halberstam, a queer interpretation of time and space challenges traditional social foundations such as family, heterosexuality and its quintessential goal, reproduction. The theorist states that “[q]ueer time and space are useful frameworks for assessing political and cultural change” (4). That is, time and space have been analyzed from a queer perspective so as to introduce new perceptions in individuals’ relation toward both notions.

Taking as a reference D. Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Halberstam explains that time and space are social constructions resulting from social relations. Similar to what was done with gender, he quotes Harvey regarding the notion that time is perceived as “some form of natural progression” (7) and, hence, individuals are unable to recognize it as constructed. Harvey goes on explaining that capital accumulation, once again,

is on the base of the way time has been organized. Furthermore, individuals provide time with value and meaning. On the other hand, as Halberstam's reading of Harvey implies, space undergoes a double naturalization as a consequence of its practice and its subordination to time. In his opinion, Harvey's study points out that the way people use space results in how they turn such space natural. That is, individuals add their specific application to a space and, hence, they end up believing that such practice is the only and reasonable one. By not questioning this praxis, spaces become naturalized and subordinated to time. Hence, Halberstam concludes that the production of spatial practices become uncertain by such naturalization of time and space. However, the author also warns that although Harvey's analysis of time and space are defined in such a manner as to point out capitalism's effects, he fails to include, except in some rare instances, the ways in which heteronormative, racism and sexism have also influenced this traditional perception of time and space.

It is in order to fill this theoretical gap that Halberstam's study focuses on the ways in which gender and race have modified the "time/space continuum" (8) at different times in history by always favoring the white male. In his attempt to bring attention to the consequences of specific understandings of time and space, Halberstam introduces the compelling example of the effect that AIDS had among gay communities at the end of the 20th century. He explains that by acquiring this illness and seeing their life-span suddenly reduced, AIDS victim started experiencing time in a radically different way by focusing in the present they had and conscious about the future they lacked. This perception of time as

a painful finite notion encouraged many unordinary and socially provocative practices by this community.

Halberstam's use of queer "refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (6). It is the purpose of this author then, to analyze the way in which the concepts of time and space could be redefined from a queer perspective. This new theoretical understanding will, thus, allow for the inclusion of non-traditional practices related, although not limited, to gay and lesbian individuals. Both queer time and queer space are results of a postmodern interpretation that would dispel the previously limited conception of this continuum. In the critic's opinion, as a result of this revising trend in postmodern studies, time would free itself from the parameters that have traditionally defined it in so as to fulfill, through the bourgeois class, the capitalist system's interests. That is, the author considers time in need to be freed from "the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (6). Similarly, queer space would also be created beyond traditional practices that have confined and limited certain communities from experiencing it. By the participation of queer subjects in place-making discourses, then, a new perception of space will be available in which a more inclusive and non-normative practice of place is possible.

The importance of the possibilities that a queer understanding of time/space continuum offers is unquestionable in order to study the way the identity is constructed. In other words, "[p]laces afford preexisting narratives of former encounters; they offer a means of symbolically decoding practices that occur within certain sociolinguistic frameworks" (Halberstam 5). Following this

idea, then, individuals who enter or inhabit different places bring their own experience and narratives, and, thus, construct their identity through their interaction with other individuals. Consequently, the setting becomes a physical standpoint for interchanging discursive spaces that might be defined, but not limited by the place. The discursive space allows individuals participating in it to rearrange previous “norms” and to, thus, by altering the discursive space, the actual place might also become the *locus* of new narratives. This way, identities keep being shaped by their active exchange with different subjects in localized settings. These settings will provide a prearranged discursive space, but it will, nevertheless, allow its participants to discuss and question it. Consequently, new and alternative interpretations of such spaces will become available.

Halberstam’s analysis goes on underlining the lacks regarding the relation between sexuality and space in postmodern analysis of space. However, the author does acknowledge the attempt of some well-known authors in at least including the axis of race and gender in some of their studies. Sexuality and how it is present in a postmodern conception of space, seems to be missing from the general trend. The critic brings attention to the dangers and struggles that transgender individuals, as well as queer performers, have taken either in their personal or/and professional life because of their sexual identity. In the case of transgender people, the author highlights the absence of studies dealing with rural areas in contrast to the more studied urban settings. Among the increasing literature on sexuality and space, Halberstam also emphasizes the predominance of subjects relating to white gay male sexual communities. The author claims that important notions, such as race and gender differences, are ignored or underestimated. Thus, the resulting analysis, although interesting

from a queer standpoint, still reflects some of the traditional biases against minorities and women. Once again, male and white characteristics are privileged over female and colored ones. It is the author's purpose to focus on the study of gender and race in the analysis of sexuality and space which include, on the one hand, the generally ignored rural settings, and, on the other hand, the under evaluated women and/or colored lesbians and transgender people in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of queer time and space.

Halberstam defines the transgender as any individual who defies hegemonic gender normativity. Following with the queer interpretation of time and space, he defends that the transgender body challenges the temporal adequacy of this body when he describes it as a "site for fantasies of futurity and anachronism" (15). By describing it so, she considers the transgender body as a symbol for postmodern flexibility and plasticity in that it represents the "embodied subjectivity" (17). In other words, the agency of the transgender subject to enact her/his body in opposing terms to what has traditionally been defined as results in a gender ambiguity that clearly differs from the gender-inverted definition of early 20th century. He also denounces the preferential treatment given to the enactments of feminine men in contrast to the masculine women. Consequently, criticizing the ample studies that sissy boy, drag queens and transvestites have received, and the marginality of their masculine counterparts. The preference of some gender performances and the invisibility of others is proof of the importance that labeling every gender and sexuality seem to have. The fact that some people enjoy or feel the need to overcome this labeling is introduced in Felicia Luna Lemus' first novel, *Trace Elements of*

Random Tea Parties, through the protagonist, Leticia, who does not want to restrict to a formulaic identity. Her choice not to conform to a single gender turns her suspicious in the queer community she lives in:

In the 1950s bar days, there was a word most dykes would have hissed my direction in an attempt to describe me. Ki-ki. "That one's ki-ki, a neither-nor, [...] One night she's a femme prowling pretty for a butch, next night she's a tom cruising for a lady. Never know which you'll get, not when she dresses in the morning, not with the way she talks, tells a story, acts. She's trouble, that one." (169)

In this passage, the author presents the coming-out story of a young Chicana queer, Leticia, who struggles with the various identity impositions regarding her sexual identity. In this case, the protagonist, a college graduate, deals with the difficulties of constructing her identity and enacting it in front of her traditional Mexican family, more specifically her grandmother, Nana, who has raised her. However, Leticia's difficulties, as seen in the above passage, are not limited to her cultural and ethnic background, but also relate to the queer community where she lives and works, and which expects her to choose a single queer gender role. The constraints and difficulties of enjoying a public and free queer Chicana identity are not only based on the heteronormativity found in her Mexican American family background, but also within the queer community in the city of Los Angeles. Leticia's need to go beyond specific identities and the either/or identity definition is perceived as a threat to both her relation with Nana, and also with the queer community who forces the restrictions of a binary system that somehow echoes the traditional gender division. Somehow related with Leticia's position, theorist Halberstam denounces the tendency of a post-

gender era where young queers, especially white urban youth, consider that gender labeling, or labeling in general, becomes a sign of oppression and, thus, discard labeling altogether. In this sense, the queer scholar views such attitude as an unfortunate disregard for the rights achieved by previous activists in relation to queer individuals, and also, for their work in creating discursive spaces that would help shape queer identity. The following excerpt from Leticia in *Trace Elements* echoes Halberstam's concern:

What kind of dyke was I anyway? Good question. Simple and complicated all at once, I wasn't a pigeon to be tucked away neatly into a hole. I didn't wear a fixed category without feeling pain. I was more, or less, or something different entirely. (170)

In this passage, Leticia seems to echo Halberstam's criticism toward young queers who resist any kind of labeling. However, I would say that the protagonist of the novel is more concerned about not having to name, act or behave in a specific manner as a reflection of a single queer role, but that she needs to move beyond a static conception of queerness. In other words, she seems to still be exploring her queer identity and navigating among the different options available in the process of her identity formation. Therefore, it is not so much the labeling that she is against, but the pressure of choosing and adopting a single preestablished queer speech, appearance and behavior. According to Halberstam, negating and discarding any queer labels is linked to capitalism in late postmodernity where, and recovering Lisa Duggan's analysis, these post-gender individuals align with a "new homonormativity" (Halberstam 19). That is, they create a parallel queer community that does not challenge or question the

powerful heteronormativity, but maintain and support it. According to the scholar, this practice is carried on while they engage in similar patterns of domesticity and consumption that, although set within a privileged gay community, will lead to confining, normative, nonpolitical and exclusive behavior. Opposite to Halberstam's perception of queer individuals accommodating and unchallenging position within heteronormativity, queer feminist Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde and Paula Gunn Allen did not only question heterosexist and Anglocentric understandings of racialized sexual identities, but they moved beyond traditional dualism by challenging lesbianism itself. As AnaLouise Keating states in her comparative analysis *Women Reading Women Writing*, these authors included "bisexual inflections" (85) in their literary works and theoretical engagement; that is, they alternated between homosexual and heterosexual urges as well as female and male genders. By doing so, they shook the traditional dualistic system that confined sexual identities and gender categories in an attempt to overcome such restrictions.

Aligning with Anzaldúa, Lorde and Allen's challenge of traditional sexual and gender confinements, Halberstam advocates for the idea that transgenderism is central in many current postmodern debates. Furthermore, in *Queer Time & Space* the author selects contexts that have not been widely studied in an attempt to portray a more complete picture of the transgender experience these days. By doing so, the author participates in the recovery effort carried out by marginalized communities through history of claiming their space and value. Through this work, he tries to overcome the previous studies which focus on a generalized gathering of individuals, instead of the interaction between different groups of individuals in relation to "space, embodiment,

locality, and desire” (44-5). He, thus, goes on studying different social debates related to the postmodern flexibility which the transgender subject represents. It is the purpose of the author to focus on the importance of the spatial and sexual relations, and the way this tandem defines queer communities in urban settings. It is necessary to take into account the fact that these communities are created by varied individuals who might share some identity axes, but differ in others. Consequently, racial, class and gender crossings might become problematic to the unity of the community, or, on the contrary, strengthen it.

Nevertheless, Halberstam is cautious with the generalized use of the term transgenderism to include every cross-identifying subject. In his opinion, the automatic grouping of individuals has the risk of obscuring the meaning of the term itself and which subjects are included under transgenderism. The critic continues clarifying that the term does not refer to people who challenge and refuse traditional defining categories, but to those who claim an alternative defining mode for themselves. This form of recognition is a more dynamic and flexible one in that it does not gather a set of characteristics in regard to a specific identity, but in that it is created in relational basis. In other words, the author favors a more fluid mode of identity than that presented by traditional variables. This is an interesting way of allocating identity in that Halberstam does not only provide agency to the individual, but she also includes the participation of others in identity definition. However, the participation of the Other in defining oneself does not involve traditional constrains, but it is understood more as a shared acknowledgement of the transgender individuality, which might readapt in future exchanges.

Halberstam's study also includes the work of scholar Jay Prosser as he recovers Butler's analysis by presenting the transgender as the epitome of the "gender trouble." In this sense, the transgender or transsexual body proves, in Halberstam's reading of Prosser's work, the separation between sex and gender and, thus, the constructedness of these notions. Challenging the "naturalness" of a specific sex and its correlation to a gender raises the possibilities of identity assignation as represented by transgenders and transsexuals. Halberstam explains the different approaches that these individuals show regarding their cross-identification. While transsexuals move to perpetuate definite changes in their bodies, transgenders rather maintain their gender ambiguity and, thus, welcome a more hybrid stand that further questions normative gendering and identity definitions. Nevertheless, Halberstam reminds the reader that transgenderism and transexuality lack unique meanings and performances. Therefore, the changes they undergo are a result of the relationality established among each other and which places them beyond "hegemonic medical discourses" (Halberstam 53-4).

Different studies on transgenderism have presented varied readings of the transgender body. On the one hand, the transgender has been perceived as the perfect postmodern conception of transformation representing the idea of the body as a changeable reality. On the other hand, some others perceive that the issue of transgender bodies does nothing but underline the perpetuation of the traditional gender system. Furthermore, others consider that the transgender body depicts an idealized figure that represents the indefinite possibilities of subcultures. The idea I find most interesting is the theorization of the transgender body as a fluid body. This dynamic body-definition provides the

potential for varied interpretations regarding identity construction. According to this idea, the individual's identity and location in the world is never limited or accomplished as long as the relational nature of queer identity formation is understood. That is, a dialogue between queer identity and its in-process nature echo the Borderland subjectivity of Chicana (queer) subjects. Following border theorists' interpretation, border identities never cease to become as long as they stay rooted in community spaces, where new revisions of historical account and cultural production takes place. Recovering queer critic Juana María Rodríguez's statement, "[m]anifestations of identity can be mapped within specific fields of knowledge, but cannot be contained by them" (8).

According to scholar Mary Pat Brady, "[t]he city, perhaps more than any other public space, has been narrated as male and as a network of public spaces enclosed by private spaces" (88). The urban space has not only been defined and perceived in gender discriminatory ways, but the urban *loci's* practices have, as a result, been controlled and monitored through specific designs so as to police them. Following Brady's analysis, the 20th century city, as theorized by Euro-American citizens, was defined by medical discourses that would delineate the borders between citizens and the dangerous Other. The use of medical rhetoric in order to pathologize certain social behaviors has been common through history as the earlier recollection of Foucault's study on sexuality certified. In the history of urban theory, similar repressive actions were taken and unsurprisingly those affected the most were women, minorities and queers. Brady includes a series of nervous pathologies related to the design of urban spaces, such as agoraphobia and claustrophobia, which were presented as especially affecting women in an uncanny similarity to the conception of the

hysterical woman in the 19th century. Consequently, specific architectonic characteristics were designed and built in order to “secure” the health of particular citizens. These measures allow interesting studies on the relation between gender and space, on the one hand, and sexuality and space, on the other, as Brady continues by explaining that those most prone to nervous breakdowns happened to be women and homosexuals. These two communities, thus, became the objective of modernist planners that would profit from open spaces of garden and glass buildings. Behind such “caring” measures, however, lay the need to police their behavior and actions. Thus, these architectonic traits allowed the exposure of these citizens, and their deprivation of private spaces. In Brady’s opinion, this urban design did nothing but “produce a nonheterosexual sexuality that predicates heterosexual anxieties” (Brady 88-9) in relation to sexual identity, and patriarchal anxieties in regard to gender identity.

If modern gay/lesbian narratives are studied, the term metronormative is common, according to Halberstam, to refer to the open and visible queer experiences that cities provide. Metronormative narratives outline the coming out experience of queer subjects within their journey from home to a new place. Accordingly, change in location, usually from the rural to the urban, enables the queer individual to fully experience her/his sexuality as s/he locates her/himself in a social space that allows and encourages breaking with previous repressive modes. In other words, the physical move equates the psychological passage of queer individuals. The acts of coming-out and moving into an urban setting are presented as necessary for the full development of queer subjects. This moving out-coming out experience is central to Frank, the protagonist of *Like Son*, in

order to begin his life as a different individual from that expected from him by his mother and, to some extent, his community:

but I knew my mother would continue somehow to control me for as long as I was doing things her way. And going to college like a good kid was most definitely doing things her way. Stupid and self-defeating as it may have ultimately been, I wrote off college. [...] Neurotic over-achiever, I still earned all A's and even graduated high school "Most Likely to Succeed." But the second I graduated, I used my savings to move to L.A., where I got a new job and worked more and saved less money, but finally slept well at night. (Lemus 70)

In this passage, the transgender protagonist decides to leave his home and move to Los Angeles where he finds jobs, which although not economically profitable, let him sleep well at night. Although Halberstam alerts the reader about oversimplifying these two processes of moving out and coming out, I would say that, in this case, it is not so much Frank's transgenderism that propels him to leave his home, but the memories of sexual abuse suffered in that house through his childhood, the inability of his mother to show any emotional affection for him and the mother's obvious emotional imbalance that forces Frank to seek an emotionally healthier environment in L.A., first, and in New York, later. The protagonist's identity, however, must not be undervalued when interpreting his choice of these urban settings which have long history of queer-friendly activism.

Cities and their public areas have often served as the frame for many social and political disruptions in order to claim minorities' right to urban space. This is why the importance of the urban setting in the identity formation of

minorities is key to understand the different political activisms born in cities. The different Civil Rights Movements of the '60s and '70s are clear instances in which minorities appropriated urban spaces in their social and political struggle. According to scholar Mary Louise Pratt, these struggles over civil rights also involved the right to use the urban space where issues of public versus private space, gentrification and segregation, were examined. In other words, minorities demanded their claim to participate in previously denied spaces which will, later, enable them to enjoy social equality. When analyzing the civil rights of the minorities, it is necessary to bear in mind the inequality embedded within these communities. Chicanas within *El Movimiento*, although active in the nationalist movement, did not enjoy equal conditions to their male partners. As a result, not only did the city's hegemonic politics set her aside for being a minority on the grounds of her race and class, but her own community limited her position on the basis of her gender. Chicanos approved private spaces rather than public ones to reduce Chicanas' active role within the Movement, and, which rendered them invisible within the urban context. It is not surprising then, that many Chicana writers have chosen to frame their literary works in urban settings that have, somehow, both confined them or liberated them. Sometimes these settings might not be revolutionary by themselves, but it is the use that Chicanas provide them with that turn them into challenging spaces. A completely different setting, the university campus, has also been quite common in different Chicana literature. According to theorist Brady "universities have been crucial to urban transformations in the postwar period" (95-6) and, thus, they have also been crucial in empowering both Chicanas and queer communities. Spatial transformations, such as the construction of a university,

bring along ideological, political and social changes from which different communities can take advantage from. However, it is also true that the presence of marginalized individuals, such as colored women and queers, was a rather extraordinary phenomenon at first. The predominance of men and heteronormativity provided that the number of challenging voices to be rare. This tradition defined nationalist and cultural movements in such ways so as to make sure that the hegemonic gender and sexual roles be maintained. However, defining a common political and social program helped Chicanas and queer activists improve their opportunities. Working together for a mutual goal also provided them with emotional strength by creating a sense of community. These communities, located outside their cultural ones, would prove to be significant for Chicana feminist and/or lesbians during the '80s and '90s when their gender and sexual-specific activism labeled them as *vendidas* and Malinches within the Chicana/o community.

This is why feminist scholar Mary Pat Brady highlights the importance of acknowledging the difficulties that these Chicanas endured and the enormous struggles involved in the creation of the terms "Chicana" and "lesbian." Thus, when joining both denominations, people should recall the importance that forging and adopting these identity terms implied within the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movements. Brady also informs that these new political identity models were originated from the fact that these marginalized individuals reclaimed their body while, at the same time, defined it through "the appropriation and analysis of space" (109). In other words, reevaluating and recovering their body would lead to gender-based and sexuality-based decision-making processes that would always benefit the subject, in this case the

Chicana queer. In order to strengthen this idea, Brady recovers writer Cherríe Moraga's belief that memory, desire, and body are linked to each other to the extent that they define each other. Furthermore, feminist critic AnaLouise Keating unites French feminist Hélène Cixous and Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa in order to examine the way these scholars interpreted and insisted on the close relation between language acquisition and women's bodies. Although there are similarities between this thinking between the authors, it is true that the dissimilar experiences lived by these authors affected their interpretation of this premise. On the one hand, Keating unites Anzaldúa and Cixous in their certainty that as long as women's bodies are defined by phallogocentric discourses, they will be perceived as passive objects. Therefore, challenging these constraining discourses and breaking free will liberate the female body and, hence, the close association of "voice, body, desire, and text" (*Women Reading* 119) that Anzaldúa and Cixous defended will become possible. Although Keating warns that the notion of such connections between writing and the female body are usually considered suspicious, "[b]ody-writing's visionary metaphoric language" (*Women Reading* 122) became a tool with which feminists put into question the repressive binary system at the base of western discourse. In other words, the critic states that translating bodily experiences into literature and theory allows feminists to promote change and to invite discussion within the communities, and between communities. However, she is also convinced about the need to appropriately translate the body into language, and, thus, the various ways in which a woman is defined must be taken into account. It is bearing this in mind, she denominates Gloria Anzaldúa's body-writing as "mestizaje écriture" (*Women Reading* 122) as

opposed to Cixous' *écriture féminine*, in which her race, class, gender and sexuality are present. Their distinct experiences and the women they represented is essential and, then, although these differences must not limit the working together of different women, they must be taken into account and incorporated to achieve an accurate and sincere translation. According to Keating, Cixous and Anzaldúa advocated for an identity which affirmed the centrality of their body in as much as it defined who they were and what their experiences were. As she explains, it is through this crucial realization of the Chicana identity and experience as an "embodied subject" (*Women Reading* 124) that Anzaldúa's most well-known theoretical concepts were created. That is, it is through Anzaldúa's similes between body and geography that her symbol of the Borderland was produced: "a 1,950 mile-long open wound [...] me raja me raja" (*Borderlands* 24), and her queer *chicanidad* was also defined in the poem "Del Otro Lado." As mentioned earlier, and echoing Audre Lorde's words, differences must not be overlooked, but regarded as a source of energy to work together among feminists from different communities. This is exactly what Anzaldúa's *mestiza* writing involved, that although specific to the experience of Chicanas it also promoted interaction with other feminist activists.

Literary critic Debra J. Blake defends the notion that the term Chicana, unlike Chicano, implies by itself a strong concern with issues regarding colored feminists and lesbians as well as its association with the struggles carried out by Third World feminists (4). As a term recovered during the '60s, Blake claims that "Chicana" expresses not only a strong affiliation with political and historical consciousness of the racist, colonialist and classist conditions suffered by the Chicana/o community within the U.S., but also their proud recognition of

mestizaje. Concerning the scholarly studies on Chicana feminist and/or queer Chicanas, literary critic Catrióna Rueda Esquibel claims that, unfortunately, two of the central feminist Chicana queer theorists, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, are oftentimes studied separately. She denounces that while Moraga's work is examined and regarded as the Chicana lesbian *per se*, in Anzaldúa's case her theory of *mestizaje* is relegated by her work on queer analysis. This incomplete appreciation of these queer Chicana scholars, then, reflect the "maiming" trend Moraga so openly and repeatedly criticized when she described herself as embracing multiple identities that interconnect and affect each other. According to Esquibel, this treatment has been detrimental to a more open and wholesome interpretation of Chicana queer identities and cultural production. The literary critic states that Chicana lesbianism must be placed at the center of Chicana/o community, feminism and theory, challenging the belief that Chicana feminisms prompt from heterosexuality, and, more specifically, from its compulsory establishment within the community (3). Critic Debra J. Blake also defends Moraga and Anzaldúa's determination in promoting the active recuperation and redefinition of the Chicana/o identity through the questioning of historical narratives and the rewriting of narratives in order to attain a positive identity. Moraga and Anzaldúa's insistence, along with other Chicana/o theorists and artists', on their "racialized sexuality" (Soto 10) makes the inclusion of both these queer Chicana theorists necessary in this study of queer Chicana novels, such as the ones analyzed here by Felicia Luna Lemus. Stressing the importance of the way a colored woman is defined by race, class, gender and sexuality, makes any other kind of literary analysis ineffective and fruitless.

As the literary critic claims “[w]riting is a self-produced form of expression, a narrative generated by the author herself and representing her own vision of self and the world” (4). In other words, the connection between body and language becomes even more crucial in the case of Chicana/os and Mexicana/os in the U.S. with their long history of denial to education and, hence, their erasure and silence from official narratives. Writing becomes not only a way claiming their rights as citizens, but also their way to express their experiences as an oppressed community and to form, through the knowledge that their history of persecution has bestowed them, their identity as active subjects in ways that move away from oppressive systems. By reappropriating the Chicana body, these women also recovered and were able to narrate their memory and desire. The interconnection of these two elements is central in the following passage of *Trace Elements*, where Leticia describes the first time she learned about *La Llorona* from her grandmother and the “romantic” relation they have enjoyed since then:

Twenty-some-odd years had passed since Nana first introduced me to my old lady Weeping. It started out that Weeping only stopped by for visits when the Santa Ana desert winds moaned sharp fry hot, but over the years our affair developed to the point where I felt my girl Weeping with each breath. Her presence settled into the crevices of my body. The joints between the segments of my toes swelled and need to be cracked. My ears hummed a high-pitched moan. My throat burned. (Lemus 11)

In this excerpt, the protagonist aligns with Moraga’s idea that memory, desire and body are interconnected. In this case, it is the recovered figure of *La Llorona* that embodies Leticia’s memories and becomes the center of her desire

in their life-long affair. *La Llorona* becomes Leticia's desirable object and she is, at the same time, the spiritual memory of her Mexican background and what links her queer desire to Nana's tradition. *La Llorona's* command over Leticia's physical body is also described in a very detailed way as she affects her mobility through her toes, her connection or disconnection to the family stories as the result of *La Llorona's* moans in her ear, and, finally, even her ability to talk. This last characteristic is crucial in that storytelling is the strongest trait in Leticia and, besides, it is what makes her an active agent in her community, whichever she chooses to be. Hence, *La Llorona* becomes not just part of Leticia's desire, but her own body and what shapes her as an individual are affected by her. This legend's presence on Leticia's body is very clearly depicted in her "Weeping Woman tattoo, my beautiful lady perfectly bronze-skinned, gold-robed and surrounded by a barbed wreath of cadmium red carnations" (Lemus, *Trace Elements* 29). It is important to note that Felicia Luna Lemus' depiction of *La Llorona* does not fall under the traditional image of this figure, but resembles the image of the virgin of Guadalupe. That the author has presented the wrong type of mother with the traditional reproduction of the virgin as the traditional ideal of the mother is an extraordinary way of rewriting and revising these Mexican female figures and to break down with the traditional and male-defined roles assigned to them. Thus, Luna Lemus restores the image of *La Llorona*, the infanticide, with *La Virgen*, and reunites them as a single figure of motherhood in some sort of tribute to the ambivalent and opposite values inherent in every woman.

In her recovery of *La Llorona* figure, literary critic Catrióna Rueda Esquibel includes her experience as a listener to scholar Shirley Flores-Muñoz's

interpretation of this tale as a doctorate student, which described *La Llorona* not as the murderer, as in most versions of this tale, but as a survivor of the history of violence forced on the indigenous people by the conquest. As Esquibel further states, in Chicana lesbian literature the figure of *La Llorona* is very present, although the interpretation and readings of this figure differ from the traditional cautionary tale. Moreover, she describes the figure of *La Llorona* both as a disruptive and unifying figure who embodies not only a challenge to patriarchy and conquest, but also the alliance between past and present. That is, Esquibel claims that this cultural female figure is an atemporal and inclusive representative of “the women of discord” (16). Recovering the memory and history of these Mexican female figures was important for Chicanas in the ‘60s and, especially, later in the ‘80s and ‘90s in the hands of feminist Chicanas, queer and non-queer alike. This recovery redefined the nationalist narratives that maintained the hegemony and were themselves revised to fulfill nationalist ideas. Therefore, it is not surprising that Chicana feminists recovered the figure of Malinche, *La Llorona*, and *La Virgen de Guadalupe* in order to rewrite these narratives of treason, insanity and purity, and turned them into powerful female figures that would both maintain their cultural significance and would enable feminist friendly narratives.

Literary critic AnaLouise Keating frames the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, and Paula Gunn Allen in the “transformational identity politics” (*Women Reading* 5). This new conceptualization, unlike the traditional one, believes in the challenge and redefinition of identities, and in its dynamic and hybrid nature. By redefining the process of identity formation, Anzaldúa, Lorde and Allen, according to Keating’s interpretation, examine how identity is created

and which forces interact in this process. These feminists believed in the strength of language to describe and transform reality. Empowered by their particular experiences, positive and painful ones, as they navigated through the U.S. society as racialized women, they excelled in the practice of shifting subject positions to better face everyday life's commitments. Therefore, Anzaldúa, Audre and Allen acted out of, as Keating describes, "threshold locations" (*Women Reading* 4) so as to actively engage in the liberation and alliance of queer colored women. Such emancipation was promoted by their "threshold theories" (*Women Reading* 15), which slipped through different genres and languages. This miscellaneous was but the formal reflection of their alternative theoretical content, which was inspired by everyday experiences that help define the individual's identity, and will take part in a culturally-conscious reconstruction within their community. Furthermore, as Keating states in her detailed comparative work, Allen, Audre and Anzaldúa's theories are deeply indebted to "precolonial creatix figures" (*Women Reading* 19), Laguna Pueblo Thought, Yoruban MawuLisa and the Mesoamerican Coatlicue, from which they got their inspiration to create more feminine-oriented and positive cultural alternatives that would ground their particularities as lesbians of color. Following Keating's interpretation, this precolonial symbology compelled these women to create new culturally-meaningful possibilities that would incorporate past and present concerns as they related to race, gender, sexuality and spirituality.

Scholars Raúl Homero Villa and George J. Sánchez do not define this city as unique in *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures* edited by them, but they consider the City of Los Angeles central in developing and defining issues that make up for contemporary American studies. The city is described as

a site where identity and community formation takes place between individuals of different race, class, gender, and sexuality. Such heterogeneous background is what turns the city into a local reflection of the worldwide globalization phenomenon. In Villa and Sánchez's *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures*, the situation of marginalized individuals is explored and also the way in which the city, as an urban site, facilitates or complicates the possibilities of these individuals to become active subjects. These marginalized citizens are mostly working-class minority women and queers. As scholar Moira Rachel Kenney presents in her study on gay and lesbian Los Angeles, being able to gather and create a location in which queer individuals can meet is crucial to offer them a sense of belonging and a spatial reflection of their identity. According to Kenney's study, these gathering points have existed in L.A. since the '40s when the city's downtown area bars, near the Greyhound station, offered a space where queer and strangers could safely meet. The fact that a meeting point for non-normative individuals was created around the bus station is interesting in that it provides a passing, non-definite sense, but also a centric location where people from different parts of the city or even outside the city could easily find. Thus, the transit nature of the bus station ironically secures stability and locality to the otherwise criminalized queers. There are different kinds of settings that allow and promote queerness to be lived and experienced within communities. In the following excerpt from *Trace Elements*, the protagonist describes a unique apartment building where lesbians lived and partied. The particularity of this building is described in a very positive way that implies a freedom and congeniality that seem to be hard to find outside this specific site:

Back in the day, the late 1980s and early 1990s to be exact, K's apartment had been a building stocked with fierce dykes full of swagger and style. [...] Word was that the building's parties had rocked with a good time better than any club's offerings. [...] And, cherry on top of the fantasy pie, the rent was the cheapest in town. Of course, the rent had to be cheap. Where else could a group of avant-garde dykes take over a building except in gang warfare turf? [...] With each person that moved out, fifteen others wanted to move in. But you know, even legends start to get crow's-feet after a while in the sun. (Lemus 138-9)

Many interesting issues are present in this passage that are worth pointing out. First of all, it describes how in the '80s and '90s L.A. continued to be a city where the queer community was able to get together, live and party, as the quote describes, by inhabiting a whole building and, thus, attracting many others to celebrate their queerness. However, the building and the community that gathered around it still had to do so in an economically depressed area, more specifically in the dangerous "gang warfare turf." The violence, danger and alienation that such an urban location represents crashes with the previous glorious description of partying and sexual freedom exposed by the narrator. The danger related to the gang activity might also be connected to the U.S. mainstream "fear" and dislike for queers as well. Therefore, although the presence of such a building does provide certain space for queers to live their life, the neighborhood represents the marginalization of the queer community within the U.S. society, and also the dangers that being queer implied. I would also like to refer to the last part of the excerpt where the mobility and changes of L.A. are referred to. That is, neighborhoods continually shift and, such flux

prevents them from creating solid roots giving them a temporal, ethereal and provisional existence. On the other hand, the fact that the city is so active also implies that new communities and centers might be created every time and that a dynamic life is present.

Sociologist George Lipsitz studies why, how and who rides public transportation in the City of Los Angeles. By doing so, he is able to analyze the hardships of working women who are forced by their economic constraints to use the public transportation regularly with the inconveniences and dangers this might bring with it. Lipsitz goes on describing the sharp contrasts between economically comfortable individuals, who can afford to drive in Los Angeles, and the working women, who have to adapt bus routes to their necessities. He also refers to those who shop in the expensive and luxurious boutiques the city is known for, and those who frequent thrift stores where glamour and good quality is missing. Furthermore, these distinctions come down to the inequality between those who can safely navigate through the public space of the city in the security of privately owned car, and, on the other hand, those who must endure the dangers that public space presents when navigating through it in a public transportation system, where sexual harassment and sexist behaviors are fairly common. The differences in location and in the communities living in them reflect the reality of two extremely differentiated worlds that cohabit in Los Angeles. The metaphor of the two worlds coined by Lipsitz still dictates current day social policies.

In these radically separated worlds, the blame for social maladies is divided. On the one hand, there are what Lipsitz calls “‘alien’ outsiders,” those who are denied their citizenship, such as immigrants, undocumented individuals

and foreigners. On the other hand, there are the “subversive’ insiders,” who although citizens of the U.S., somehow disrupt the homogeneity and normative discourses, such as queers, feminists, welfare mothers, and so on. This division between those who blame and those who are blamed has been, according to Lipsitz, behind the different moral outcries taking place in California and Los Angeles since the 1970s. However, what is interesting is to see, as author Henry Yu analyses in his “Los Angeles and American Studies in a Pacific World of Migration,” that despite all this persecution, there has been a positive outcome. The critic refers to the fact that these criminalized and marginalized individuals have managed to create communities, physical or/and emotional, by overcoming the traditional definition of belonging which is based on “static definitions of place and legal regimes of citizenry” (Yu 39-40). These scholars encourage the notion of spaces created by the circulation of individuals instead of those defined by traditional modes, which parallel nation-states limitations. This idea of spaces being created and connected from dynamic motions rather than the traditionally static ones challenges the unique-site definition of space. Thus, it opens the possibility for a more fluid and hybrid mode of community creation.

Furthermore, sociologist Greg Hise describes the different types of segregation that reflect the industrial capitalism in the world’s major cities. On the one hand, he presents the social segregation in which individuals are divided and grouped along race, class and gender. This division follows the dynamics of a capitalist system, where biological features such as gender and race, and the economic ones limit individuals’ possibilities to succeed. This discriminatory economic system demonizes specific racial, gender and class

traits and, thus, this will be reflected in the spaces and locales they are provided within the city. On the other hand, the functional segregation mentioned by Hise group or alienate people limiting their access to specific areas in the city which are defined in terms of their function. Thus, while social segregation confines people according to their gender, race, class, and sexuality, functional segregation limits space's functions so as to secure specifically targeted individuals to access it or to be denied access. Either one of these segregations reflect the way in which borders, spatial and personal, are created and reinforced in different areas of the cities, and, as a result, produce bordered cities, which are the quintessential capitalist city. These bordered sites produce dramatic alienation among its inhabitants, who find it hard to develop a celebratory identity. This discriminatory realm is presented by the following excerpt from *Trace Elements* where Leticia feels deeply alienated:

And me, I never was good at obeying American body space waiting in queue rules. [...] Doodley-doo, in search of my slushy I got too close to that cigarette hand man. It seared through my entire body when the lit end of the cigarette made contact with my right hand. My right hand, the hand that was just learning how to hold a pencil and write my name, my right hand. With my downward gaze I saw the mission red tiles and I knew I was a bad little Indian girl. (100-1)

It is interesting to read how the mentioned segregation present in major capitalist cities are included in this literary passage. The idea of different borders created by capitalism that alienate individuals according to their race, gender, class or/and sexuality is reproduce in Leticia's childhood memory in the neighborhood store. The notion that there is an "American body space" that is

different from her own gives the impression that her physical presence in the space is different, and must be kept at bay in order to avoid physical pain and danger, a cigarette burn in this case. Besides, the racial, gender and class borders are very tangible in little Leticia's self-deprecating image of herself, which reflects her subjugated position as the colonized subject and her learned submissive behavior of bending her head and looking down after being hurt by the white male colonizer. Leticia recalls the colonization's dynamic and aligns herself with the exploited Indian while, at the same time, sees the cigarette burn as the white man's attempt to keep her in that submissive position by hurting the hand she is learning to write with. That is, the power of education in giving her a voice and her freedom to be able to write her name is temporarily attacked. The young Leticia, thus, appears very aware, despite of her age, of the importance of writing and naming.

The idea of Los Angeles as a border city is presented by Hise as being essential to the city since its foundation. In this sense, the critic describes L.A. as constantly being redefined in new terms due to the hybrid influences and forces taking place in the city. This hybridity proves that the formation of identity, in its many complex layers, is the result of individuals moving and connecting through different spaces. Thus, it is not something one is born with, but is constantly evolving into. As the author explains, the way this on-going identity construction is formed depends on the way it interacts and evolves at different spatial scales. It goes from the "individual body (with its psychological and sensory perception of internal and external and of bodily boundaries), to an urban district, to the nation-state and its boundaries with other nations" (58).

Consequently, the study of the individual as s/he navigates through different spaces within the city will lately reflect the effects of globalism.

Following a similar idea, the author of the article “The Figure of the Neighbor,” Dana Cuff, states that “the figure of the neighbor is multifaceted” (62) in that the very existence of the neighbor depends on somebody else’s perception of her/him. As part of the creation of the subject, her/his interaction with the people and places around her/him, the figure of the neighbor embodies the individual’s ideas of self and other in her/his relations with the people living in the neighborhood. In other words, they both depend on each other to exist, and it is this relation that Cuff defines as “reciprocal spatial identity” (62) that best describes the importance of space for the process of identity formation. Back to the passage in Felicia Luna Lemus’ *Trace Elements*, where the description of the lesbians’ apartment building is described as a transgressive environment of freedom and possibilities, in the following passage from the same novel, just the opposite happens when Leticia describes her childhood’s house as a place that she does not identify with, and which has constrained her personal development as a queer Chicana:

Only seven days had passed since I’d last visited the pink square she raised me in. Our pink house with Christmas lights up all year long on its windowsills, the house that forced me to remind myself each day when I was growing up that I did *not* like pink. (21)

This excerpt amply shows that neighborhoods are much more than the space they are confined into. The very house the protagonist was raised in, with its pinkness, reminds her of her struggle in becoming what she wanted to be

instead of what her “house,” family and neighbors expected her to be. The pink color traditionally associated with femininity is a constant reminder of her need to broader conceptions of gender and sexual identity. In this context, growing up in that pink house not only reminded her of what she was expected to evolve into, but of the tight connection between such gender-based tradition and what it meant to be part of *la familia*. Thus, questioning the pinkness did not only challenge the traditional gender roles, but also her belonging to her family and, by extension, to her neighborhood. Describing her home as a “pink square,” Leticia also implies the notion of confinement that such geometrical shape suggests and the rigidity of its defined borders that symbolizes the value system of her family’s tradition with no room left for reinterpretations.

In this line of thinking, *Tejana* feminist historian Emma Pérez claimed “*un sitio y una lengua*” (“Sexuality” 161) for Chicanas where they became the vocal agents of their narratives. This cultural space and language was crossed by race, gender and sexuality in a way that Anglocentric and heterosexist systems dismissed and silenced. Therefore, Chicanas became the creators of a discourse that denounced the racism, sexism and homophobia inherited from colonization and which were still widely applied and naturalized within power structures in the U.S. Marivel T. Danielson’s reading of Pérez’s conceptualization of “*un sitio y una lengua*” has inspired her study of the way queer Chicanas are left homeless and silenced as the result of their sexual identity. Her exploration of the way “coming home queers both the queer subject and the conceptualization of home” (4) aligns with this chapter’s analysis of Felicia Luna Lemus’ characters, as defined by their Chicana queerness. Leticia and Frank search for an alternative redefinition of their home

and community through their interaction with individuals within and outside the queer community. These multiple interactive crossings lead them to question the way race, gender, class, language and sexuality define their identities. In other words, through Felicia Luna Lemus' two novels, this chapter aims at underlining the way in which Leticia and Frank, the protagonists, struggle to create their own "*sitio y lengua*" in contemporary L.A. and New York City which will define them as agents of change and embodied subjects. This space and language will overcome constraining dualisms forced upon by tradition, and will allow the protagonists to be heard and seen, not as marginalized and alien individuals outside their cultural communities, but as representatives of an alternative understanding of Chicana queerness. This redefinition embraces positive and dynamic reconstructions of race, gender, sexuality, language and culture. Thus, similar to Danielson's study, this chapter puts Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness and Pérez's concept of a self-empowering space and language into conversation so as to read the queer Leticia and Frank in all their multiplicities as literary representations of an active queer Chicana subjectivity.

Another interesting phenomenon present in recent Los Angeles Studies is the idea of a collective amnesia as part of the city's character. As critic Josh Kun explains the city's urge to reinvent itself in the new era is done at the cost of erasing and destroying the city's ethnic and racial past. Echoing Noman Klein's words, the author states that L.A. as a city has survived and evolved through history by its predilection to erase itself. According to these scholars, this historical trait has been problematic among Mexican American communities whose legitimacy is based on maintaining their culture and recovering their historical presence that has long been erased from official narratives. As a

consequence, the authors locate the Chicana/o community as traveling in the intersections between spatial and temporal sites. That is, Chicana/o activists reclaim their history while performing and identifying with the spatial sites in L.A., and also in the rest of United States. Kun explains that the Chicana/o community has to work hard because its legitimacy and legality is too often put into question by prejudices based on skin color, which, renders them as illegitimate citizens. It is because they have long been marginalized that they have strengthened their goal by creating communities and neighborhoods that spatially allowed them to maintain, reinvent and, even alter, their cultural heritage. As mentioned above, Los Angeles is a border city, where different communities are created and where individuals navigate by crossing these borders in order to open communication among different neighborhoods. Unfortunately, it is also true that some borders are reinforced to block the “intrusion” of Othered individuals that challenge the U.S. hegemony. It is this alienation that pushes many Chicana/os to search for a space, where a sense of community and belonging is available. Unlike the pink house where Leticia feels alienated in *Trace Elements*, her great-grandparents’ store becomes a welcoming, cultural haven for those who are persecuted and criminalized by U.S. mainstream:

Long years had passed since she made the States her home, but Mamá Estrella still had rural México good girl in her blood. [...] Put simply, they hung out in the store looking for the México they held in their hearts, where their families were, where all their money earned went to, where their skin was common and their tongue understood –the solteros stood around in the store smoking cigarettes to try to find home. (25)

As described in this passage, the store that Leticia's great-grandparents owned in the U.S. becomes a privileged space where Mexican workers used to gather in an attempt to feel safe, at home, and escape, for a moment, from the hardship of being a marginalized Mexican worker. Mamá Estrella, who runs the store, is described as Mexican in her heart regardless of the years spent in the States, embodies the Mexican women, mothers and wives that these workers left behind and missed. Therefore, the store becomes a welcoming space where these men regain their dignity, and where their racial, cultural and linguistic characteristics are shared and respected. In other words, the bordered and oppressive U.S. hegemony disappears in the borderless Mexicannes of the store. In this case, hence, tradition becomes a solace for these people.

In sociologist Michael Nevin Willard's article, "Nuestra Los Angeles," the L.A. School Urban Theory is presented as it evolved around one of its central ideas. This idea claims that space is not just a static setting on which social and political events occur, but, on the contrary, space behaves as a dynamic factor that provokes political and social movements. As a result, different spaces become fundamental in the process of identity formation. That is, particular places carry on sets of values that are reflected by the individuals living in it. However, such expectations are not always welcomed and, so, they might as well become the source of conflicting interactions. As an example of the later, in *Trace Elements*, Leticia describes her return to her original neighborhood, where who she really is and what she is expected to be clash in the spatial specificity of her community:

But what I didn't say, what I knew better than to rattle out with no control, was that the forty minutes driving down to Walnut Street wasn't just time spent on the road. [...] Nana's scowl materialized the second she opened the pink house's back porch door and saw me standing there with my bleached rust-blond bobbed hair, my motorcycle boots and thrift store ratty getups. (Lemus 29)

By moving through space and driving back to her neighborhood and the pink house Nana still lives in, Leticia is transported to the many instances in her life when her identity was misunderstood by the people she loved the most. All through her life, she has struggled to claim an identity which challenges tradition. As part of her growth into adulthood, Leticia acquires different fashion trends as a mechanism to show to her family that she cannot be forced to become someone she is not. However, as the reader can see, her "fashion tips" do not seem to succeed in passing her idea through as it becomes the source of many confrontations with both her family and, also, with the larger queer community. The "rust-blond" hair might be perceived by Nana as an attempt to Anglocize herself as she can already pass as white due to her pale skin. The motorcycle boots are in clear contrast to what a traditional Mexican girl would wear as it also symbolizes an independent stance to the feet-numbing and movement-constraining heels. Besides, the "ratty getups" are just the opposite of the clean, carefully arranged and iron-pressed girlish outfits Nana used to dress her with. Hence, Leticia's clothes problematize and discard, to some extent, her upbringing's tradition, and can be interpreted as a more profound defiance to the values of her culture.

Willard describes the different "place-representing" (327-8) actions taken by the Chicana/o community in order to recover the history and locality that the

city's amnesia erases. Different cultural representations are presented, such as newspapers, poetry, murals and music that legitimize Chicana/o's presence in urban spaces. By focusing on the importance of place-making in the artistic productions of Chicana/o community through his reading of critic Raúl Villa's work, he stresses the importance of social location. Willard includes two opposite spatial terms created in relation to the Chicana/o community. On the one hand, he talks about "barrioization" (327-8) which expresses the spatialized repression provoked by different forces, such as the law and the media, and, on the other hand, the more positive term of "barriology" (327-8) which describes the positive political and cultural actions the Chicana/o community has put into practice in their fight against negative urban changes and repression. The critic shows the way in which the Chicana/o community has actively participated in cultural and political actions that have, in return, challenged the oppression suffered in the urban context. Furthermore, this urban Chicana/o activism has succeeded in encouraging positive identity and community formations.

Academic Moira Kenney, on the other hand, has studied the queers' situation in L.A. She, thus, chooses to focus not on racially marginalized groups, but rather on sexually marginalized ones, the gay and lesbian community. According to Willard's reading of Kenney's work, urban locations have been of utmost importance for the creation of queer community and identity since the early 20th century. In Willard's interpretation, Kenney and Villa come to a similar conclusion in that the very nature of the urban setting has enabled social politics that have helped queer people. The uniqueness of L.A., in comparison to other well-known cities in which gay and lesbian communities are settled, such as New York and San Francisco, according to Kennedy, lies in the centerless

urban form of the city which has benefited the creation of “multicentered” (Willard 328) queer communities in contrast to a more compact structure. The variations within the queer community result from the presence of gay and lesbians in different areas of the city. Thus, ironically, bearing in mind what urban designers intended, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, their openness is the result of their visible presence throughout the city. All in all, regarding the works of Villa and Kennedy, the author of “Nuestra Los Angeles” emphasizes the importance of these studies in showing the mechanism through which urban places turn into community-based networks, where exclusion is challenged by the socio-political query of individuals searching for a place-based community.

Furthermore, in their thorough study, *Queer Migration*, editors Eithne Luibhéid and Lionel Cantu Jr. shed light to the historical accounts of persecution in the borders. The essays gathered in this work analyze the different systems of oppression, constructed on the basis of the racist, sexist, and classist standards at the core of the U.S. hegemony, undergone by crossing (im)migrants. According to Luibhéid and Cantu Jr., border zones and detention centers “highlight the structured exclusions, limits, and ongoing violence through which normative constructions of nation, citizenry, and citizenship are actively produced and contested” (xviii). Hence, contrary to the optimistic assimilation readings spread by mainstream discourses, these studies portray the process through which these (im)migrants are forced to regroup among their own in order to struggle against the various forms of oppression encountered at their entrée in the States and, if allowed to enter, in their everyday life.

This work uncovers the way in which the U.S. migration control system was implanted in such manner so as to police and control (im)migrants along

gender, race and class lines as well as in terms of their sexual identity. By implanting normative identities, the border enforcers have targeted specific individuals that represent a challenge to the white heteronormativity. Consequently, non-normative sexualities have been historically restrained from entering the U.S. under various discriminatory policies. Although different individuals have been denied access to the U.S., I will focus on the case of women and queers in order to follow the general thread of the chapter. As Luibhéid and Cantú Jr. explain, oftentimes, gender and sexual identities play against the lesbian migrant, who is doubly scrutinized. Hence, whether complying with the normative sexual identity or not, migrant women are among the most vulnerable subjects in the militarized and abusive monitoring of border zones and detention centers.

As analyzed by the studies included in *Queer Migration*, the federal immigration control at the border has proven to closely monitor and police queer migration since its start in late 19th century. It is important, nevertheless, to strongly stress that sexuality is not an isolated category, but that it always exists in the interstices of other identity features, such as gender, race, class and culture specificities. Queer individuals' control has been occurring even within national borders. In Luibhéid and Cantú Jr.'s reading of Carl Styvhin's study, such degree of concern regarding queer people's whereabouts is based on the fact that their migration has helped to define lesbian and gay subjectivity. By creating queer communities, lesbian and gay people have been encouraged as a group to take social actions against the persecution they suffer within the U.S. Styvhin's research shows that although queer migration has always been present, it greatly increased in the period after World War II due to job

availability and “the increased sexualization of commerce” (Luibhéid and Cantú Jr. xxix).

Heterosexuality, as it was defined and established by the 1920s, was encouraged and implemented as the norm in sexual identity. On the contrary, homosexuality and other sexual alternatives were regarded as undesirable sexualities which had to be detected and “cured.” These sexual profiles were implemented through the law in every social, political and economical aspects of life in the United States, and even more specifically at the limits of the nation; that is, at the border. The discriminatory nature of this law and its violent effects regarding queer individuals, in general, and queer (im)migrants, in particular, have been silenced and ignored. On the other hand, many narratives have been written in which (im)migrants express their gratitude for the opportunity that the United States represents in contrast to the “backwards” societies in their home country. Consequently, most often queer (im)migration is presented as the result of these individuals’ attempt to improve their situation in the allegedly more democratic and egalitarian United States. The erasure of the violence and repression that queer (im)migrants endure, both in their homeland and in the United States, results in a politically crafted discourse that reinforces a self-congratulatory image of national superiority.

The essays compiled in *Queer Migration* respond to the existing gap in this field of study regarding the impact of sexuality in the migratory experience. Although many studies have analyzed the way in which gender, race, and class ideologies are policed and implanted, sexuality has not been specifically studied or, at best, has been equated with gender. Therefore, although these axes do affect each other, sexuality itself must be studied for its central importance. As

sociologist Alisa Solomon's inclusion of Jonathan Simon's study shows, sexuality was at the center of the drastic change regarding immigrant among the general U.S. population. In 1981, a large immigration flow took place from Cuba and into the Florida Coast. This flow was to be known as the Mariel boatlift, in which thousands of Cuban citizens escaped political, economical and ideological oppression and landed in United States in search for a better future. In Simon's opinion, while the mid century Cuban migrants were welcomed and portrayed as hard-working people escaping from Communism, the Mariel migrants were seen as "deviant and driven to prey on American society as welfare recipients or criminals" (Solomon 6). These men, who came to be known as Mariel gay men, made queerness visible by performing their transgression in public. They challenged not only sexual normative, but gender roles as well. By dressing, talking, and performing in such manner, they put into question dominant discourses of *Cubanidad* in Miami, on the one hand, and normative gender and sexual identities in the general community, on the other.

In 1987, HIV/AIDS was added to the list of dangerous diseases that immigrants were checked on. This addition strengthened the national paranoia of "dangerous aliens," and directly affected immigration law enforcements' praxis. Testing HIV positive directly banned the immigrant from entering the United States and from applying for permanent residence. The belief that HIV/AIDS was a "queer" illness heightened the violence and the restrictions at the border controls. What is more, immigrants could be denied access because they "appear" to be queer and, thus, might be carrying the HIV/AIDS. Equating the illness with a specific sexuality limited the mobility of queer individuals and heightened the scrutiny every immigrant had to undergo. Finally, in 1990, the

ban on queer immigrants was lifted, and, by 1994, new opportunities opened for gay and lesbians who qualified to apply for asylum if they proved that they had been victimized due to their sexuality. Although this victory by Attorney General Janet Reno in favor of queer rights cannot be lightly dismissed, it is also true that proving persecution on sexual grounds did not turn to be such an easy matter bearing in mind the profile of queer asylum seekers. According to sociologist Alisa Solomon in her article, "Trans/Migrant," although improvements have taken place to include transgender people in human rights laws, they are still not included under the federal civil rights protection up to date. As a result, violence against them is not punishable because the law does not acknowledge them. Thus, although gay men, lesbians and transgender individuals cannot by law be excluded on their sexual identity anymore, entering the country through border zones and detention centers still involves suffering terrible ordeals. The fact that sexual discrimination became illegal does not ensure the rights of immigrants in the reality of these highly militarized border zones or detention centers, where to some extent unsupervised border enforcements apply their power.

As mentioned earlier, sexuality intersects with gender, class and race and, thus, might provoke a greater alienation of the queer individual. As sociologist Timothy Randazzo explains, new immigrants, especially those of color, might not find support within those queer communities that could help through the process and paperwork to request refuge from persecution. Because race is an identity feature that cannot be disguised, racist attitudes within queer communities are not unheard of. Furthermore, and echoing Randazzo's arguments, traditional immigrant communities might not be willing

to help queer subjects due to their homophobia. This is why, many of the newly arrived queer immigrants rather hide their sexual orientation in order to be accepted in their cultural community. Gender is another identity characteristic along with race and sexual orientation that marginalizes and limits queers' chances to successfully obtain asylum because of the fact that lesbian immigrants are generally poorer than gay immigrants. "The Asylum Program has recorded 686 asylum grants to men and just 87 to women, illustrating a severe gender disparity in the asylum process" (Randazzo 43). Moreover, according to the author, the unfortunately common instances of women battery seems to complicate the matter in that immigration judges are in trouble to decide if violence perpetuated against the female immigrant is caused by her gender or by her sexuality. In other words, although improvements have been made, as long as individuals' identities are not created out of a single defining characteristic, be it race, gender, class, or/and sexuality, marginalized subjects such as women and queer (im)migrants will be still deprived of basic rights and equal opportunities.

The difficulties that queer immigrants face to benefit from asylum, in terms of what is required, is central to wholly understand the violent nature of the border as a site where women and/or queer sexuality is constructed, controlled and policed. In order to win asylum based on sexual orientation, the (im)migrant must first prove that s/he is lesbian/gay. Unlike race, class and gender, proving your sexuality goes to the core of what it is to be a lesbian/gay. The law asks for the applicants to demonstrate that they are members of "a particular social group" (Randazzo 45-6) which might be difficult or impossible for those who are not public about their sexual orientation or do not participate

in any gay/lesbian organization. Due to the different racism and homophobia encountered within different immigrant groups, and the class difference that commonly affects women and men differently, many queer immigrants might not have publicly participated or even presented themselves as queer. Another difficulty encountered by queer asylum seekers is the fact that they must prove that being lesbian/gay is an invariable part of her/himself. This inherent condition was used to exclude queer immigrants in the past and it is this same notion that is required to be eligible for asylum. Furthermore, according to the coauthored article, "Well-Founded Fear," by Cantú Jr., Luibhéid and Stern "[t]his tricky undertaking runs the risk of reinscribing essentialist notions of gay identity that scholars have spent decades painstakingly challenging" (64).

Having to prove the inherent nature of the sexual orientation becomes even more complex when queer immigrants from Mexico seek asylum. Due to the deep cultural differences between Mexico and the United States, queer immigrants undergo additional difficulties in certifying their queerness in a comprehensible manner for United States' understanding. As Cantú Jr., Luibhéid and Stern explain anthropological and sociological studies from the 1970s and 1980s show that the queer identity as perceived in North American mainstream is absent in Mexico. That is, due to the different conception of sex/gender system, Mexican men will only be considered gay if they acquired a specific role in their sexual encounters. More specifically, only if the Mexican man assumes the passive position during sex will he be rendered queer. On the contrary, those men who perform active roles will be regarded masculine and heterosexual no matter with whom they have sex, man or woman. According to Mexican culture, it is not the sex of the partner that matters but the gender role

that counts to render a man heterosexual or homosexual. According to Cantú Jr., Luibhéid and Stern, however, the problem with this conception and with the dynamics taken place when a Mexican queer seeks asylum in the United States is that essentialist perceptions of Mexican culture are expected from asylum candidates in such a way that the myth of the U.S. as saving the backward Mexican is perpetually reinforced. What is more, the authors claim that the pivotal role of United States' history of colonization and exploitation in conditioning Mexico's modern history is completely ignored, and, thus, its racist, gendered, classist and sexual abuse that has conditioned the social, economical and political ideology in Mexico is overlooked. That is, Cantú Jr. brings attention to the fact that the limiting definitions of sexuality regarding asylum petitioners and (im)migrants not only confine the current variables of sexual identities, but also reinforce U.S.' restrictive nationalist ideology in a desperate effort to strengthen the borders that globalization has challenged. All in all, the crossing to the United States is already a next to impossible task. Besides, the official documentation and legal apparatus change in a speed that hardly any immigrant knows how to successfully achieve her/his purpose and which rights s/he is entitled to in order to avoid discriminatory exclusion by border officials. In addition, the general paranoia in regard to immigration is based on a racist, classist, gendered, and sexual discriminative system that is reinforced through politics of fear and through the implementation of violence at the national borders.

A clear example of the unprecedented power that immigration enforcement officers enjoy, unsupervised, came as the result of a polemical arrangement of the IIRIRA (Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant

Responsibility Act) that allowed the detention of asylum solicitors while their claim was processed. Due to the lack of rooms by the INS, this “legal,” although certainly abusive, measure forces asylum seekers into spending a period that could go from weeks to years in local prisons. The contracts with the local prisoners have become a very lucrative business for many towns in the United States. While the detainees wait for the results of their asylum claim, they are forced to stay among the general prison population without any special treatment or quarters. Apart from the worries about their asylum request, the petitioners suffer the same conditions as convicted criminals, and the abuses they end up undergoing come from both prisoners and prison officials, especially when the asylum seekers are women and/or queer. Furthermore, since September 11, 2001, petitioners have seen their chances decrease as a result of the more restrict policies regarding foreign individuals, which provokes longer detention periods.

The specificity of Mexican gay men’s experience when facing U.S.’ definition of what being gay means, what gay men look like and how they act has been mentioned earlier in this chapter. Such cultural differences are dramatically set in motion in the highly militarized and politicized Mexico-U.S. border zone when (im)migrants from Mexico try to cross the border posts. In this section, however, I will proceed recalling the only case, according to queer critic Eithne Luibhéid, that the ordeal regarding the sexual identity of a Mexican woman has been documented. According to the scholar, the first considerably recorded account about the border’s role in controlling the access to queer individuals happened with the passage of the 1952 INA or, also called, McCarran-Walter Act. As a result, many documentation and analysis have

surfaced about men who have been perceived by the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) as being gay. On the contrary, little has been said about the experience of lesbian (im)migrants or asylum seekers. This is why Quiroz's case, which occurred in 1961, is so remarkable in that it provides a chance to study the queer immigration experience from a woman's perspective.

Luibhéid chooses not to enter on the matter whether Quiroz was a lesbian or not, but she is interested in questioning the way in which U.S.' power hierarchy are adamant in defining and creating a narrow definition of queerness. This definition is not just incompatible with the actual array of queer experiences, but becomes dangerous in that it limits by forceful application the validity of it. The scholar argues that the INS' policing creates the very queerness that it is engaged in controlling and excluding. Thus, border checkpoints become sites where queerness is constructed and pinned on individuals whose sexual orientation, must not be forgotten, is connected with other identity axis, such as gender, race and class. Ironically, as a result of such policing by power enforcers, an artificial definition of queerness is produced, which proves easier to avoid at checkpoints. Instances of "[s]traightening up" (Luibhéid 111) in order to fulfill the INS' constructed definition of appropriate gender and sexual appearances are mentioned in Luibhéid's study. It is not surprising, then, that these definitions of "proper" gender and sexual behavior and appearance, even more strongly in women, reflect U.S.' long history of colonization in Mexico and which has depicted women's body in highly racialized and sexualized manner.

According to Luibhéid, the reason behind the fact that queer women have somehow managed to avoid sexual criminalization is the skepticism regarding

the existence of women's sexual practices without the involvement of men. As Ana Castillo states, the "man," considered as the creator of all knowledge, is regarded as the subject of desire who, then, decides and assigns who the object of desire is going to be, while, at the same time, enjoys the privilege of negating that same condition to anybody else he considers so. Consequently, the "woman" is left with no choice whatsoever to define and enjoy her sexuality, while, constrained to the dual opposing roles of "virgin/mother/nature on the one hand, whore/witch/mystic, on the other" ("The Distortion" 147).

Besides, reflecting the way space and sexuality are related, women have access to certain spaces when gathering is not perceived suspicious. However, there is another indicator that affects women especially, and this has to do with a woman's appearance. It was actually because of her appearance that Quiroz was detained and regarded as a lesbian. According to her lawyer, it was her appearance, speech and behavior that made her queer for the border officers. In a 1952 PHS (Public Health Service) statement to Congress appearance was included as a way to detect homosexuality. This precedent, in Segura and Zavella's opinion, was based on the 19th century idea of gender inversion as the reason for queerness. However, although medical discourse and documentation have been important to the way queerness has been defined, the scholars believe that it was not the only source of discriminatory politics, but that the whole power system was interested in demonizing the queer.

In Quiroz's case, the author of the study state that speech became central to decide her queer identity. Apparently, Quiroz confessed to being a lesbian although the actual course of action involved in producing such admission was not examined. Echoing Foucault's analysis, Luibhéid claims that

“there *are* procedure and that they *did* work together to ensure that Quiroz provided explicit statements about her sexuality” (117). Afterwards, Quiroz tried to defend herself by first disputing the way her “confession” was attained and, secondly, by challenging the pathologized opinion that being homosexual equated to being psychopathic. Quiroz, according to the scholar, even engaged into “hegemonic constructions of female heterosexuality” by mentioning her daughter as proof of her heterosexuality. Nevertheless, her and her lawyer’s every attempt proved to be unproductive and the INS deported her.

In the following excerpt, scholars Hastings Donnan and Thomas Wilson declare that the physical body of the individuals who cross national borders are written and read by the very violence that forces identity on the individuals living in the area: “we suggest that the bodily experiences of those who inhabit or traverse border regions are often shaped by the forces of power and domination that give form to the territorial borders themselves” (129). Thus, the body also becomes a setting where defiance against the forces of those bordering nations takes place. Donnan and Wilson take the symbol of the body a step further and equate body maps to border maps. Such visual depiction is proved very appropriate when reading the different studies they include in their work, in which female Mexican (im)migrants’ lives in the borderlands of Mexico and United States are described. All through their work, the authors successfully substantiate the notion that bodies, while often physically exploited, are also metaphorically empowered to represent different social and political struggles.

Furthermore, from their extensive study regarding migrant Mexican women, Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella also present ample case studies regarding female farm workers’ experiences and the way in which they are

forced to learn and adapt to new social, political and economic situations while at the same time are being required to maintain and keep ties to their original towns and culture in Mexico. The poor working conditions made strikingly clear by the high number of health problems, sexual and work-related, and the sexual abuses suffered by many of these working women, reflect the violent construction of the border area itself. The risks to their health and abuse, however, does not only come from the Anglo community, but Mexican American and Mexican men as well participate in the exploitation of the Mexican woman by forcing on them a traditional Mexican code of behavior that they often do not follow. As a result of having to make her living and to navigate in a strange environment in which contradictory messages are thrust at her, the Mexican working woman ends up internalizing complex notions and habits in relation to her body and sexuality, which reflect the unequal power system enforced at the border.

Health issues are central to the lives of Mexican and Mexican American women working in the borderlands of Mexico and the United States. It is my purpose to include the image of the unhealthy-body to both denounce the terrible conditions these working women suffer, and also, in a metaphorical sense, to represent the national border as it is perceived by the general U.S. population. This depiction is not unique as it has oftentimes been used to reinscribe a nationalist discourse, which portrays the Mexican Other and the nation's border as sick and in danger. This malicious discourse ultimately serves to further enforce U.S. hegemony and to the militarization of the borders in order to "secure" the nation.

According to sociologists Xóchitl Castañeda and Patricia Zavella's study women farm workers suffer health problems of all kind due to their job and also to their underprivileged status in the U.S. and they are described as suffering "a Third World health status" (251). On the one hand, their health is constantly put at risk due to the toxic chemicals used in the farms. As a result, physical diseases related to skin and breathing problems are common among them. The long hour schedules they are forced to work also cause other problems such as dehydration and heat strokes. Yet another set of health problems are directly connected to their gender as reproductive problems and infant mortality cases according to the authors is "25 percent higher than the national average" (251). Due to the isolation and stress that comes from arriving at a new country, where they meet poor conditions and poorer expectations, it is common to encounter cases of depression and stress among these women. The authors also stress the increasing numbers of HIV and AIDS among women both in Mexico and United States in the periods between 1988 and 1997 where "women between the ages of thirteen and forty-five in California, with Latinas moving from 3.3 percent to 11 percent of all cases" (252) according to the California Department of Health Services in 2000. Unfortunately, despite the poor health status of these women very few of them dare to access the U.S. health system. It is clear from the type of illness common among these women that race, gender, class and culture as defined by both Mexico and United States is central to the way their bodies are perceived as exploitable objects. Recovering Hastings and Wilson's similarity between body maps and border maps, this unhealthy, exploited Mexican female body embodies the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as the profit-making, ecologically exploited and abandoned site. Related to this idea, I

would like to include their metaphors of mapping and remapping to bring attention to the fact that these women are mapped as objects, and the way gender and sexuality discourses and praxis, defined by the U.S. white heteronormative power, are remapped as the result of transnational migration.

It is important to bear in mind that the way gender and sexuality affect everyone in Latino and, more specifically, Mexican culture is of great importance in order to understand these women's attitude and behavioral pattern. Different queer Chicana authors have extensively written about their experiences of being queer and Chicanas, and about how hard it is often to maintain good relationships with the community once they have come out. Women have been rendered and described as representatives of their culture, and it has been considered their duty, as member of a cultural community, to pass on the values and traditions to the next generations. The responsibility of being the "voice" of the community is immense, and can also be overwhelming when the woman does not align with the traditional values of the community. This is exactly the conflict that Leticia, the protagonist of *Trace Elements*, feels within her childhood community as described in the following excerpt:

We were three generations in one room and right then I was the only one who wanted to talk. [...] I wondered if I was too light to be seen. My small wrists and thin tangly long auburn strands and skin so rosetinted yellow pale that the veins showed on the sides of my nose, I got that from Mamá Estrella, the only one in the family missing Indian blood. [...] Us with our different pale and our rambling and winding super talk-talky way. Our reputation was that we told more stories than the rest of the family combined; wasn't always true, but usually it was. (Lemus 27)

In this passage, the act of talking and the ability to tell stories seem to be aligned with a specific appearance, once that is different from the rest. In Leticia's and Mamá Estrella's, her great grandmother's case, their pale skin is what sets them apart from the rest. Furthermore, they are both described as being the most talkative ones and also the ones telling stories. Taking into account the importance that possessing a voice has had through history, I would say that these two women seem to be the ones that defied traditional standards the most, by making such a powerful use of their voice. It is also true that by describing themselves as "missing Indian blood" it could be interpreted that they feel the need to prove their commitment towards their culture and people in a way "making up" for not sharing the physical traits. However, in the case of Leticia, choosing to be part of Nana's tradition is also adamant in opening and reinterpreting certain aspects of it. In other words, I would say that Leticia, while having the chance to avoid the racist and classist discrimination of U.S hegemony, consciously chooses her *chicanidad*. She works hard and gets a college degree to, somehow, integrate herself among the educated privileged, but her sexuality is something she does not want to bargain, and so she struggles in finding her place. Although proud of being Chicana, Leticia also considers it necessary to challenge the traditional Chicano value system in order to include new identities that have been marginalized before.

The character of Leticia, in Luna Lemus' *Trace Elements*, mirrors the experience of real Chicana queers, who although marginalized within their communities, decided it was worth to openly recognize their queerness. Well-known queer Chicana authors Gloriza Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga have written extensively about their own experience with their family and how they

managed to redefine *chicanidad* from a queer perspective by integrating revised traditional and cultural role models. These two authors were part of different political and social movements that helped not only revise their Chicana culture, by including issues of queer identity and feminist stands, but were also interested in opening their cultural struggle to other feminists so as to create shared grounds for a more inclusive feminist and queer revolution.

Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness and Border Theory are among the most often quoted and applied notions in feminist, queer and Chicana cultural theory since the 1990s. She challenged the Western tradition of binary system definitions in which people's identities were described in or/either terms. Bringing and developing her theories from her own experience, as a woman born close to the border between Mexico and the United States, Anzaldúa suggested an inclusive *mestiza* identity where different, at times, opposite features mixed in creating a hybrid identity. As AnaLouise Keating explains, Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of *mestizaje* is a redefinition and reappropriation of the term that differs from its previous usage. On the one hand, it brings attention to the feminization of the word, which has provoked a break from previous male identification of the Chicano theory and literature. This intervention, as Keating defines it, places Chicanas at the center of the cultural and intellectual activism that has been limited to them before. On the other hand, by including in this culturally specific concept individuals who have neither Mexican nor Indian heritage, Anzaldúa "de-essentializes and pluralizes culturally specific notions of identity" (*Women Reading* 71) which will allow a more inclusive conceptualization of the oppressed individuals identifying with it. Similar to Audre Lorde's underscore of the importance of emotions, such as eroticism and

anger, mentioned earlier, Keating connects Anzaldúa with Lorde in that she also promotes the recognition of the pain and suffering endured, and to part from this acknowledgement with regained energy to transform and originate “cross-cultural sisterhoods” (82) that, as Lorde insisted, would find in the differences reasons to establish political alliances with other oppressed people. As Keating states, however, Anzaldúa went further away in order to found cooperation and support even with those who traditional lesbian-feminist dismissed, such as gay men and women of color who were also oppressed. In other words, her cross-cultural *mestizaje* seems to be founded on the believe that everyone who has been oppressed under any circumstance is part and participant of her *mestizaje* project in order to achieve a respecting, hybrid and agentic activism. As Keating asserts “[i]dentity is always relational” (*Women Reading* 89), and, thus, in order to achieve a positive and identity one must face the differences between each other. This mode of thinking echoes Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s rhizomatic system, as introduced in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), which also advocates multiplicity rather than the more restricted mode of definition in Western tradition.

Both images have been widely used to describe the many-layered and interstitial nature of identity formation, in which different traits depend on each other in the creation of an inclusive and fluid identity understanding. Quoting scholar Juana María Rodríguez’s words, “[t]he *mestiza* consciousness she describes is born of hybridity and cross-pollination” (23). It is this notion of hybridity and inclusivity of contradictory conceptions that queer stands for in Rodríguez’s opinion, and thus, following the *mestiza* theory queerness should question heteronormative ideals of definition. Besides, the same way in which

the rhizome does not have a beginning or an end and, but is forever making connections and adapting, Norma Alarcón's idea of the "subject-in-process" is very pertinent to the case. This notion of a dynamic identity formation describes the ever-defining and revising project of many Chicana writers and scholars in their cultural recovery activism. Consequently, and following Rodríguez's analysis, the creation of different discursive spaces is central to Chicana activists, especially, in challenging queer studies. It is through these discursive spaces, and their constant meeting points, that new ideas are exchanged, and, hence, political activism endures. According to Rodríguez, it is as the result of the different discursive spaces created from the Civil Rights Movement, gay and lesbian liberation activism, and the women's movement, which organized around the notion of identity as fundamental in order to relate the personal with the political. This centering on notions of identity responded to the need by marginalized communities to destabilize the hegemony that kept them subjugated. In other words, new ways of understanding the process of identity formation were presented as the means to challenge a traditional and reducible mode of definition. The work of these activists did not only acknowledge the constraints of white heteronormativity, but also questioned the oppressive patriarchal system imbedded in traditional Chicana/o communities. Hence, traditional and discriminatory understandings of race, gender, class and sexualities were challenged by these "community-in-process" (Rodríguez 80) associations.

Gloria Anzaldúa believed in the necessity of communication and interaction among different worlds which included varied kinds of ideas and people. Her ideological and physical connection and curiosity for other modes of

understanding the world answered to her willingness to learn and adapt new ideas and to avoid reductive modes of definition. Therefore, she is considered one of the first and strongest defenders of the formation of hybrid and multiple identities. This multilayered identity includes the knowledge received from the world of thoughts, dreams and spirits, on the one hand, and the more physical world of the everyday experience. According to Anzaldúa, these different worlds come together at a liminal space she names *Nepantla*, and, thus, everyone who is willing to accept the existence of this interface will consequently be a *neplantlera*.

Due to Anzaldúa's constant references to spirituality, and her believe in the centrality of this world in defining her work and vision as a Chicana theorist, many scholars have ignored this part of her work, which is, however, according to scholar AnaLouise Keating, crucial to Anzaldúa and to her most revolutionary work. *The Borderlands/La Frontera* is a great example of Anzaldúa's innovative way of understanding and theorizing what she believed. That is, her innovative theories are presented in a new genre that defies previous normative exercises of theory. As Anzaldúa herself describes it, *Borderlands* is an "autohistoria-teoría" (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 9), a genre she considers to be necessary for "women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional western autobiographical forms" (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 9). This new genre, as the name suggests, is developed from the notion that the personal is political and, thus, becomes necessary in any attempt of producing a critical theory. Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's works have been widely examined regarding different issues concerning its content and the way it relates to various fields, such as Chicana theory, women's literature, queer analysis, etc. Their works,

especially *La Frontera* and *Loving in the War Years*, have become central in any attempt to understand the interconnection between these authors' experiences as Chicana feminists and Chicana lesbians, and its consequent alienation from their family and community. However, Chicana literary critic Elisa A. Garza highlights another aspect which has been key for Anzaldúa's and Moraga's centrality to Chicana studies: their innovative use of varied literary genres. The way Moraga and Anzaldúa dismiss single genres or unique usage of specific genres, parallels, according to Garza, their theoretical proposal. That is, similar to the way Anzaldúa and Moraga encouraged relations between different communities, their literary genre challenged traditional practice of memoirs, poetry and history. Thus, their literature, as well as their theory, is representative of queer Chicana feminists' specificity which searches for a true representation of varied experiences and oppressions. Once again, then, these queer Chicanas' multigenre literature and their political defiance to pre-established systems connect these Chicanas with the early *fronterizas* studied in the second chapter. These women's transgressive usage of literature in order to explore and include their particular experience as colored women in the U.S. unites them. Through these new genres, then, the personal experience of the individual, as part of a larger cultural community, is at the chore of their theory, which includes storytelling, history and myth. The centrality of tradition in order to redefine the futures is exemplified by the following passage from Luna Lemus' first novel:

Me, I can only whisper right now, but you still hear me, don't you, Weeping? Perk your ears up, woman, because, I swear, you better listen something good. [...] I kept you

close by my side since my earliest little girl days and this is how you return the gesture?
[...] Tell me why you decided Nana would never speak again. [...] My body entire, my
voice, me, I'm shattering from ice cubes on me for too long. But you are not going to
silence me. No, mujer, not you, not nobody, you are not taking my voice from me.
(*Trace Elements* 207-8)

In this dramatic excerpt, Leticia, sees how her whole life collapses after the sudden death of Nana, the grandmother who raised her. The way myth, storytelling and silence are interconnected and provided with special meaning in this fragment is an appropriate way to highlight the importance that Anzaldúa confers to these elements in order to create an appropriate theory that represents queer Chicanas. With Nana's death and definite silence, Leticia's voice seems to weaken, and her role as the family storyteller comes to an abrupt halt. In her desperate sorrow, she blames *La Llorona* for letting this happen, and, thus, myth and tradition, as represented by this female figure, become the reason for her disappearance as a voiced individual. Later in the novel, Leticia recovers and claims her voice back and, hence, in a way, expresses her resolution to continue her work as the community's storyteller so as to request changes that would invite different subjectivities.

In her extended study of Anzaldúa's work, scholar Keating states that it was Anzaldúa's hope to achieve a hybrid identity, where the individual and collective was included. The enormous repercussion that *Borderlands* had at the moment of its publication, and even today for border, feminist, queer, Chicana theories, is the result of Anzaldúa's innovative and complex redefinition of this geopolitical setting. On the one hand, Anzaldúa talks and theorizes about her personal and historical experience as a queer Chicana of the area in the

Southwest border between Mexico and Texas. On the other hand, she also presents the border as a creative symbol that enables her to theorize about psychological, spiritual and sexual issues concerning feminist Chicanas. In other words, for Anzaldúa the Borderlands represent, according to Keating, “potentially transformational spaces where opposites converge, conflict and transmute” (*Anzaldúa Reader* 9-10). However, it is important to stress that the borderland is first of all a physical reality, not just a concept, where state-perpetrated violence is strong. Nevertheless, the porosity and permeability of the border also enables for positive cultural encounters and interaction which, in turn, becomes the basis for cultural, social and political resistance.

Anzaldúa must be considered as one of the precursors of Queer Theory, especially, concerning Chicanas and, more generally, women of color. Following Keating’s study, the reason for her not to be regarded as a queer pioneer is related to her defense of the interconnectivity between spirituality, sexuality and the body. Anzaldúa strongly believed that these three realms were connected and that they defined each other in such empowering way that they allowed her to take “back that alien other” (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 88) which the mainstream U.S. discourse forced upon her. Acquiring such awareness, and being able to react to the colonialism still present in modern U.S., encouraged Anzaldúa in asserting the need for a new critical theory developed from non-Eurocentric nor white-male-queer theory.

She included personal experiences in her theory which offered her the narrative space to relate the process through which Mexican American workers are animalized as the result of their working conditions. She presented her childhood memories working the fields in the borderland area in Texas and,

similar to what scholars Donnan and Wilson have collected in their work, Anzaldúa's explained how Mexican Americans, Mexicans and Indians became "ideal" workers by carrying out physical, unrewarding and extreme labor that dehumanized them. Such hardships succeeded in turning them into passive, disempowered, animal-like bodies. Relating these poor conditions with the long history of U.S. colonization, she introduced the notion of Chicana/os being absorbed in a neocolonialist phase, in which they, as the Othered people, have internalized "the white colonizers' system of values, attitudes, morality, and modes of production" (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 112). As a clear example of this colonization, Anzaldúa mentioned the fact that, in rural Texas, the Chicana/o neighborhoods are called *colonias* instead of *barrios* which reflects a very systematized process of Othering them from mainstream U.S. society.

Anzaldúa was passionate about the importance of naming and language in general. She believed that the act of writing is a powerful tool in order to develop a hybrid identity. In this regard, she described that being a *mestiza*, either biologically or culturally, represented different layers of identity that have been "written' all over, or should I say, carved and tattooed with the sharp needles of experience" (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 124). By describing the process of identity formation in this manner, she denounced that this writing was made by somebody else and not the *mestiza* herself, and, besides, that the writing was conceived violently. Anzaldúa also condemned the suspicion resulting from any attempt to challenge these forced "writings" on the Chicana body. Accordingly, she encouraged the *mestiza* to become the "typographer" (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 125) of her body, not only by taking action through

writing, but also by choosing how to rewrite history, culture and personal experience.

When Anzaldúa refers to her *mestiza* queer identity which she describes as being “constantly on the move, a traveler, callejera, a cortacalles” (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 142), the importance of choosing how to name oneself becomes essential. She advocated for a hybrid identity which inhabited and crossed different worlds. It is not surprising, then, the number of names she came up with to name herself. Furthermore, she also analysed the different names that have been used to refer to queer people such as, lesbian, gay, homosexual; and the meaning each name implies in her opinion.

When she wasn't busy worshipping me in her apartment, sometimes Rob would drive us up past the county line to Los Angeles in her rusty truck to go to the city's only old-school “ladies” bar. Big blond hair, aerobics class bodies, fitted jeans worn high up above belly buttons, the West Side ladies at the Norm made Rob's militant San Francisco hairy legs in their leather motorcycle boots stomp hard and superior through what she loved to label “bleached lesbian stuff.” “They aren't dykes, Leti, they are ‘lesbians.’ They might even be ‘homosexual’ or ‘gay women’ for all I know,” she'd say with a sneer. “Don't ever call me a ‘lesbian,’ got it?” (Lemus, *Trace Elements* 46)

Similar to Anzaldúa's listing and discarding of names, the protagonist of the novel describes the clientele of a queer bar in Los Angeles, where different ways of naming or being named represent implications charged with criticism. In this case, Rob, Leticia's partner, feels superior to the traditional lesbian aesthetics common to what she calls the “old-school ladies' bar.” What it is not clear, though, is if her disdain towards these women is based on racial

differences, as the “big blonde hair” might imply or to these women’s representation of traditional feminine ideals with their slender bodies and fitting jeans while Rob proudly displays hairy legs and “leather motorcycle boots.” Besides, the narrator also seems to make a point about Rob’s “militant San Francisco” look as representative somehow of a modern queer version in contrast to “L.A.’s West Side” old-school. Consequently, these two Californian cities appear to portray the differences between the traditional queerness and the modern one found in urban sites.

According to Anzaldúa, the term “lesbian,” which comes from the Greek word *Lesbos*, is representative of an English-only dominant culture and, thus, attached to certain classist, racist and linguistic features that do not match her experience. In her opinion, this was used by the dominant group and also by some colored individuals, who assimilated into it. There are the terms “queer” and “dyke,” which although still English words, the queer theorist considered closer to her background as their origins were described as working-class. However, she also warned that “queer” was being appropriated by white middle-class lesbian theorists in the academy and, thus, was unfortunately becoming a much too wide concept, which included people from different race, ethnic and class background. That is, its meaning since the ‘60s and ‘70s turned into a too generic name that would not prove useful to reflect the variety embedded in different communities. Anzaldúa also commented on the negative implications of using the term “homosexual” as it was coined to refer to a highly pathologized sexual practice and identity by some psychological theories. Consequently, she made a culturally and politically conscious choice of referring to herself as “‘una de las otras’ or a ‘marimacha,’ or even a jota or a loca porque –these are the

terms my home community uses. I identify most closely with the Náhuatl term patlache” (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 163) used to describe a woman similar to an Amazon who loves women. Thus, Anzaldúa was intend in rewriting and naming herself in the terms that were culturally understandable, and she reappropriated these terms by inscribing positive meaning instead of the derogatory way used by the heteronormativity of Chicano tradition. Anzaldúa defended a *mestiza* identity that was formed as the sum of different meanings in relation to class, race, gender, sexuality, and more. However, in her experience as a queer Chicana writer and activist she often found herself asked to erase part of herself in order to homogenize the group. She found this request equally unacceptable coming it from either the traditional Chicano community, from the white lesbian community or from queer Chicana community.

Regarding the white lesbians’ community, she claimed that in their quest to enlarge and strengthen their cause, these women often equated their oppression within the homophobic society to that of colored people in a racist society. Anzaldúa, however, reminded them that while sexual orientation might be kept private, colored people did not have the possibility of doing so regarding their race. Therefore, she was appalled by the request of white lesbians and some women of color, as well, for race to be displaced in favor of queerness as if racism was “a lesser oppression than sexism” (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 142). The theorist denounced that white lesbians often assumed that by being feminist or lesbian they had moved beyond racism. As a consequence, while colored people were asked to leave their race out so they could focus on queer issues, whiteness was assumed to be without any racist implications.

Related to the problem discussed above, Anzaldúa also wrote about the way in which, unfortunately, issues of self-deprecation were present among colored minorities because of their internalization of the discourse of the oppressor. As a result, marginalized subjects became agents of exclusion, who challenged individuals on the basis of a narrow and confining identity definition inherited from hegemony. Consequently, rigid understandings of what it meant to be a true Chicana were used to exclude Chicanas. Although Anzaldúa included every minority in this unfortunate behavior, in the case of Chicanas, the meaning of *chicanidad* was severely decided in terms of skin color, language skills, sexual orientation, the individual's origin, etc. In her personal experience, Anzaldúa describes how her own community had alienated her because of her questioning of traditional patriarchal beliefs. Moreover, colored lesbians aligning with white lesbians had expected her to leave her cultural values aside. In a similar line of thinking, literary critic Catrióna Rueda Esquibel claims that Chicana lesbianism is intrinsically connected to their political activism. That is, she states that queer Chicanas represent sexuality as part and central to their general political framework, and, thus, they establish relationships between different issues, such as environmental racism and substandard living and working condition, etc. However, the critic also warns about the mistake of interpreting the queer Chicana's activism with her nationalist stand, and states that, along with what other colored activism have done as well, Chicanas have denounced the way in which nationalist discourses have alienated feminists and queers in order to maintain patriarchy going.

In relation to her sexual identity, Anzaldúa commented on an instance when her colleague, Cherríe Moraga, questioned her legitimacy as a Chicana

lesbian. According to Moraga, Anzaldúa did not focus on her lesbian identity and her sexuality strongly enough. Answering to this criticism, Anzaldúa understood that in Moraga's opinion, sexuality was a lesbian issue and, thus, writing about it was what made a writer a lesbian writer. However, she was completely against the idea of defining herself only as a lesbian as this would imply that she would have to ignore her other identities. The artist did not understand the need and, actually, was against compartmentalizing herself. To do so would go against the very definition of *mestiza* identity. She asserted that she was "arguing for a lesbian sensibility, not a lesbian aesthetic" (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 170). By this statement, Anzaldúa returned to the importance of the written word in order to construct a true identity, be it by writing or by reading. She defended the notion that identity was constructed through writing and reading as the individual identified or failed to identify with what s/he was reading. This is why she did not trust the notion of a "lesbian literature" and neither did she believe that such literature should always deal with sexuality. Because identities evolve by navigating different worlds Anzaldúa was certain that writing or reading just about sexuality limited the scope of the writer/reader. Even more, bearing in mind that race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, etc are interconnected layers that meet at the interstices of the identity formation process. Hence, the *Tejana* poet favored a more open and complex conception of queer Chicana activism and literature.

La Malinche. Everyone was taught to despise la Malinche because she loved a conquistador. Or so he said. As did his buddies. And the entire empire they set up. La Malinche. Yes, that woman, the archetype of the Wrong Kind of Woman. Not

surrounded by cherubs and pink roses like the Virgen de Guadalupe, our blessed patron mother saint. Nor pasted on candles in textured tall glasses that we lit for thanks. No, the Weeping Woman and her cousin La Malinche, they were bad, bad, bad girls, those two were. Those two girls, their fierce rebel lasting power made people remember them long after they had died. They were everything I wanted to be. (Lemus, *Trace Elements* 19)

In this passage, the narrator presents her version of these three Mexican women in a similar manner to what Chicana feminist did. By questioning the very truth of Malinche's story and pairing her with *La Llorona*, the other negative role model, Leticia reappropriates their narrative and rewrites them in a more positive way. The narrator explains the unfairness of not thanking Malinche and *La Llorona* the way the *Virgen de Guadalupe* is, and her admiration for them goes even farther when she states that these two, the ones that had been traditionally casted away, are the ones she wants to emulate. Leticia's appreciation for these women is not based only in their bad behavior, which directly challenges the value system of her culture, but she envies and probably measures their value to the fact that they have been remembered even after their death. So, their power seems to go beyond society's good opinion of them. The author of the novel pairs these two female figures to the extent in which they sometimes become one: "The Weeping Woman, she cried because she was la Malinche reborn" (Lemus, *Trace Elements* 18). Both figures have traditionally been depicted as embodying the highest treason towards their people, by fathering *mestizo* children in la Malinche's case and by killing her children in *La Llorona's* case. It is interesting, however, that the role of the faulted and self-serving male figure central to the "crimes," the rape in la

Malinche's case and the abandonment of his lover and children in *La Llorona's*, has never been used to also discipline men in Mexican and Chicano tradition.

Anzaldúa rewrote the stories of the three mothers in a similar manner to what author Luna Lemus would later do in her novel *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*. What is more, Anzaldúa turned *La Llorona* in a central figure in her literary work.

.....

I am the daughter of La Llorona
and I am La Llorona herself,

.....

Abandoned by my mother culture for being queer, orphaned,

.....

I feel alienated, feel as though I'm outside and apart from the
world, homeless, lost
I've lost the sense of being alive,
I have become a ghost,
set apart from other beings

.....

My mother calls her lost and exiled child
a call to the vocation of artist

La Llorona wailing, beckoning, encouraging the artist to rail
against injustices. She calls me to act. (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 295)

In the fragments of her *La Llorona*, Anzaldúa includes the issue of queer sexuality at the center of her reappropriation of the story and describes the way her community and her mother has abandoned her for her queerness. The narrator of this poem takes the place of the dead daughter and *La Llorona*

herself, and equates both to the ghostly material they have become without their community. At the same time, the narrative voice connects her cry with the calling of the artist, thus, turning the desperate screams of *La Llorona* into the productive urge of the artist to “write” her story and defy the injustices suffered by her people. Consequently, the narrator of this poem does not only become self-sufficient, but must also work in favor of the community that has abandoned her. Queering this legend is also key to Luna Lemus’ first novel, *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties*, where the protagonist, Leticia, seems to follow her long-lasting object of desire, *La Llorona*, as a model for her own sexual identity: “She was a super drama queen back in those days, just like me now, though I’m only a princess if she’s a queen” (14).

Another issue brought by Anzaldúa becomes central in Luna Lemus’ literary work. I am referring, in this case, to health-related concerns that guided Anzaldúa in her personal and literary work. According to scholar Keating, due to the singular hormonal dysfunction that affected Anzaldúa from her early childhood and the severe diabetes she struggled with later in her life, health and the way it affected her body and experiences became fundamental for Anzaldúa. The queer theorist did not entirely agree with the notion of considering herself a disabled subject because she perceived herself more as an active individual struggling with a disability. However, she also believed that disabled people are more predisposed to develop *la facultad* and, thus, to become *nepantleras*. However, she also presented her doubts about the productiveness of identifying oneself as disabled in that she saw some similarity to the instances when identifying with a political stand and using it for political activism one might even inadvertently incur in reinforcing such submission. In

Anzaldúa's opinion, the individuals who claim a disabled identity and participate in actions to validate their situation in mainstream society are expecting that those who have created the subordinated situation of the disabled put an end to it. In other words, "[w]e get locked into the binary abled/disabled, us/them [...]" We mourn (here is where La Llorona comes in) the loss of the 'healthy,' abled, integrated self, a self we may never have possessed" (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 302). Such binary takes a step further when in Luna Lemus' second novel, *Like Son*, illness does not only separate the healthy from the ill, but restrains this binary in terms of female and male. That is, the particularity of the illness suffered by Frank's father is gender discriminatory:

The blindness actively affected only males, my father said. But female offspring of the blind generation carried the gene and could pass the blindness to their male children. "You," my father emphasizes, "are a carrier." I chocked a little on a dry bit of rye bread – more at my father's loud insistence that I was female than at learning my hypothetical son might be blind. [...] He write a long tangled mess of totally illegible letters that he probably intended to read *artificial insemination* or *test tube baby*, but could have just as accurately read: *I'm a freak show and you're a freak show and any kid you have will be a freak show too*. [...] Our bodies were failing us in ways science could never entirely repair. (25)

This passage from *Like Son* presents interesting issues evolving around *retinitis pigmentosa*, a hereditary illness that Frank, the main character, learns about from his father. This illness is a very particular one in that provokes the gradual blindness of those who suffer it and because it is very gender-specific. Thus, only male individuals become blind while women do not develop the illness.

Women are carriers of the illness so they pass it on their children blinding, once again, only the male offspring. What is worth mentioning is that while Frank's father is glad that Frank won't suffer his same fate, Frank, a male-identified transgender, is horrified with the idea that the very gender he does accept is what keeps him safe. Contrary to what Frank felt as the result of her step-father's abuse, that the female body was what made her vulnerable, now it is the female genes who are the "strong" ones regarding the *retinity pigmentosa*. Furthermore, while Frank's father is happy to inform him that he does not have to worry about the illness, Frank is appalled by his father's insistence on his femaleness. Similar to Anzaldúa's stance when facing illness, Frank takes the active resolution of stopping it from spreading by avoiding pregnancy which, in fact, he perceives as totally incompatible with his male identification. Contrary to his father's faith in science to provide a better life to the human body, such as proposing Frank that he could selectively abort so as to secure the child's health, Frank totally disagrees in that it is precisely both their bodies that are proof of the contrary as his "chromosomes defined me as a daughter. And cancer was irreversibly sabotaging my father on the most essential of cellular levels. Our bodies were failing us in ways science could never entirely repair" (Lemus, *Like Son* 25).

Author and critic Cherríe Moraga also includes and takes advantage of her own personal experience so as to explain her theory, and, also, as the following excerpt describes, to legitimize her voice as opposed to the EuroAmerican and Western theory tradition: "[t]his feminist tenet, *the personal is political*, has provided me the poet's permission to use my own life as evidence of what I believe to be true about *us* and *them*" (iv). Moraga aligns

with Anzaldúa's idea that a new mode of writing *teoría* is necessary in order to represent the history, culture and experience of the minorities, who have always been misread by the U.S. mainstream. The importance of the process of writing and the agency behind it is another issue that both activists share. Moraga is vehement about how writing can be both illuminating and dangerous. What is more, the artist also explains that it is through the act of writing that she often realizes what she knows, and what she is trying to say.

Unlike Anzaldúa, Moraga's coming to terms and embracing her *chicanidad* was a more complex process in that she did not have the "burden" of race that marked her out. As the daughter of a white father and a Mexican mother, Moraga went through different stages in her life in which she would make the best of her light skin. She focuses on the fact that it was especially her sexuality that put her at war with her community and U.S. mainstream. As she describes it "[i]n this country, lesbianism is a poverty –as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor" (44). It is fair to say, then, that Moraga did not have to endure the triple oppression of being brown, female and lesbian the way Anzaldúa did, and that to some extent, she did make deliberate use of her white skin in order to alleviate part of the marginalization. Nevertheless, both activists share the belief that *teoría* has to reflect their particular experience and history, and that the struggle against oppression must take an active stand and not just a theoretical one.

Moraga eloquently describes the double colonizer/colonized syndrome present in Anzaldúa's criticism when describing the results of living under the colonizer's discourse to such extent as to emulate it. "[I]t 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” (Moraga 48). She, however, adds a new level behind the oppressor’s discourse, which has its source not so much on the differences found in the Other, but the similarities. In other words, she states that it is finding himself struggling with the same anxieties and desires of those he has been oppressing that the colonizer is worried about.

I would say that even in a more physical way than Anzaldúa, Moraga had to learn to deal with opposing two worlds. On the one hand, the Anglo world her light skin allowed her to enter and, on the other hand, the Chicana world that she chose to embrace. She became a bridge between both worlds because she wished to overcome the division. Moraga, like Anzaldúa, believes in crossing different worlds without letting any one of them confine her. This bridging not only challenges Anglo American value system, but also traditional Chicano ones, because, as she has previously stated, being a lesbian thrusts you into the margins of heteronormative communities. Hence, she must navigate through divergent worlds in order to learn how to set the dialogue going; that is, “I am a woman with a foot in both words. I refuse the split. I feel the necessity for dialogue” (50).

When talking about her evolution and becoming as a sexual subject, Moraga relates to the Anglo world so as to avoid sexual alienation. As she clearly states “[t]he control of women begins through the institution of heterosexuality” (102). In other words, Chicanas are socialized into heterosexuality as part of their role and aim in perpetuating the continuation of the community; that is, the maintenance of *la familia*. Even if the Chicana subject becomes active in different areas of her identity, heterosexuality is

presumed and expected from her. Moraga situates herself in “*a long line of Vendidas*” (108) when she portrays her mother as the modern Malinche for marrying an Anglo man and, thus, betraying *la raza*. Furthermore, she follows her lead by going a step further in her defiance, and becoming a sexual individual who chooses to love women and, thus, disregards, as her mother did, the Chicano man. Just the opposite case is included by Luna Lemus in her *Trace Elements*, where Leticia’s interracial parents are described as the perfect happy couple:

Asking questions about my mother and father only ever made the women in my family silent and the men weep. Result is, I don’t know much about my parents. But from looking into the only photo I have of my mother, I do know that she was beautiful. And proudly satisfied. And that she and my blue-eyed father must have loved each other something bad. [...] My mother’s comatose body was kept on life support for a month while I incubated, getting ready to be born twenty days early by cesarean delivery. The day I was hatched, Nana gave my mother one last lullaby kiss good night. (132)

This episode somehow mimics Moraga’s personal story and her queerness. However, Leticia’s parents in the novel are described as being deeply in love and this is why their violent death in a car crash, when she is in an advanced stage of pregnancy, is so horrifying. Describing how the protagonist came to the world and was “hatched” from her mother’s comatose body is a powerful image that in some way advances Leticia’s own ordeal when she has to decide when to switch the life support machines that keep Nana alive. Taking the birth image a little farther, one could read it as the birth of the queer *mestiza* from the ashes of inert and unmovable traditions of Chicano and the Anglo as represented by

her deceased parents. Consequently, Leticia's role as the voice of the queer Chicana community is key to reinscribe and recount the new "autohistoria-teoría" (Keating, *Anzaldúa Reader* 9) advocated by both Anzaldúa and Moraga. Following Moraga's ideas, as described in her polemic *Loving in the War Years*, challenging heteronormativity is perceived as the highest treason against the Chicano community whether a woman is a lesbian or not, whether she has children or not. Questioning the patriarchal values forced on the genders is understood as a provocation to the history, culture and people from the community, even if heteronormativity reflects the colonizers' value system. In other words, Moraga stresses the uneven way in which Chicano and Chicana activists have been measured. She reminds the reader how white theoreticians were quoted and their work read in order to defend the Movement's class struggle to put an end to the classist power system that oppressed them as a working-class community. On the other hand, as soon as Chicanas started working with and quoting white feminists, they were depicted as *vendidas* to the white power and their activism was considered the outmost betrayal. Although, Moraga aligns with white feminists and white lesbians, she also insists that the most important work by Chicana theorists has been the recovery of previous feminist *Mexicanas* and Chicanas. In addition, she explains the creation of the Third World feminism as a reaction to many issues. On the one hand, there was the homophobia present in U.S. mainstream discourses of the '80s. On the other hand, minority groups advocated the defense of the heterosexual family as a culturally reactionary image alienating, thus, those who did not conform to heteronormativity notions. Finally, there was a high level of racism and classism located within the white lesbian movement. Thus, in Moraga's opinion, Third

World feminism was created in reaction to homophobia, sexism, classism and racism encountered in different sectors of U.S. society.

Similar to Anzaldúa, Moraga also recovers the figure of *La Llorona* even if unlike most of other Chicana writer, artists, scholars she did not hear the story from any member of her family while growing up. However, she states that as soon as she learned about the story, this feminine figure became the core of her work even before she was consciously aware of it. As she recalls it, she considered this legenday woman a sister to herself in that she recognized both their “crimes” as unnatural. *La Llorona* by being a sexual individual ended up killing her own children, and, Moraga by being a lesbian also betrayed her people for sex. The feminist scholar, however, revises the myth and, distrusting the official narratives, rewrites her. The theorist does not believe that being abandoned by her lover is enough reason to commit such crime, so she suggests that *La Llorona* was after a more ambitious revenge that included all men for their implication in subjugating women in a repressive interpretation of motherhood. Furthermore, Moraga also reinterprets this legend’s most defining characteristic, her screams. In her reading *La Llorona* is wailing for food because she is hungry. That is, “[s]he is the story that has never been told truly, the story of that hungry Mexican women who is called puta/bruja/jota/loca because she refuses to forget that her half-life is not a natural-born fact” (Moraga 147).

While Anzaldúa talks about writing one’s own body in order to subvert preimposed discourses, Moraga believes that storytellers are the embodiment of the word and, thus, somehow the language and the body depend on the other in order to exists and survive: “I put my faith in the stories, that language

of the body, where the word is made flesh by the storyteller” (176). At the end of Leticia Luna Lemus’ novel, *Trace Elements*, the reader encounters Leticia struggling with many personal dramas including the death of Nana; the abandonment of her lover K; and her rejection of *La Llorona*, her life-long ghostly companion, who has kept her link to her cultural and queer community. At some point, Leticia starts recovering and decides that she is ready to pick up herself and continue her life by uniting her past and present through the very feature that has always defined her as a challenging Chicana queer: storytelling.

“Know what you can do?” “Name it.” Nol edged away, a little freaked at how suddenly sloppy smile I was. “Let me tell you a story?” [...] “do you want to hear one Mamá used to tell or one Nana would tell?” “Either, its’ up to you.” “Mamá’s stories are prettier, sweeter.” “Leti, it’s up to you.” And it was. It was up to me. Nol was right. It was entirely up to me. I shut my eyes to remember it right. I bit my lip to keep it from jumping forward before I was ready. The static crackle jangle of my voice hummed warm reliable, and Nana, she began walking deliberate and measured through the pink house backyard. (245)

Conclusion

To survive the Borderlands
you must live *sin fronteras*
by a crossroads.

(Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera*)

This dissertation has aimed at opening discussion between varied border Chicana literary works as the means to overcome past scholarly voids regarding the definition of the Chicana/o literary corpus. In order to achieve such purpose, the study has gathered a number of border Chicana works which fulfill two main requirements. On the one hand, the authors stress the particularity of the Chicana experience as a marginalized cultural subject in the U.S. On the other hand, the border, physical or/and conceptual, structures the literary space provided by these works. Many scholarly endeavors have dedicated their research to these two subjects, but a strict definition of what Chicana literature is has often brought the dismissal of valuable literary contributions. This thesis has attempted to emend this injustice by presenting a more inclusive understanding of what border Chicana literature is. Furthermore, I believe that this analysis will contribute to the more challenging enterprise of connecting an apparently diverging body of literature through dissimilar temporal and spatial realms.

Border Chicana literature, as presented in this study, puts into question traditional conceptualizations of space and identity construction. The literary works gathered here, then, challenge both the locale of the American Southwest as described in the dominant historical reports, and the concept of

chicanidad as it was conceived during *El Movimiento*. The establishment of the U.S.-Mexican border with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in 1848, not only marked the limits of U.S. and Mexico, but it opened “una herida abierta” (Anzaldúa 25) between the Anglo normative center and the Other (non-Anglo ethnic communities), which has lasted up until today. This historical event became the origin of the Chicana/os’ political struggle to claim their rights as U.S. citizens, which came to its peak in the 1960s. This is the reason why this dissertation has considered that the U.S.-Mexico border is the primary element in defining what border Chicana literature is. The Anglo value system, which colonized the original Mexican community in the Southwest, was implanted through physical violence and a process of narrative erasure that sought the invisibility of the original cultures. Hence, for the purpose of this study, it is fundamental to not only analyze the significance of space in the development of the Chicana/o identity, but also to recover literary instances that succeeded in maneuvering through Anglos’ discursive erasure.

As mentioned above, the idea that *chicanidad*, as defined by *El Movimiento*, was insufficient and needed to be questioned has guided my choice of literary works presented in this dissertation. Mexican Americans became politically active as an alternative cultural community during the 1960s. The Movement’s agenda was structured around the recovery of their cultural and historical past which had been actively erased and disregarded by Anglo dominant power structures and academia. In this context, during the Civil Rights Movement, Chicana/os claimed their status as the original inhabitants of the Southwest in a culturally defined political activism. This project, however, was limited, to some extent, by the maintenance of a traditional value system which

proved not to be as inclusive as it was expected by some of the members of the Chicana/o community. Nationalist ideals, which arranged the community in a patriarchal hierarchization of *la familia*, were implemented by *El Movimiento*. What is more, the Chicana/os' traditional understanding of the family became decisive in the community's agenda. That is, the perpetuation of *la familia* was presented as the means to achieve the cultural and political success of the Chicana/os in modern U.S. society. Its practice became a proof of loyalty to the cause.

As this *familia* overlooked gender issues that directly affected Chicana activists, some of them believed that the traditional conceptualization was a step backwards. Issues related to traditional conceptions of gender and sexuality prevented some Chicana/os from achieving a fulfilling subjectivity within the community. These constraints were denounced mostly by Chicana feminists as being similar to the discrimination Chicana/os were struggling against in the U.S. society. Consequently, they resented the secondary position they had been relegated to despite their active participation and political engagement to the politico-cultural struggle of *El Movimiento*. Besides, they demanded their legitimacy as members of the Chicana/o community in a similar attempt to that of the Movement, which requested the suppression of race and class discrimination. Traditional viewpoints within the Chicana/o community, however, kept demanding the dismissal of issues regarding gender equality and sexual freedom as necessary to achieve a stronger unity as a Movement. Chicana feminists, on the contrary, insisted on the need to redefine traditional values in order to accomplish a more united activism. These demands were not only disregarded, but were often seen as an act of selling out to the Anglo

feminist movement. This strategy tried to dismiss Chicana feminists' interests and legitimacy by aligning their political concerns outside their cultural community. In spite of these attacks from their cultural partners, Chicana feminists persisted with their activism, which ended up producing a particular literary corpus, where issues concerning them as colored working-class women in a racist, classist and male-centered society were included.

Many Chicana feminists found the idea that spaces are defined collectively inspirational to pursue the creation of their own literary space. This intellectual praxis was translated to real activism in feminist Chicanas' direct interaction with community-based politics, which attempted to reinterpret Chicanas' role as political and cultural agents within the U.S. society. The specificity of this feminist activism was defined along their particular experiences in terms of gender, race, class and sexuality. In other words, feminist Chicanas became adamant at challenging those ethnocentric and patriarchal structures that bordered them. As a consequence, literature became the fertile ground where alternative conceptualizations of *chicanidad* blossomed.

Accordingly, the act of writing has been vital in defining a feminist Chicana identity. As gender inequalities and abuses came to the forefront of this literature, assertive female characters replaced the passive and subjugated more traditional representations present in male-authored narratives. Acquiring a voice, and using it to resist and define a positive identity became synonymous to Chicana feminism. This celebratory literature encouraged the recovery of past experiences in order to establish their historical record as active women and, accordingly, by learning from their foremothers, to design their route

ahead. In this recovery project, the figures of *La Malinche*, *La Llorona* and the Virgin of Guadalupe became at the center of feminist Chicana literature. Acknowledging the negative connotations assigned to many female figures in traditional Aztec and Mexican narratives, it is not surprising that Chicana feminists made their intellectual and political goal to recover and rewrite them in more empowering role models.

This dissertation has given evidence of the recovery of these figures through the study of works of diverse nature and times. In the case of the early 20th century writers, *fronteriza* Josefina Niggli provided the character of María, “the river wench,” similar characteristics to those of *La Llorona* and *Malinche*. Although the author does not make any direct reference to these legends, I believe that, in *Mexican Village* (1945), her portrayal of María as an independent woman who is misunderstood and envied by her neighbors bears clear correspondences to them. Niggli’s positive portrayal of this character can be interpreted as her interest in amending the injustices born upon these female figures under a patriarchal tradition. Moreover, in the section regarding contemporary border Chicana literature, Lucrecia Guerrero’s work, *Chasing Shadows* (2000), recovers the figures of *La Malinche*, *La Llorona* and the Virgin of Guadalupe. In her reinterpretation of them, similar to Niggli’s, Guerrero provides these characters with voices and turns them into the narrators of their own story. Taking advantage of this literary device, the author does not only relocate these traditional legends in modern Chicana literature, but she furnishes them with the necessary socio-historical context to make their actions comprehensible. *Malinche*, *La Llorona* and Tonantzin are presented as agents who, victims of their circumstances as colored working-class women in the U.S.,

have to resort to what little is available in order to survive in the hostile environment of the border. What is more, *La Llorona* also becomes a central character in Felicia Luna Lemus' first novel, *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties* (2003), where a queer version of the wailing woman accompanies the protagonist, Leticia, in her search for a relevant queer Chicana identity. Looking and recovering the past is, thus, essential for Chicana feminists in order to strengthen and navigate through new political and social realms.

On the other hand, bearing in mind the centrality of the U.S.-Mexico border in defining the political and literary development of the Chicana/o community, this dissertation has gathered diverse literary works that revolve around the U.S.-Mexico border in very different ways. The idea of studying border Chicana literature follows the purpose of establishing the connection between apparently unrelated literary productions and authors, on the one hand; and to underline the varied ways in which these authors and/or their works interact with this space, on the other. This geopolitical construct is present in divergent ways in every literary work included in this dissertation. In a different mode to other border literary studies, this thesis gathers together many interpretations of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands: from the Frontier myth and empty Southwest described by the first Anglo settlers in their nationalist narratives, to the pragmatic call for a binational identity by early *fronterizas*; from the specificity of the physical border, which secures the over-industrialization and over-militarization of the 21st century border towns, to the conceptual borders that constrain queer Chicanas throughout the U.S. metropolises. These differing readings respond to the changing and unpredictable realities enforced by the U.S.-Mexican border among the

Chicana/o community. Hence, this geopolitical construct becomes the center of this personal genealogy of border Chicana literature along with its characters, who cross and are crossed by it every day.

In the early years of the U.S.-Mexican border, its presence was symbolized by the introduction of an Anglo value system, which was alien and challenging to the Mexican tradition. This new ideology and the raise of the number of Anglo settlers to the borderlands provoked confrontations between both communities. The literary and historical accounts written at the time were purposefully biased with the aim of spreading and promoting an Anglo nationalist discourse, which legitimized the new settlers' forceful establishment of what they considered to be a civilized society. The geological particularity of the Southwest, the changing nature of the desert, thus, became the perfect image for the "smoothing" narratives which erased the worth of the original cultures. This same geography was later appropriated by *fronterizas* and Chicana authors, and it became the source of many artistic productions which unleashed assertive cultural and political creations. Hence, Chicanas claimed literature as an alternative space where positive interaction with the landscape promoted a new understanding of feminist Chicana community. Consequently, early 20th century depictions of these borderlands must be the first step in order to establish the development of border Chicana literature. With this purpose in mind, the recovery of the Hispanic tradition in the American Southwest has been presented in this dissertation as the foundation to support a chronological order that improves the understanding of border Chicana literature production as it is known today.

The Chicana/o activism during the 1960s, however, celebrated its *mestizo* and working-class characteristics as essential to a “real” Chicana/o identity. Therefore, non-colored racial homogeneity and class privileges were deemed as un-Chicana/o, and, thence, representative of the oppression and subjugation experienced since colonization. This strict interpretation of what a Chicana/o was, dismissed the value of those literary works created during the early 20th century by authors who enjoyed better social conditions, such as Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niggli. Moreover, these women and their works were regarded as assimilationists, and, thus, unimportant and unrelated to the Chicana/o literary corpus. These authors, among others from this period, have oftentimes been disregarded as conflictive examples of border literature due to alleged sympathy to the dominant Anglo power. They are widely absent from too many historical and literary records, and this erasure must not be regarded as accidental. My belief is that the works included here present a diverse literary corpus where issues regarding their content and form secure their position as representatives of border Chicana literature. Through the study of their major works, *Caballero* (1996), *The Rebel* (1994) and *Mexican Village* (1945), this dissertation aims to underline their contribution to the Chicana/o literary corpus. In more positive criticism, González, Villegas de Magnón and Niggli’s commitment to report their contemporary sociopolitical context has been judged as providing nostalgic and self-deluding narratives, which failed to denounce the harsh conditions suffered by the Mexican American community throughout the border. Accordingly, their works have been considered as entertaining and apolitical literary contributions. Fortunately, complete silence and patronizing criticism are rapidly being

amended by recent scholarly works from Chicana/o academia, which inspired this dissertation, and which defend these *fronterizas*' rightful position in the Chicana/o literary canon.

The times these women were writing in must be born in mind as that sociohistorical context did not encourage or allow many women to lead a professional career, even less a literary one. What is more, the discrimination rampant in the Texas-Mexico border especially discouraged non-Anglo women from actively and professionally pursuing a literary career. It is no accident, then, that Josefina Niggli, the only one among the three who was widely published during the 1930s and 1940s, pursued her professional career far from the U.S.-Mexico border, on the East Coast. This geographical distance, along with the lack of a Spanish last name, provided her with more opportunities in the publishing business. Their geographic location, their ethnicity on top of their gender, hence, impeded Jovita González and Leonor Villegas de Magnón to succeed in publishing the works included in this dissertation during their lifetime. González, Niggli and Villegas de Magnón's works succeed in presenting their political goal of promoting a border identity, which includes both the Mexican and Anglo cultures. These *fronterizas*' report of their particular experience answers to the urgency of recording their historical and literary past while it was being erased in the new Anglo-dominated reality. The fact that Jovita González entitled her work *Caballero* as a historical novel shows her intent on presenting this work not as an entertaining romance, but as a truthful narrative of a disappearing tradition, where cultural, political and economic facts are at the origin of its plot. That is, her intent does not seem to be so much the romantic intricacy of the characters, but to produce a written testimony of the Texan

society, with its language, culture and value system, as had existed in the deserts of the Texas-Mexico borderland before the Anglo settlers' arrival. Furthermore, Jovita González's partnership with Anglo writer Eve Raleigh also establishes her political commitment to an understanding between both cultures. Thus, *Caballero* becomes not only a literary history of the Texas-Mexico borderlands, but also a literary praxis of an alternative border identity. In addition, the inclusion of gender and class problematic as they were established by the Mexican tradition proves the novel to be a more complex study of this borderland than that presented by other more idyllic depictions of the area.

On the other hand, Leonor Villegas de Magnón appropriated the genres of Revolution narratives and the memoir to denounce the erasure of women's critical activism and, once again, established a written testimony for the often overlooked fact that women were active participants during the Mexican Revolution, and that their work had been an invaluable contribution to one of the most important events in Mexican history. Villegas de Magnón, and her Cruz Blanca, assisted the Revolution on both sides of the Texas-Mexico border. This binational activism defined the author's understanding, similar to Jovita González, of the positive outcomes of an amicable relationship between both nations. The fact that women had actively been part of the Revolution was being ignored by the official narratives of the Revolution and historical accounts, so, her literary contribution challenged this tendency of dismissing the presence and activism of women. The Revolution affected life on both sides of the border, and, hence, this event underlines the significance that Mexican history has had in the development of modern U.S. history, and, also, in the way Chicana/o identity has been defined. Josefina Niggli, on the other hand, included an after-

Revolutionary context in *Mexican Village*. The importance of Niggli's work lies in her constant engagement with the study of hybrid subjectivities and her portrayal of various border characters where ideas of *mestizaje* might be located. Besides, Niggli's multi-genre literary production is particularly relevant due to her inclusion of strong and active female characters. Moreover, the choice of presenting *Mexican Village* as a set of ten independent stories reminds the traditional *cuentos* of Mexican female tradition, where community's wisdom and culture was passed on from generation to generation. Taking up herself with the role of a storyteller, Niggli left detailed and rich testimony of border society culture on the Mexican side, which prevented its exclusion from literary records.

Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niggli set their works on the Texas-Mexico borderland in different historical periods –before the annexation, during the Mexican Revolution and after the Revolution– centralizing their defense of border identities at the very border. The issues regarding gender, ethnic, class and sexuality included in their works might not be as overt as in later border Chicana literature, but the obvious importance of the socio-historical context that these *fronterizas* experienced must be born in mind and should not be brushed aside. The mere fact that they opted for writing, their strong commitment to improve the relations between both nations, and their participation on the preservation and recovery project of their culture place them at the early years of feminist border literature. That is, inspired by the Texas-Mexican borderland, Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niggli produced challenging and culturally relevant literary works

that rightfully place them, in my opinion, as the foremothers of border Chicana literature.

With the drastic economic changes brought by the over industrialization and over militarization during the second half of the 20th century, a different kind of border Chicana literature came along. In order to understand the particularities of this new border literature, it is indispensable to take into account the transformations imposed on this geographic area. In other words, current border literature cannot be fully comprehended if the structural changes taking place at this site are not taken into account. The complete silence that North American mainstream discourse maintains regarding the centrality that these changes at the border have brought to their economy is also highly indicative. What is more, the perpetuation of this border exploitation and its biased interpretation on mainstream discourse is key to the maintenance of present North American economic and political structures. On the one hand, with the Bracero Program in 1942, Mexican labor workers were invited to cross to the U.S. in order to provide the manual labor that the World War II had restricted. The Border Industrialization Program started in 1964 and completely altered the geography of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands through the drastic construction of thousands of assembly lines or *maquilas* on the Mexican side with the purpose of profiting from the cheap labor provided by Mexican workers. In addition, the signing of NAFTA, in that same year, turned the border into the world's largest free trade area, which provided immense profitable gains thanks to the cheap wages and exploitative conditions that Mexican workers were forced to accept. Furthermore, border militarization rapidly increased with the signing of Operation Gatekeeper in 1994 with the purpose of closing the border

to Mexican immigrants. This militarization forced many of them to try alternative routes in order to cross the border. These new paths involved more dangerous passages in more severe conditions and provoked a dramatic increase in the number of deaths. In addition, discourses regarding the risk for domestic terrorism were located at the U.S.-Mexican border, and, thus, immigrant workers, and by association all Mexican looking individuals, were criminalized and persecuted.

This aggressive economy taken place with the consent and participation of the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Fund brings the dramatic conditions of laborers, which turn Mexicans and Mexican Americans into victims of human exploitation. This drama, however, is taken a step further with the environmental exploitation of the border, and, thus, its dangers to the health and wellbeing of the borderlanders. The over industrialization of this area has caused the contamination of water, air and natural resources, which, once again, put at risk the same exploited population that border industry has based its existence on. The border individuals who suffer the most, then, are the same colored, working class women who work at the assembly lines which contaminate the grounds and waters. Thus, environmental activists denounce not only these hazardous conditions, but, especially, the feminization of this border abuse in all its extension. In order to do so, ecofeminism highlights the tight connection between environmental and gendered exploitation as the direct result of the structural changes implanted at the U.S.-Mexican border in the last century.

While nationalist discourses multiply, the fact that the U.S. globalized economy depends on the transnational commerce of goods and in the

exploitation of Mexican workers do not seem to weaken its purpose. The discriminating discourse regarding Mexican immigrants and the Mexican American population, in general, is politically profitable. The perpetuation and promotion of disparate conditions on both sides of the border is necessary in order to maintain the current economy going. That is, inequality and discrimination is actively searched and implanted so as to maintain this transnational economy. These differences have altered the border physically as well and they have promoted a drastic urban development in response to the needs of capitalism. By the end of 20th century and current 21st century, the border has become a site of compulsory economic system which is founded on the basis of human exploitation, which clearly marks individuals along race, gender, class and sexuality notions.

Similar to what can be perceived by the literary works gathered in this dissertation by early *fronterizas*, current border Chicana literature is not as interested as early *El Movimiento's* writers in promoting the U.S. Southwest as the origin of a Chicana/o homeland. Furthermore, this literature is more concerned in denouncing the day-to-day extreme conditions lived by borderlanders on both sides of the border. Contrary to Jovita González, Josefina Niggli and Leonor Villegas de Magnón's works, however, the border itself becomes a strikingly recognizable *locale* in contemporary border Chicana literature. The border, as a contention site, has transformed into a state-policed exploitative enterprise. The political purpose of this modern border literature brings the dramatic living conditions of its inhabitants at the forefront of their literary space. However, in a more positive side, in this border Chicana literature, there is also room for celebratory *mestiza* instances where the

recovery of traditional female images is included. That is, the revision and redefinition of the legend of *La Llorona*, *La Malinche* and the Virgin of Guadalupe is very present. Thus, in the literary samples of this border Chicana literature, although different kinds of discrimination are included, gender exploitation plays a primary role. The more overt report of this gender discrimination in these 21st century border Chicana literary works respond to the greater freedom enjoyed by its authors in comparison to the early *fronterizas*. Thus, the feminization of modern border struggle is what connects the three short story collections by Lucrecia Guerrero, Richard Yañez and Ito Romo.

Distancing, once again, from a more traditional definition of what Chicana literature is, this dissertation has also included the works of two male authors, Richard Yañez and Ito Romo. Although Chicana literature has been traditionally regarded as literature written by Chicanas, in this thesis I defend the notion that the *chicanidad* of literature should not be restricted to the gender of its authors. In other words, I believe that what makes a literary work “Chicana” should also be related to its content. In the case of Chicano authors Ito Romo and Richard Yañez, the works included in this study, present a great amount of prominence to the experiences of *fronterizas*. That is, especially in the case of Ito Romo, the author narrates the stories of different female characters living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. In *El Puente/The Bridge* (2000), there is not even one single male character and the author, however, includes women of different race, age and class positions. Moreover, the only aspect that these women share is their crossing of the border, and the poverty and misery forced on them by the economical and political abuses unleashed in this site. In the case of Richard Yañez, *El Paso del Norte* (2003) presents a similar account of male

and female characters, but the stories present in this work, whether they have a female protagonist or a male one, provide a sensitive and detailed account of border women's particularities. In this case as well, the U.S.-Mexican border becomes the center of the narrative, and Mexican and Mexican American populations fall victims of this geopolitical construct.

Yet, the border's presence expands to sites that are far from the actual U.S.-Mexico border. In other words, it is, somehow, carried in the everyday life of Chicana/o individuals living throughout the U.S. The conceptual borders, those regarding emotional and psychological divisions within the individual, define the praxis of activist Chicana/os as much as the actual setting does. The Chicana/os' historical development, which began with the establishment of the border in 1848, has still its effects in the community. This division and persecution along definite limits, which constrain the identity process of Chicana/os, is particularly marked regarding queer Chicana/os. Thus, through the study of Felicia Luna Lemus' two novels, *Trace Elements of Random Tea Parties* and *Like Son* (2007), queer *chicanidad* has been examined. Compulsory heteronormativity was established at the core of *El Movimiento* and sexuality was regarded as the means to perpetuate *la familia*. That is, sexuality meant heterosexuality and its purpose was a reproduction that would increase the number of Chicana/os for the political and cultural cause. With this constrained understanding of sexuality, Chicanas were not encouraged to seek sexuality as the means to fulfill their identity as women, but were, on the contrary, taught to perceive their bodies and sexual drives as a collective tool for the community's political goal. Hence, the female body and sexuality was understood as men's property and as a useful instrument. Feminist Chicanas

who claimed their body and sexuality were described as deviants and as sold-outs. Thus, queer and feminist Chicana literature was ignored and, as a consequence, their literary and theoretical contributions dismissed from the Chicana/o literary corpus.

Border Chicana literature, obviously, refers to the geopolitical border dividing both nations, but it also includes and studies the way this site has produced conceptual borders. The traditional conceptualization of sexuality, which defines it as Chicana/o or un-Chicana/o, is a subject that border Chicana literature deals with. Then, the study of queer *chicanidad* and the inclusion of this literature in my personal account of border Chicana literature conclude this dissertation. My discussion on queer Chicana literature has incorporated key queer theoretical concepts brought by Michel Foucault's genealogy of sexuality, Judith Buthler's challenge to traditional gender definition, Eve Kosofsky Sedwick's study on the centrality of the closet in the life of queer individuals, Judith Halberstam's reinterpretation of time and space from a queer perspective, and Audre Lorde's call for the erotic as the means for political activism. However, the particularity of the queer Chicana must include the pertinent contribution done by queer Chicana theorists who stress the importance of their original historical and cultural background. In other words, the effect that the establishment of the U.S.-Mexico border has had in Chicana/o identity is highly important to understand the conceptual borders queer Chicanas struggle through within their cultural community. Therefore, it is necessary to resort to the queer Chicana *teoría* as defined by Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Emma Pérez in order to contextualize queer *chicanidad* and be able to study its practice through literature. Felicia Luna Lemus' two

novels have been taken into consideration to apply this particular *teoría* in order to prove the necessity of including queer Chicana literature as instances of border literature. Hence, Lemus' works have been studied in an inclusive attempt to broaden the traditional conception of *chicanidad* which will embrace, against traditional sexual patterns, non-heterosexual sexuality as culturally relevant to the Chicana/o community. What is more, Lemus' novels make it clear that issues such as gender and sexuality, are highly important to the definition of current Chicana identity. Besides, these novels introduce a literary space where Anzaldúa and Moraga's queer theories, along with other studies, are put in practice and negotiated in order to define a culturally relevant Chicana queerness that has been created from traditional contexts, but have undergone different changes in order to fit current socio-political and identity problematics within the Chicana/o community.

The fact that this *teoría* is mixed with the very personal experience of the authors overcomes the void that more hegemonic queer theorists present in relation to the particularities of Chicana queerness. What is more, Anzaldúa, Moraga and Pérez's call for a more personal theorization to be included in the literary production as a means to protest was put into practice by early *fronterizas*, whose literary production was deeply affected by their biography. That is, the personal became political at the U.S.-Mexico borderland long before Anzaldúa, Moraga and Pérez defined their *teoría*. This is why, and because they acknowledged the presence of these early feminists' challenges, these theorists called for the recovery of past literary productions. What is more, Jovita González, Josefina Niggli and Leonor Villegas de Magnón's reappropriation of literary genders, such as the historical narrative, memoirs and

cuentos, bring their border literature to the particular modes of queer Chicana *teoría* as presented in Anzaldúa and Moraga's key works, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and *Loving in the War Years* (1983). Therefore, this literary and theoretical productions share both political and formal experimentation in order to reflect the particularity of border Chicana experience which challenges traditional understanding of nationalist identities and literary canons. Answering to Emma Pérez's invocation of a "*sitio y lengua*" (Trujillo 161) in order to achieve a comprehensive study of Chicana history and literature, the samples of border Chicana literature gathered in this dissertation answer to the centrality of a *sitio*, the U.S.-Mexico border, in order to understand the complex journey of Chicanas and the necessity of listening to their *lengua* to gather a complete account that will empower them.

All in all, the centrality of the U.S.-Mexico border in the construction of the Chicana/o identity is undeniable and this is why this dissertation has focused on the different studies and narratives stressing this connection. The violent origin of the geopolitical construction of the U.S.-Mexico border is a suitable symbol that represents the Mexican American populations' destiny and history in the modern North American context. Bearing this historical background in mind, this research has presented a sample of apparently disparate literary works where this political border becomes a central figure around which the different characters interact. In the early 20th century works, *Caballero*, *The Rebel* and *Mexican Village*, the early years of the border are described. The presence of *la frontera* is expressed through the awakening to a new reality by the Mexican population where different cultures and traditions meet. Although the struggles between the Anglo population and the Mexican

vary in these works, the border itself does not represent a direct danger or violence to the characters. Besides, Jovita González, Leonor Villegas de Magnón and Josefina Niggli's attempt to reconcile with the Anglo newcomers, although preserving the original Mexican tradition, prove these authors' wish to achieve the understanding of different communities, and, thus, to some extent, to overcome the distance that the geopolitical construct represented.

On the contrary, in the works included in the second chapter, *Chasing Shadows*, *El Puente/The Bridge* and *El Paso del Norte*, the U.S.-Mexico border does not only strengthen its centrality in the narratives, but becomes the very source of the violence and desolation enforced upon its inhabitants. In these works, the authors' intention is not to conciliate the relationship between the Anglo and the Chicana/o population, but to denounce the devastation taken place at the border. In the last section, the presence of the U.S.-Mexican border in the development of border Chicana identity provokes the creation of conceptual borders as described in *Borderlands* by Gloria Anzaldúa. Changing the setting of the novels from the U.S.-Mexico border to the metropolis of Los Angeles and New York allowed this section to present theories regarding a bordered Chicana identity along gender, class and sexuality axes. The importance of urban queer sites in order to create alternative Chicana queerness is common to Luna Lemus' both novels. In other words, *chicanidad* is crucial to the culturally aware queer communities that the characters of these novels, Felicia and Frank, struggle to create in the cities they live in and have turned to in order to come to terms to their queer Chicana/o identity. Therefore, the U.S.-Mexican border that discriminates them as colored U.S. citizens is carried on in their day-to-day life, and it also problematizes their association to

different queer communities available in the urban context. These culturally aware protagonists, Leticia and Frank, search for the creation of a community that will promote and celebrate the crossing and interaction among different realities. Thus, each and every literary work studied in this thesis bears witness to the tight connection between identity formation and geographical location. This interactive relationship takes place in divergent settings, from the deserts of the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border to the twin cities of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez; and from the fictional town of Mesquite, to the metropolis of Los Angeles and New York.

Places and the border, thus, become the center and what connects border Chicana literature in their attempt to denounce Chicana/os' oppression as a community and their legitimacy as part of a cultural activism. Writing is the tool that these border Chicana/os use in order to subvert their discriminated position, and the border represents the physical and conceptual notion that has originated, marked and compelled their activism as an alternative cultural praxis in the U.S. society. This dissertation has aimed at providing an alternative Chicana analysis which will challenge and redefine what border Chicana literature is. While this work is deeply indebted to previous extensive Chicana scholarship, I also wished to present a more inclusive understanding of *chicanidad* in order to make justice to early *fronterizas*. I believe that these women have been devaluated by a modern and rigid conceptualization of Chicana identity and, thus, their dedication to recover, promote and create culturally and historically relevant narratives have been unjustly overlooked. The particularities introduced by these authors help us relate to the difficulties that all active women face whenever they attempt to question dominant discourses.

Hence, studying how misunderstood González, Niggli, and Villegas de Magnón's contributions have been, might provoke the revision of other non-traditional subjectivities within the Chicana/o community, such as the queer one. On the other hand, this thesis has also attempted to reappropriate the U.S.-Mexico border in order to invite new scholarly research which will denounce the border's current situation. In other words, I read the experiences and literary production of these authors, studied here, as the atemporal praxis of three site-specific theoretical Chicana frameworks. On the one hand, Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of the Borderlands, where constraining nationalistic identities are disregarded in favor of a more positive interpretation of Chicana identity; Pat Mora's depiction of Nepantla, a land in the middle where culturally relevant artistic celebrations take place, on the other hand; and, finally, Emma Pérez' "un sitio y una lengua," a political remedy which intertwines geography and literature as the only possible path to follow for feminist Chicana production. If these theoretical frames can be applied to divergent Chicana literary works, I believe that *chicanidad* should also encourage a more fluid interpretation of its corpus. In sum, I have tried to underline the relevance of various theoretical frameworks as well as a body of literary works, which move beyond restrictive temporal and spatial locations, in order to prove the validity and relevance of an alternative conceptualization of borders and of a political Chicana identity as narrated in literature.

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