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Detrás de Cada Letra: Trauma and Healing in Chicana/o Literature

by

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ABSTRACT

DETRÁS DE CADA LETRA: TRAUMA AND HEALING IN CHICANA/O LITERATURE

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This dissertation seeks to substantively place Chicana/o literary studies in dialogue with the field of trauma studies, a field in which the robustness of minority letters remain under-theorized. The legacies of British and Iberian colonization, the ongoing racialized abuses of communities, the Mexican cession of 1848, the continued struggle for civil rights, the recent censure of Ethnic Studies, are all events marked by systematic racial wounding. For this reason in order to understand trauma more comprehensively, I look to Chicana/o literature to analyze how trauma and healing continue to be theorized, and aesthetized within American writing. Tracing an aesthetic of trauma and healing throughout the Chicana/o literary corpus, this dissertation explores in detail a poetics that I insist reflects the relationship between trauma, colonial wounding, and the palliative function of Curanderismo.

Opening in the sixteenth century in order to explore the relationship between coloniality, Americanity, and racial wounding, the project then turns to the twentieth and twenty-first century. Divided into five chapters, which define narrative broadly, I read closely to extract a cluster of ideas that comment on trauma and healing. Chapter I, examines the geopolitics of knowledge and Mesoamerican colonial writing. Chapter II, contemplates Curanderismo and the key concept figure of the Curandera across the archive by analyzing texts from disparate historical sections within the Chicana/o literary canon. Chapter III explores Américo Paredes’ novel, George Washington Gómez as trauma fiction. Chapter IV,
places Gloria Anzaldúa’s writing in conversation with Manuel Muñoz’s texts. Chapter V, considers post-Movement writing and alternative understandings of trauma and healing circulating within Chicana/o literature and their relationship to decolonialty.
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INTRODUCTION

DETRÁS DE CADA LETRA: TRAUMA AND HEALING IN CHICANA/O LITERATURE

The best of creative writing so grand in its particulars is able to traverse great borders of mind and matter. The distinctions disappear. Our present moment becomes history. History is enacted myth. Myth is remembered story. Story makes medicine. I am in daily search of these acts of remembering of who we once were, because I believe they will save our pueblos from extinction. Our preconquest imaginations offer strategies for building self-sustaining societies today, societies that can disrupt the mass suicide of global consumption, engineered by the Empire of the United States. I believe the United States intends to disappear its indigenous inhabitants and our non-Western ways of knowing. So, I write.

I write to remember:
I make rite (ceremony) to remember
It is my right to remember.¹

--Cherríe L. Moraga, Indigena as Scribe: The (W)rite to Remember

This project forwards a fundamental claim: the Chicana/o community, is a trans-American body of people that continues to reappraise and examine its own historical evolutions, and cultural productions, amidst fluctuating economic realities and shifting political ideals. This community continues to perspicuously represent experiences of trauma and healing in the Americas through their writings. As such, Chicana/o literature provides a rich discursive space, over-flowing with diverse accounts of anti-Mexican racism, sexism, homophobia, and economic exclusion, which provide useful insight for the theoretical elaboration of trauma, wounding, and dis(ease). Such accounts make visible the ways marginalized subjects have transhistorically negotiated the borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico (and their ever reconfiguring pluralities of meaning and difference). These accounts record the way that coloniality has created trauma, but they also construct both theoretical

and activist discourses centered on healing the lived trauma(s) associated with their colonized experiences. A majority of writers who make up the Chicana/o archive have taken up the topic of trauma and healing through the cultural practice and logic of Curanderismo.\(^2\) As Bret Hendrickson suggests, “Mexican American Folk healing, [and] the narrative predispositions that undergird cultural and religious healing are both durable and open to creative reconfiguration.”\(^3\) Because this logic is malleable, its presence in the Chicana/o archive is in equal parts profound and diverse.

A second fundamental claim here is that the entire field of Chicana/o literature is about decolonial healing, and this literary field conceptualizes trauma in ways that account for colonization and the unforeseen residual contemporary impacts colonization makes on the present. Subversively, Chicana/o writers disengage from the unspoken obligation to understand trauma in the standard Euro-centric hegemonic way and instead, through their narratives claim the authority to imagine within their own cultural traditions and constraints.\(^4\) They remain skeptical of the academy and practice caution when engaging institutionalized thought, much like Native scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who asserts:

> Academic knowledges are organized around the idea of disciplines and fields of knowledge. These are deeply implicated in each other and share genealogical foundations in various classical and Enlightenment philosophies. Most of the ‘traditional’ disciplines are grounded in cultural world views which are either antagonistic to other belief systems or have no methodology for dealing with other knowledge systems. Underpinning all of what is taught at universities is the belief in the concept of science as the all-

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2 A system of traditional Mexican healing practices.
embracing method for gaining understanding of the world. Some of these disciplines are more directly implicated in colonialism in that either they have derived their methods and understanding from the colonized world or they have tested their ideas in colonies.5

For this reason, I argue that by disengaging wholesale with trauma studies proper, Chicana/o writing proffers an epistemic decolonial shift. This dissertation maps out how and in what ways Chicana/o literature accounts for trauma. It asks, what cultural work do authors of Chicana/o trauma fiction undertake? It posits a disarticulation of trauma from prior Holocaust-centric theorizations and initiates a provocation regarding Chicana/o cultural forms and their relation to collective identity, cultural trauma, and communal healing at large. In doing so, this study also touches on the disciplinary borders and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that obstruct the kind of work this project undertakes. My ultimate hope is that this study encourages dialogue between Chicana/o literary studies and trauma studies.

The leading figures credited with developing literary studies of trauma are the former students of Paul De Mann.6 Trauma studies blossomed soon after the formal recognition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSMIV) in 1980. Firmly rooted in psychoanalytic discourse and tethered to the diagnostic and therapeutic treatment of Vietnam veterans, in the 1990’s trauma studies was taken up by literary critics who began to explore the political, historical, and ethical contours associated with the human experience of trauma and its representation.7 An interdisciplinary enterprise, trauma studies takes up questions emerging from the natural sciences, the social

6 Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey H. Hartman etc.
sciences, and the humanities by exploring the critical, theoretical, and clinical aspects of trauma and its aftermath.

Cathy Caruth’s work *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), which explores the psychoanalytic dimensions of trauma and affect in relation to literature, marked a watershed within the field of literary studies. Working alongside other key figures in the field, including Shoshana Felman, and Dominik LaCapra, Caruth’s yoking of critical theory, literary theory, and psychoanalysis cleared the theoretical space for scholars to think about trauma as an individualized intra-psychic, “symptom of history.” Recently, postcolonial scholars began launching critiques at the trauma studies canon because of its exclusive focus on Western experiences of trauma. Cadres of scholars denounce the exclusion of multicultural and postcolonial expressions of suffering to agitate for cross-cultural understandings of trauma that foreground the racial and gendered particularities of divergent experiences of wounding, which have heretofore all but evaded the traditional Eurocentric focus of literary trauma studies.

Trauma studies has a potentially valuable role to play in theorizing representations of trauma: it cannot however, do so without acknowledging the way Eurocentric thought shapes not only our analytic lenses but also our areas of inquiry. Contemporary studies of trauma, presuppose an element of coloniality: Eurocentrism, an exclusionary power articulated around the idea of race. Because the specific rationality of colonial domination is Eurocentrism, it is not hard to see how a field can remain guided by such a rationale, and

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9 Ibid., 5.
10 See Vol. 40 *Studies in the Novel*.
why it has been slow to integrate “other” experiences of trauma and “other” representations of trauma. Underpinned by Psychoanalysis, trauma studies must be critical of its epistemological and methodological roots. Psychoanalysis carries the baggage of colonialist discourse, a discourse built in “opposition to a colonized primitive other.”¹² The possibility of the restitution of subaltern knowledge enables contemporary thinkers to begin to learn, “from those who are living in and thinking from colonial and postcolonial legacies.”¹³ The broad cultural recognition of trauma as an area of study signals the need to explore the intergenerational and collective structures of trauma. How Mesoamericans responded in and through their trauma to technologies of colonial power during the traumatic intervention of Spanish colonialism remains a fruitful site for exploration and perhaps pre-stages and can shed light on how Chicana/o literature as a whole conceptualizes trauma and healing. In order to understand trauma more comprehensively in what follows I look to a sixteenth century codex, and twentieth and twenty-first century Mexican American writing. By doing so, I will theorize how processes of racial wounding, cultural loss and cultural healing continue to be theorized, and reaesthetized within American writing, U.S. literary production and print culture, and the broader universe of Latinidad.

Central works within the archive have explored the geopolitics of borderlands and the functions of anti-Mexican racism, gender violence, institutional violence, and transgenerational poverty, on distinct and overlapping trajectories and it is for this reason, that these works provide alternative sites from which to theorize trauma. Accordingly, this study widens the analytic scope of trauma studies, and gives primacy to an interrogation of how

trauma and healing are collectively experienced and represented by Mexican American communities. In what follows, I demonstrate that Chicana/o writers possess literary paradigms with which to map out the relationships between trauma, healing, and history, and these paradigms, conceptually propose a break from the dominant mode of theorizing trauma. This break only adds to the discursive thickening taking place, that sets out to understand trauma as a varied culturally inflected experience.

Chiefly, this dissertation pivots around one of Gloria Anzaldúa’s most well known paradigms. Anzaldúa’s notion of la herida abierta14 (the open wound) serves as a critical race, class, gender, and sexuality cognizant paradigm useful for theorizing trauma from the margins—which I frame here as a radical decolonial path.15 This dissertation will theorize Chicana/o letters by offering an investigation of the myriad ways in which contemporary Chicana/o authors continue to re-deploy and extend Anzaldúa’s symbol of la herida abierta throughout their works as part of an ongoing conceptual model that stages intersectional interrogations concerning how differentials of power shape lived experience. Echoing Walter D. Mignolo, I posit that Anzaldúa’s epistemic construction which co-articulates “colonial wounding” with the “ossification of the Mexican/US border,” remains a paradigm, which is fit to take on new disciplinary directions because here she makes the connection between the

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14 Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987), 25.
15 Walter D. Mignolo states that deocolonial paths engage colonial wounds and comprise the decolonial option. Mignolo notes, “decolonial options are nothing more than a relentless analytic effort to overcome the logic of colonialty and the anchor questions which guide decolonial epistemologies are as follows: What kind of knowledge, by whom, what for? See Walter Mignolo, The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options (Durahm: Duke University Press, 2011).
border and colonial wounding more explicit. Moreover, I contend that various works, which anticipate Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), similarly draw attention to the perdition of communal, spatial, and/or psychic “open wounds,” and inscribe their own theorizations of trauma. In fact many writers imagine trauma and pose calls for healing through their writing by employing distinct narrative strategies and in doing so construct a larger aesthetic of wounding and healing operative within Chicana/o letters.

Indeed, inscribing *la herida abierta* across the Chicana/o corpus not only works to solicit witnesses to past (colonial) traumatic injustices, but also poses contemporary calls geared towards mobilizing healing based on the “belatedness” of trauma. Such a move can be understood to function as a decolonial maneuver which summons the need for healing across national boundaries. In other words, many writers from across the twentieth and twenty-first century gesture in an anticipatory fashion towards, and also return to what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as *la herida abierta* in an effort to both problematize past cultural trauma (both material and psychic) and petition for transformative healing. The experiences of despair associated with post-Industrial labor, documentation/citizenship status, economic displacement, transgressive gender and sexual crossings within a context of neoliberal globalization function in ways that intensify the importance and impetus behind Chicana/o literary calls for healing. Chicana/o writers, as cultural workers contribute to wider contemporary efforts that aim to mollify the anguish of the colonial wound(s) encountered by many Chicanas/os within the borderlands across the Americas and beyond. Chicana/o literature then, offers a distinct vantage point from which to analytically engage trauma and healing, and this angle warrants further exploration.

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This study includes an analysis and discussion on aspects of form. The formal dimensions of the texts this study analyzes are important but are of secondary interest. By looking across genres, and defining narrative in the broadest sense, I hope to consider the ways distinct cultural forms i.e., narrative fiction, (including both the novel and the short story), herbals, critical essays, and autohistoria\textsuperscript{17} comment on the varied experiences of trauma and healing within Chicana/o literature. My selection of written works is based on an attempt to locate texts which best exemplify suffering, endurance, loss, but most importantly—**healing**. Through close-reading textual analysis, I put Chicana literary studies in dialogic relation with literary trauma studies. This means that this project will inevitably engage in disciplinary crossings as studies within both of these field imaginaries draw from literary studies, ethnic studies, Latin American studies, and cultural studies.

In tracing this wider aesthetic of trauma and healing from the sixteenth century through twentieth and twenty-first century, my aim is to show how ethical and political imperatives central to Chicana/o communities relate to trauma and healing transhistorically across the Mexican American archive. Furthermore, I show how Chicana/o trauma narratives depict anti-racism, anti-sexism, and a critique of unregulated capitalism and in order to register sociogenic causes of wounding. These aspects when considered in light of trauma studies further ply the parameters of the trauma paradigm in its putative disciplinary usage into further elasticity. A few of the questions I set out to ask in this provocation are as follows: What are the interpretive possibilities and limitations of framing particular works within the Chicana/o literary canon as minority trauma fiction and investigating them as such? Are there strict properties across Chicana/o literary texts that paradigmatically mark

\textsuperscript{17} A genre developed by Gloria Anzaldúa, which blends narrative, testimonio, cuento, and history.
works as Chicana/o trauma fiction? What types of narrative strategies do authors within the Chicana/o literary canon program into their works to convey traumatic scenes and traumatic (collective and or individual) experience? What are the thematic or tropological continuities across Chicana/o works that engage trauma and healing?

In this framework, it is clear that Chicana/o writers share an overwhelming desire to heal. Collectively, they have engaged in a historically wide-ranging metaphoric conversation with one another surrounding paradigms of wounding and healing. These conversations comprise a cross-generic network. In regards to the Chicana/o archives it is clear that Chicana feminist writers are suturing and stitching wounds and closing the historical gap from the Civil Rights era to the present by extending a call for healing and transformation to all. This call for healing, or the suturing of wounds vis a vis Curanderismo, like the requisitions made in the past, requires an uncomfortable confrontation with exclusion and how it functions within and around Chicana/o communities both in the fictive imaginary and in the real lives of Chicanas/os. We can also see that Chicana/o writers insist on critiques of both the economic and socio-political order as a way to represent and grapple with historical wounding. In the end, these critiques belong to a larger network that emphasizes intra-communal healing and the importance of Curanderismo. This ultimately sheds light on why Curanderismo circulates within the Chicana/o archive to the extent that it does.

**CHAPTER ONE-AMERICA’S FIRST MEDICAL BOOK: HEALING ON THE EDGES OF CONQUEST**

I begin with a reading of a sixteenth century herbal. I focus on this “long forgotten manuscript’s” production, rhetorical staging, removal and return to the Americas to emphasize returns. Returns are important. The very structure of returns serves as a leitmotif

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throughout this project, as a way of conceptualizing trauma within the Chicana/o archive, because authors continuously return to a Mesoamerican past and to the horrors of colonization. The structure of returns is a central component to understanding the concept of the “belated.” Belated marks the moment when a traumatic experience first becomes discernable to the subject. Therefore, this chapter returns to the Codice de la Cruz Badiano to show that it is at once both evidence of colonial trauma and “border gnosis” given its lexical capacity to articulate epistemic trauma even as it uniquely responds to the moment of coloniality. In this chapter I demonstrate that the Codex offers two strategies for dealing with the trauma of colonization. It details a medical practice that will become the foundation for the hybrid practice known as Curanderismo (which remains the Chicana/o therapeutic pathway of choice for pursuing healing) and it presents the practice of writing as a strategy for subversive healing that addresses the trauma of epistemic wounding.

Chapter Two-Curative Figures: Curanderas, Nepantleras, and Communal Healing

This chapter draws from Anzaldúa logic to theorize the tools and paradigms circulating within Chicana/o literature, which offer an alternative way of understanding healing. Curanderismo provides a pathway that disrupts the circumscribed racially non-cognizant interpretive practices associated with psychoanalysis and biomedicine, which have attempted to make sense of trauma in the past. This section situates the perpetual troping of the Curandera figure emphasizing her repeated representation across genres within the Chicana/o literary archive and argues that writers use this figure to create a larger aesthetic of trauma and healing. As such, I argue that the Curandera figure remains a key concept figure worth wrestling with because she saturates the Chicana/o archive and binds pre-Movement,
Movement, and post-Movement writing. As Chicana feminist Cherríe Morraga notes it is important to take note of the metaphoric figures that emerge around us. She asserts:

Metaphor[s] comes to us organically. It feels most often that metaphors choose us rather than the other way around. Our manda as writers is to listen to them, follow the road they take us on and see what stories, what visions, emerge from their usage and how they apply to our social conditions.19

Thus, in this chapter, I take up Rudolfo Anaya’s Bless Me, Ultima (1972), and examine his use of the Curandera figure alongside a close reading of Gloria Anzaldúa’s poem titled, “Healing Wounds.” By focusing on several emblematic moments within these narratives, this chapter sets out to read thematic consistencies across texts which foreground culturally specific conceptualizations of healing. In addition, this chapter considers where Rudolfo Anaya’s representation of Ultima falls short and how Chicana feminists deploy the figure of the Curandera in the academy in radical non-heterosexist ways.

CHAPTER THREE - UNFINISHED BUSINESS: THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSIBILITY OF TRAUMA IN AMÉRICO PAREDES’ GEORGE WASHINGTON GÓMEZ

Following my exploration of the significance of Curanderas throughout the archive I provide a detailed discussion of Américo Paredes’ novel, George Washington Gómez. In this chapter I discuss the formal properties of this text and produce a close reading that maps out the ways Paredes evokes traumatic narrative force. This novel points to the institutional quality of white hegemony, heterosexism, economic inequality and gendered denigration experienced by and perpetuated within communities of Mexican descent. Here, I hope to identify what the precipitating events engendering “border trauma” as narrated by Américo

Paredes are, and grapple with what this specific representation of suffering, endurance, and loss entails.

**CHAPTER FOUR—SUTURANDO HERIDAS: LA HERIDA ABIERTA AND NETWORKS OF TRAUMA AND HEALING**

Chapter four undertakes an exploration of the critical paradigm of *la herida abierta* and its function within Anzaldúan logic alongside its impact on the writing of Manuel Muñoz. As a key figure within the Chicano/o corpus, Anzaldúa introduced the metaphorical concept of *la herida abierta* or borderland in her classic work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), in an effort to characterize and conceptually mediate the open wounds of the subaltern through an intersectional analysis of power. In her written work she made the sociogenic experiences of exclusion, violence, marginalization, and the wound(s) of the Chicana/o subject legible. Anzaldúa disrupted silences within Chicano/a communities by overtly investigating complicated constellations of power, and how they relate to land, language, Chicana/o identity, exclusion, and domination. My aim here is to show how Muñoz’s short stories, “Campo,” and “Faith Healer of Olive Avenue,” are in conversation with Anzaldúa by discussing how the paradigm of *la herida abierta* operates within Muñoz’s writing. In this chapter I show how Muñoz maps queer masculinity and sexuality on to race much like John Rechy in order to chart out some of the major shifts within the Chicana/o literary archive and point to the ways the Chicana/o literary corpus comments on the globalizing changes affecting Chicana/o communities in the U.S. and abroad. Here, I ask: If trauma stories teach us about trauma and narrative, what do the short stories in Muñoz’s collections reveal?

**CHAPTER FIVE—POST-MOVEMENT THRESHOLDS: HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION**
This chapter takes seriously Anzaldúa’s assertion that, “All of [her] work, including fiction and poetry are healing trabajos.”\textsuperscript{20} Hence, I return to Gloria Anzaldúa’s fountainhead work for a close reading of her poem, “La Curandera.” I analyze the development of the post-Movement contemporary canon in order to show that writers such as Helena Maria Viramontes and ire’ne lara silva are further developing Chicana feminist writing by aestheticizing a larger planetary call to action which agitates for a refashioning of the tenets of Curanderismo in order to heal from ongoing trauma through non-oppositional transformation.\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{21} According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “This form of remembering is painful because it involves remembering not just what colonization was about but what being dehumanized meant for our cultural practices. Both healing and transformation become crucial strategies in any approach which asks a community to remember what they may have decided unconsciously or consciously to forget. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith, \textit{Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples} (New York: Zed Books, 1999), 146.
CHAPTER ONE

AMERICA’S FIRST MEDICAL BOOK: HEALING ON THE EDGES OF CONQUEST

Curanderismo treats problems that are recognized by Western medicine as well as many that aren’t.¹

-- Elena Avila, Woman who Glows in the Dark

On Thursday August 1, 2002, Pope John Paul II delivered a monumental three-hour mass in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a national shrine located in the Valley of Guadalupe in Mexico City. During this mass, the Pope canonized Juan Diego as the first Indian saint of the Americas, and celebrated him as the “catalyst in the conversion of millions of Indians to Christianity.”² This mass also formally recognized two Zapotec men named Juan Bautista and Jacinto de los Angeles who died three hundred and two years earlier at the hands of an angry mob. Bautista and de los Angeles were beatified and lauded for defending the church from acts of indigenous idolatry on September 16, 1700, a turbulent time during the evangelization of the Americas. In the summer of 2002, their official recognition as martyrs by the Catholic Church took place. They earned sainthood for their diligent “vigilance over the flock,” their fidelity to the church, and for their attempt to quell and renounce a clandestine communal return to the practice of pagan ritual and worship. Susan

¹ Elena Avila, Woman Who Glows in the Dark: A Curandera Reveals Traditional Aztec Secrets of Physical and Spiritual Health (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1999), 44.
Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer point to this historical moment as, “a complicated politics of conversion” whereby European beliefs were once again imposed on the Aztec population.  

Given the history of Catholicism in Mexico, a mass led by Pope John Paul II on Mexican soil was considered a momentous occasion. All the same, various reversals set this particular worship assembly apart as fundamentally significant and unique. The most incendiary reversal being the one whereby the Vatican as represented through the body of Pope John Paul II was ritually cleansed by indigenous women through the very rites, and mechanisms that were and continue to be recognized as acts of pagan idolatry by the Catholic Church. In a syncreticized mass, that openly crossed the rigid protocol imposed by the Roman Catholic Church two indigenous women performatively re-wrote and discursively reversed the liturgy on that day. In public view and in front of the members of the Catholic hierarchy in attendance, two traditional healers, referred to as Curanderas-Teresa de Jesús, and María Magdalena presided over the Holy See. The women, dressed in vibrant traditional textiles conducted a limpia, or ritual cleansing which is a central facet in the practice of Curanderismo on the Vicar of Christ as he sat slumped over in a golden throne at the head of the sanctuary (See Figure 1).

Curanderas are traditional folk healers. Understood as “artisans of the soul,” they are highly regarded for their ability to heal physical, psychological and spiritual illnesses that escape the purview of Western physicians. That the Holy See required a limpia, a spiritual cleansing procedure with the use of specific herbs for the prevention, diagnosis, and/or relief of diseases caused by loss, by a psychic blow, or to decontaminate impurities associated with

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4 Curanderismo is traditional Mexican folk healing.
soul loss is provocative. At the time, it inherently implied and symbolically denoted the Pope’s illness, and because the Pope was the Catholic Church, the illness was in the 200-year-old institution. Therefore, symbolically that day the sickness expunged was the Catholic Church’s belief in the inferiority of the indigenous people, the role of Catholicism in the conquest and “civilizing” of Tenochtitlan, and the attempt to destroy Aztec culture and knowledge through genocide and what Boaventura de Sousa Santos refers to as epistemicide.

This complex semiotic ritual healing act in public view undermines the Manichean logic of Christianity imposed by the Catholic Church. Curanderismo is rooted in a long-standing set of healing practices centered on preserving and safe-guarding the holistic balance and well-being of individuals and communities. Taking into account the trauma of coloniality, the uneven role of the Church in Latin America, and the enduring power of Curanderismo, this moment of spiritual purification of the Pope as Church with the use of incense and medicinal herbs signaled the ongoing need to ad(dress) and suture the wound(s) of colonization and trauma of coloniality. By “trauma of coloniality,” I am referring to both the colonization of knowledge that took place at the time of conquest and its ongoing effects. This cleansing of the Pope in plain sight was at best an “unusual” disturbance to the set frameworks authorized by the Catholic Church regarding the process of conferring sainthood, and at worst a full-fledged affront to the Church by unorthodox rituals in a formal mass.

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6 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Epistemologias del Sur (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 2010).
7 The ceremony was unusual incorporating elements of indigenous culture, pre-Catholic religious worship, and readings in seven Indigenous languages. For discussion describing that mass see, Susan Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer, “The New Worlds and the Old:
Either way, this moment offers an opportunity to think through the pressing need to return to the traumatic encounters characterizing modernity in the Americas and to look closely at the numerous contrasting and contradictory logics and mechanisms operating during the time of Old World colonialism, which undeniably and belatedly make themselves known today. It is the trauma of coloniality, and more importantly, the enduring ways people have responded and continue to respond to this trauma in the name of healing that I set out to explore here.

Figure 1 (Pope John Paul August 1, 2002) Photographer: Jose Nuñez

IM(PLANT)ING KNOWLEDGE: THE TRAUMA OF COLONIALITY

The concept of the “belated” so often used to describe the way in which symptoms of trauma interrupt and disrupt the psyche of a person in present time long after the initial


experience of wounding, is a key concept driving contemporary studies of trauma. It is also a concept at the heart of this chapter. Simply put, “belatedness” characterized the sanctification of Juan Diego, Juan Bautista and Jacinto de Los Angeles. So too, did it characterize the limpia ritual the Curanderas performed on the Pope. The limpia took place but it did so, hundreds of years after colonization began, and therefore the cleansing ritual was behind schedule. When one thinks about trauma in the context of colonialism one is then able to make sense of the geopolitical and epistemological configuration of knowledge that worked as part of the colonial project, as well as those decolonial configurations that pushed against the colonial project itself and continue to resist those legacies. Thinking of trauma in the context of colonialism acknowledges the impact colonization had on Mesoamericans, and elucidates practices and concepts that have held over. Such practices open up the possibility to re-conceptualize the trauma of that moment anew, and are inherited systems of thought that aid us in thinking about how to heal from the trauma of that moment in ways not understood by the U.S. academic mainstream.

In their attention to the Holocaust experience during the 1990’s Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Dominick LaCapra, and Geoffrey Hartman—the constitutive figures within literary trauma studies—produced a theoretical formulation of trauma during a moment dubbed the “ethical turn” in literary criticism. This turn has been extremely productive for creating theoretical insights concerning the trauma of the Holocaust, but it is not without its limits. Because of its narrow origins, their theoretical formulation of trauma fails to fully account for distinct experiences and varied representations of psychological wounding. While figures such as Stef Craps, Ranjanna Khanna, Victoria Burrows, and Jane Kilby amongst others, have since rightly turned our attention to traumatic experiences which
fall outside of the standard European frame typically employed by the founding members of trauma studies, it is as if Chicana/o literary studies continues to lag behind. This intervention offers an investigation of how Chicana/o letters frame and understand trauma. Given that Mexican and Mexican American culture has refused to engage in discussions of trauma as traditionally understood, but instead, continuously engage Curanderismo in discussions of trauma and healing. For this reason, this study attempts to understand Curanderismo as an alternative framework in which to conceptualize trauma and healing.

I begin this study by linking the focus of literary trauma studies and Chicana/o literary studies, through a close examination of another event that accompanied The Pope’s visit to Mexico. More specifically, this chapter reads closely the context of publication, the representational strategies, and the removal and return to the Americas, of a sixteenth century Mesoamerican herbal treatise titled, *Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorum Herbis* also referred to as El Codice de la Cruz Badiano (See Figure 2). This genre of book classified as an herbal, functioned to catalogue different types of plants and their medicinal uses. In addition to surveying botanical knowledge, the *Codex* details variations on the types of ritual cleansings or *limpias* the Pope underwent. The *Codex*’s removal from the continent and subsequent return after four hundred years serves as a cultural index and allegory for understanding the emergence of a specific form of temporality endemic to trauma studies, namely, the belated. Additionally, attention to modernity/coloniality, the history of the text, its content, and its hybridized registers, announce a different kind of structure. A structure useful for understanding healing through its use of Nahuatl, a form of Uto-Aztecan language spoken in Mexico, its use of Aztec glyphs, and in and through its topicality, Curanderismo. In short, the *Codex* embodies and preserves a blueprint of healing that would evolve into one of the most
important knowledge systems to counteract and strategize anew the burdens of old world colonialism.

According to Cathy Caruth, whose seminal books, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative and History* (1996) announce the field of literary trauma studies, the belated refers to the temporal mode in which trauma is experienced. Caruth posits, “Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain kind of paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event occurs as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy paradoxically may

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take the form of belatedness.” In this way, belatedness comes to register trauma’s temporality. Mesoamericans, defined as out of history, or entering history late, under the rubric of colonialism come to signal the belatedness of colonial trauma. Applied to the Codex, belatedness accurately connotes the arrival of alphabetic script and European knowledge, as well as the recent attempts to repair the cultural damage exacted by the Catholic Church and Iberian crown during colonization. This belatedness, Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes, functions as, “the forgetfulness of coloniality” whereby Eurocentric paradigms are constructed as superior and scientifically rational, and modern science radically denies the epistemic contributions emerging out of the colonies. It is not that my reading of the Codex will displace Caruth’s theorization by offering its own alternative operational definitions of trauma, rather, this text marks a specific point of departure for situating the relationship between coloniality, representations of trauma, and the role of Curanderismo in contemporary Chicana/o letters. The very structure of belated returns is crucial for understanding trauma as experienced and represented by writers of Mexican origin.

**ALTER/NATIVE SYSTEMS OF HEALING**

Interestingly, at the same time that trauma studies as a theoretical enterprise emerged heralding the need for “cross-cultural examinations of trauma,” Mexico prepared for a visit from Pope John Paul II in 1990. As mentioned, this visit was significant because the Mexican community awaited the beatification of Cuahtlatoatzin, the Aztec man that saw an apparition

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of the Virgin Mary, who would later become America’s first indigenous Saint. The worldwide Catholic community looked on as the “traveling pope” toured Mexico drawing millions of people eager to witness his presence and listen to his addresses on Mexican soil.

In accordance with most of the apostolic journeys throughout his papacy, the Pope presided over Eucharistic celebrations, delivered liturgies, and conducted holy masses throughout the country. During this visit, the Pope also returned a unique sixteenth-century pictorial document, *Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorum Herbis*, (1552) as an ostensible token of his fondness for the Mexican people. This *Codex* marked the most recent contribution to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología de México (INAH).

In actuality, UNESCO’s Committee for the Restitution of Cultural Goods mediated the historic return of this particular artifact (among others). In fact, this reticently returned item, which ostensibly appeared as a freely given cultural keepsake came back to the Americas after years of international brokering. This highly charged political moment between the Vatican and the Americas reflects the church’s complex role in Latin America since the sixteenth century, but specifically its role in Latin American politics throughout the

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13 As a result of a 123 member ratified 1970 UNESCO convention in Paris France, newly independent countries had an official intergovernmental forum in which to recover cultural objects defined in Article 1 in the convention most broadly as: property which, on religious or secular grounds is specifically designated as being of importance for archeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science. Because many culturally valuable objects belonging to newly independent states were found in museums or private collections of their former colonizing state this intergovernmental body sets out to facilitate the return of cultural objects to their states of origin and to curtail the theft, illicit trade, or illegal exportation of stolen objects around the world. This body operates on the assumption that the safeguarding of cultural objects advances knowledge and intellectual cooperation and that the promotion of cultural and national (tangible and intangible) heritage conservation promotes peace and development.
1980’s. Such an act of repatriation, of colonial cultural goods, of Mesoamerican origin, reveals the trauma of the colonial period on at least four levels: 1) it gestures towards the stripping away of Aztec knowledge practices as part of the complete destruction of the Aztec empire; 2) it harkens back to the imposition of alphabetic script as an evolutionary goal; 3) it demonstrates the establishment of racial and ethnic hierarchies to organize all aspects of cultural life; 4) its extraction from its original cultural context denotes the uneven epistemic transactions between the colonizer and the colonized. Ergo, attending to the Codex today, offers an opportunity to engage with epistemology, power, and racism to better understand diverse conceptualizations of trauma and healing in the Americas. Indeed, the Codex as an herbal is much more than a simple botanical book. Herbals are,

rich repositories of learning, lore, history, and exploration…they present a close-up view of the manners and beliefs of the classical and medieval worlds and provide us with a picture of the transition from the era of empiricism and superstition to the era of science.\textsuperscript{14}

The return of the Codex serves as a cultural allegory that both underscores the ways science, writing, race, and medicine operate in tandem with colonial projects, and aids in theoretically elaborating cultural trauma in the present and uncovering the role of race in producing and inscribing what Ramón Grosfoguel refers to as “epistemic inferiority” throughout the colonization of the Americas.\textsuperscript{15}


Contemporary scholarly interest in the Codex cuts across disciplinary and national divides. While historians, anthropologists and life scientists within the history of ideas,\textsuperscript{16} anthropology,\textsuperscript{17} and the life sciences\textsuperscript{18} have each distinctly taken up the Codex as an object of study I examine it here as an enactment of colonial trauma. The church through the “trauma of colonialism,” a term I used to refer to the epistemic dimensions and effects of the colonial project, procured Mesoamerican texts from the sixteenth century, such as this 1552 manuscript. What follows is a textual analysis of the Codex, which includes an examination of its content, its return to the Americas and an exploration of the way the text responds to the conditions of its own production. By placing this document, with its competing histories and cultural markers, into recent debates surrounding trauma I aim to critically reflect on the relationship between trauma and coloniality by bringing postcolonial criticism and trauma studies into intimate conversation. This conversation will shed light on where Curanderismo figures in the relationship between trauma and healing and the Chicana/o canon, an exploration that must necessarily begin with the onset of colonization in the New World. Curanderismo as a system of thought, extensively detailed in the Codex, remains one of the most significant ways trauma and healing is conceptualized not only by Mesoamerican communities at the time of colonization but even today in Chicana/o letters. Here, I am referring to the colonization via empirical observation, survey, and manipulation of the physical landscape of the New World, but also to the intentional and unforseen colonial impact such processes had on indigenous inscriptions and systems of thought post-contact.

The *Codex de la Cruz Badiano* is one of the most significant cultural objects the Holy See returned to Mexico. The *Codex*, written in 1552 at the College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, Mexico, documents New World plants and their medicinal properties. The Aztec Herbal,\(^{19}\) described by Henry E. Sigerist as a “purely Mexican product” with “no traces of European influence” is in fact, a hybrid New World document.\(^{20}\) Before its uncovering in the Vatican Library in 1929 by Professor Charles U. Clark, it belonged to Cardinal Francisco Barberini (the nephew of Pope Urban VII) and remained housed in the Vatican’s apostolic library as part of the Francisco Barberini collection of manuscripts and painted books.\(^{21}\)

Bound in red velvet, it contains a total of 184 brilliantly colored plant drawings, that span 89 sheets of linen paper.\(^{22}\) Interestingly, the authors modeled it after the standard Western European herbal—which details plants and their medicinal uses— but the *Codex* breaks from traditional classical herbals in various ways. This particular book represents a telling expression of cultural trauma because it is the first and only book of its kind, produced little more than three decades after the fall of the Aztec empire and is the oldest known American herbal.

\(^{19}\) According to Minta Collins illustrative Herbals belong to ancient literary traditions and a typical herbal treatise, “names the plant, gives a list of synonyms, describes its characteristics, its distribution and its habitat, reports what earlier authors have said about it, its medical properties, how it should be gathered and prepared, lists recipes for medicines made from it, or lists the cures it is used for and gives any contraindications.” Minta Collins, *Medieval Herbals: The Illustrative Traditions* (London: The British Library, 2000), 25.

\(^{20}\) Martinus de la Cruz, and Juannes Badianus. *The Badianus Manuscript* Trans. Emily Walcott Emmart (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), ix.

\(^{21}\) Dr. Charles U. Clark was researching early Latin American texts for the Smithsonian institute in the Vatican archives.

Because of its undeniable hybrid structure Dr. Carlos Alfonso Viesca Treviño, who studies Ancient Mexican medicine, refers to the Codex as, “un herbario sui géneris.” Unlike traditional herbals, this hybrid document contains both alphabetic and glyphic inscriptions on its illustrative plates (See Figure 2). While the painting materials used for the colored plant depictions were prepared with organic food colorants from the New World, the paper comprising the manuscript is European in origin, and marked by sixteenth century Italian watermarks located on each page. Labeled primarily in Nahuatl the plant illustrations provide a Latin translation of the plant name when possible. This artifact details New World localized botanical and pharmacological insights expressed and modeled in European form. In addition to containing botanical information, it also contains recipes of medicines composed of non-vegetal substances such as ash, deer antler, and hair and teeth taken from human cadavers. The Codex in and through its hybridity also reflects the fraught traumatogenic cultural tensions characteristic of the Americas immediately following European contact in the sixteenth century.

24 A glyph is a readable graphic mark or notational unit in pictographic writing systems. See Elizabeth H. Boone, and Gary Urton, eds. Their Way of Writing: Scripts, Signs, and Pictographies in Pre-Columbian America (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 2011).
26 Native American Uto-Aztecan language in use at the time of the Spanish conquest of Mexico.
27 It is worth noting that most herbals are written entirely in Latin, or Medieval German, French, or English.
The *Codex de La Cruz Badiano* provides an unprecedented cross-cultural opportunity for scholars to reorient the traditional Eurocentric focus within trauma studies and rearticulate the necessity of employing a postcolonial hermeneutic attentive to the ways in which race and power shaped the colonial landscapes of the Americas. Understanding the epistemological and discursive power exercised by the Spanish as a historical locus of wounding expands the traditional purview of trauma into fields whose scholars rarely invoke the term “trauma” to explain the experiences of native communities.\(^{29}\)

**TRANS(PLANTED): THE GEOPOLITICS OF LOCATION & RELOCATION**

Before 1990, it remained under the ownership of Catholic clergy since its removal from the New World in the sixteenth century. To read its departure during the colonial era, as

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yet another expression of injury pushes against tendencies within trauma studies to locate wounding within an individual, and in and through psychologically laded, or depoliticized valences. Put another way, to understand the cultural and communal dimensions of trauma as inextricably bound to power, and knowledge production is key to understanding the continued influence of colonization not just in individuals but wholesale communities. In fact, reading the removal of this cultural object resists reducing this type of injury to a singular set of intra-psychic dynamics occurring within a specific subject. This reading locates trauma as the cultural impact the Codex’s appropriation, removal, and simultaneous dismissal had on the intellectual and cultural sovereignty of the Aztec people.

Unlike traditional understandings of trauma, which attempt to link affective responses within an individual to a singular discrete event, Mesoamerican colonial experiences understood solely at the individual level does not suffice. I understand this manuscript’s departure from the New World as an instantiation of wounding itself because the removal of this text from the American homeland was bound to a larger project of epistemicide that came on the heels of apocalyptic destruction. This moment was marked by the rapid destruction of the Aztec empire, the physical violence employed by Iberians towards the indigenous at the time of conquest, and the imposition of alphabetic script as an epistemological evolutionary goal. I would even argue that this text could have stood as a hedge, if not mediation, against the cultural subjugation of the Mesoamerican worldview. Both the purpose and use value of this text such as this could have mitigated the large-scale societal loss and devastation that took place during the same phase of European settlement of the New World out of which the Codex emerged.
In fact, a Royal Cedula intended for the Viceroy of New Spain, from Pedro Moya de Contreras, dated May 28, 1586 details that Spanish Royalty were aware of the devastating treatment of the Indians noting that:

encomenderos treat them worse than slaves; some are bought and sold as slaves, some killed by beatings; women have died or been injured from heavy burdens; other women and their children are made to work and have to sleep in the field, some women giving birth and rearing children there, where they are subjected to poisonous insects. Many hang themselves or starve themselves to death, or take poisonous herbs. There are some women who kill their children at birth to save them from the burdens of work.  

The removal of this document and holding stock of this text outside of Mexico signifies a loss because this cultural object and its virtues extend far beyond the botanical information it imparts. All the same, the Codex offers a starting point for exploring trauma and healing in the Americas and Chicana/o literature because it reflects the relationship and the interplay between wounding, coloniality, and the palliative decolonial strategies circulating throughout the Americas.

**Colonial Trauma Belated Ad(dress) of the Wound**

Knowledge production has always been key to colonial projects. Western discourses brought to the Americas positioned Mesoamerican systems of knowledge as outside the realms of science, philosophy and therefore civilization. In the case of the Americas, a central aspect of the colonial project was the rapid imposition of alphabetic writing to replace already existing writing systems present at the time of contact. Iberian colonial elites

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maligned non-alphabetic notational techniques as barbarous. Since the Spanish did not consider their inscriptions, “writing proper”\textsuperscript{32} Iberians labeled Mesoamericans preliterate, primitive, and uncivilized. As a result, the imperial reconfiguration of all aspects of indigenous life, exercised through complex processes of cultural imperialism, initiated after the fall of the Aztec Empire in 1521 were legitimated as part of a civilizing mission. And yet, Mesoamericans wrote.

In \textit{The Darker side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization} (1995), Walter D. Mignolo offers an alternative and more inclusive definition of writing, which facilitates the analysis of the types of script found within the \textit{Codex}. Mignolo’s definition merits lengthy quotation:

Semiotically, a graphic sign is, then, a physical sign made with the purpose of establishing a semiotic interaction. Consequently, a human interaction is a semiotic one if there is a community and a body of common knowledge according to which (a) a person can produce a graphic sign with the purpose of conveying a message (to somebody else or to him-or herself); (b) a person perceives the graphic sign and interprets it as a sign produced for the purpose of conveying a message; and (c) that person attributes a given meaning to the graphic sign.\textsuperscript{33}

Such an understanding of writing refutes the basis on which colonial elites were able to legitimate relations of domination; Mignolo’s definition of writing fundamentally troubles the stability of colonial discourses surrounding barbarity and civility. Discourses on writing, uncritically inflected with asymmetrical understandings of ethnicity and race reenact a particular type of colonial epistemic trauma because they foreclose serious appraisals of alternative systems of writing in the New World, such as mathematical notation, use of

\textsuperscript{32} Spanish missionaries hierarchically ranked civilizations by whether people in given societies were in possession of alphabetic writing.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 78.
hieroglyphs, and/or pictorial glyphs etc.\textsuperscript{34} If we assume Mignolo’s capacious operational definition of writing, then the \textit{Codex}, which employs semasiographic glyphs alongside alphabetic script on many of its plates, is not only a complex text employing multiple discursive modes, but it functions as an interface that reveals the epistemological contours of colonial encounters. What the \textit{Codex} makes legible then, is that two distinct and competing writing systems remained in operation in 1552 in spite of the acute and seismic transformations(s) of Mesoamerican society brought about by European colonization. The \textit{Codex} testifies to the resilience of indigenous systems of knowledge and notational techniques. The \textit{Codex}, which details Curanderismo as it was practiced in the sixteenth century is of interest here, because it is Curanderismo that contemporary Chicana/o writers repeatedly reference as central to communal healing.

In 1536, the viceroy of New Spain, Don Antonio de Mendoza, commissioned this document under colonial patronage as a gift for his son Don Francisco de Mendoza. Martinus de la Cruz its author was an indigenous student, herbalist, and Curandero at \textit{El Colegio Imperial de Santa Cruz} or, the Imperial College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco, Mexico. Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza and Bishop Juan Zumárraga established this college as the first school of higher learning in the New World. Juan Badiano, a Latinist, also at the College of Santa Cruz translated the text into Latin. While enrolled at the Imperial College of Santa Cruz, Friars instructed both men in Latin, logic, arithmetic, philosophy, and music and taught them to translate their native language Nahuatl, into alphabetic script.\textsuperscript{35} Education served a disciplinary function at the College. Natives were instructed as part of a larger missionary

\textsuperscript{35} Martinus de la Cruz, and Juannes Badianus, \textit{The Badianus Manuscript} Trans. Emily Walcott Emmart (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), 18.
effort of conversion and the College of Santa Cruz was known to have housed significant incunabula, “…first editions of books in native tongues as well as European and classical authors like Aristotle, Pliny, Cicero, Flavius Josephus, Saint Agustin, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Erasmus, and Vives.”  

36 Pliny’s *Natural History* (AD 77-99), a comprehensive encyclopedia of natural life, more than likely served as the vehicle by which both authors learned the technical and stylistic conventions within the herbal literary tradition.

37 Agnes Robertson Armer notes that, “…writings of the classical authors…dominated European botany until the sixteenth century, [when] other influences began to make themselves felt.”

38 However, the authors of the *Codex* hybridized what they learned from these exemplars.

Herbals generally concern themselves with the medicinal properties of plants and provide information on how to apply such properties to treat illnesses. Like most herbals, the written, and illustrated content of the *Codex* foregrounds healing. In fact, many Amerindians in this era like the Curandero author of the *Codex* practiced aboriginal arts of healing. The *Codex* contains sixteenth-century simples, 39 or treatments used by the Aztecs to treat various afflictions. For example, remedies include but are not limited to treatments for scabies, glaucoma, abscessed gums, burns, and mental stupor, as well as remedies for recent

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parturition, for inducing lactation, and for treating dysentery. The treatments consistently reflect the centrality of humoral medicine and the doctrine of signatures as guiding elements informing many of the curative practices listed in this medical manual. Like many of the medical practices emerging out of the sixteenth century, the therapeutic practices, salves and simples described in this herbal have been for many centuries widely discredited by Western science as having minimal curative value. In addition, from a botanical standpoint, the kinds of plant illustrations the herbal catalogues are considered “stereotypical” and crude, as opposed to naturalist and scientific demonstrating the geopolitical hierarchies which structure how we evaluate systems of knowledge throughout the planet. In spite of de la Cruz and Badiano’s ability to catalogue botanical knowledge, this knowledge circulated within a colonial epistemic matrix of power. Nevertheless, the Codex maintains cultural curative value in that it successfully foregrounds healing agents of the sixteenth century (many of which are still in use today by healers of Mexican origin) by providing a glimpse at New World plants and at the cultural agents who composed the Codex and creatively archived Aztec healing practices during the colonial period.

40 Humoral medicine operates on the assumption that distinct body fluids determine one’s health.
41 The doctrine of signatures indicates that plants were marked, or signed in ways that clearly indicate their respective uses. In other words, external qualities of plants reveal their medicinal purposes, (i.e., hematological illnesses would be treated with crimson colored plants according to this doctrine).
43 The use of diagrammatic imagery to index the diversity of plant life is not new. Interestingly it was not until the seventeenth century that botanical art began reflecting plants in an aesthetic as distinct from depicting flowers for their medicinal uses. See David Attenborough, Amazing Rare things: The Art of Natural History in the Age of Discovery (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 110.
Interestingly, at the level of script, Martinus de la Cruz borrowed from two distinct “coevolutionary” systems of writing in his compendium of New World materia medica. If colonization can be understood as an act of collective trauma, then de la Cruz’s text can be read as an early American instance of what Mignolo labels “border gnosis.” By collective trauma here I am specifically referring to Frantz Fanon’s understanding of it as the shared experience of “systematic negation” and “furious determination to deny…other [people] all attributes of humanity.” “Border gnosis” is an unforeseen response to collective trauma. According to Mignolo “border gnosis” is an “intervention of undisciplined forms of knowledge from a subaltern perspective, conceived from the exterior borders of the modern/colonial world system.” In the case of this Aztec herbal, this instance was symptomatically configured in direct response to the trauma sustained through Spanish colonization. Acts of border gnosis are “moments in which the imaginary of the modern world system cracks.” By infusing subaltern knowledge into the construction of his New World herbal, de la Cruz also encoded information about the contested nature of writing during the sixteenth century. Put another way, if the evolutionary goal of Iberian and European elites was the use of alphabetic script, then its use, alongside glyphs in the case of the Codex at the very least compels scholars to be attentive to how technologies of writing and print began to shift in ambivalent if not contestatory ways, as a response to European contact.

45 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of The Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 250.
47 Ibid., 23.
Significantly, an herbal does not only reveal pharmacological knowledge. Each re-occurring glyph graphically encoded throughout this herbal is a cultural scar, which bears witness to the epistemic dimensions of colonial trauma. Here, the glyph maintains a multi-modal function. The glyph demarcates the differences between two distinct systems of inscription and simultaneously inscribes Aztec notational techniques. The goal of the Spanish was to instruct the natives in a new way of writing, a new faith, and a new social order based on Spanish social civilizations (policía humana) and a Christian, “settled manner” of life.”

However, King Charles of Spain ordered the Natives to assimilate and not acculturate these new Iberian ideals. As early as 1519 Hernan Cortez notes that he made it clear to the Indians that he encountered that he would “admonish them and bring them to the knowledge of [the] Holy Catholic Faith, that they might become vassals of [the] Majesty and serve and obey him.”

The metaphor of the scar lends itself to understanding the use of non-alphabetic writing in the Codex, because scars occur as a response to wounding and trauma, and as part of healing processes. In addition, all scaring is composed of the material it has replaced but is fundamentally a new “expression.”

Trauma in this sense is cultural hegemony operating at the level of epistemology during Mesoamerican colonization. In the case of the indigenous cultural body, which produced the Codex, each glyph evokes and signals meaning that, while indecipherable to Western readers who were untrained to de-code Aztec writing, were legible to diverse native audiences.

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48 King Charles I of Spain Royal Cedula to Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of New Spain, August 21st 1538 Hans B. Krauss Collection of Royal Manuscripts Library of Congress Manuscript Division Washington DC 20540.
50 Scars are described as part of the processes of wound healing and in relation to the amount of collagen “expressed” after a trauma; some types of scars block off the regeneration of new tissue altogether.
However, this text was unavailable to indigenous audiences nor is there any evidence to suggest that this written work circulated for public view. Because it was a commissioned work for a non-Native private reader the mixing of inscriptions, codes, and ciphers across distinct systems of writing suggest that the author(s) were making some kind of point. What cannot be overlooked is the illegibility of certain aspects of the text to the very audience who commissioned the work. Scholars have only recently begun to caution against the dismissal of indigenous glyphs as invariably associated with a primitive state of civilization. In fact, de la Cruz’s Codex not only reveals graphic syncretism, but also illustrates what it means to write from a “fractured locus of enunciation” to negotiate between Amerindian and Spanish discourse. A complex negotiation between discourses continues today. It is a dynamic that Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa would centuries later theorize as an inner war or struggle, she called, “un choque”—which is how she described what it means to be, “cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems.” The inscriptive practices employed by Martinus de la Cruz reflect the complex colonial matrix out of which the Codex emerged. Writing, during the colonial period itself became a “…battlefield, a complex system of interactions and transformations both of writing systems and of sign carriers.” For this reason, the Codex signals a tactical disruption of the conventions of the European herbal tradition and/or as an early subversive intervention.

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that at once assimilates the form and conventions of the herbal tradition but simultaneously disrupts and de-forms the authority of colonial discourse.\textsuperscript{55}

The re-occurring glyphs used throughout the Codex are symbols that operate dynamically. They signify contextual relationships. While most botanical books deploy rhetorical strategies of de-contextualization, describing flora in ways that sever plants from their ecological and cultural context(s), the re-occurring glyphs within the Codex do the opposite. The authors insist upon featuring plants and their contexts alongside the alphabetic Latin and Nahuatl translations. For instance, many of the Aztec symbols inscribed within the Codex represent serpents, ants, stones, and water, and their relationship (both conceptual and ecological) to specific New World plants archived within the herbal. For example, the Aztec water symbol (See Figure 3) was included as part of the root system of a plant. Moreover, the authors depicted illustrations of Azcapanyxhua Tlacolpahtli with ants around its root system since it typically grows out of or around anthills (See Figure 4).

Contextual information of this type could have been useful for Europeans who were acquiring vast amounts of American land and were curious about surveying its resources as well as for the erudite European scholar seeking information on Aztec botany and healing. However, the glyphs were largely incomprehensible to non-Native readers and therefore figuratively rooted in an alter/native aesthetic and epistemology. What made them illegible/indecipherable to non-Native readers was that indigenous pictographs were unknown to European readers of that era.

What is clear is that de la Cruz set out to artistically catalogue both plants, and “the types of soil in which the respective plants are rooted”\textsuperscript{56} and in so doing, broke generic

conventions, conventions that prescribed de-contextualization as the norm. In the renderings of the Nonchton and the Couaxcoctl plant, for example, each plant depiction uses symbols of ants, serpents, and stones on and around the root system of the plant (See Figure 5 and Figure 6). Such Aztec symbols record context specific information and infuse cultural meanings significant to the Amerindian population into the figuration of the text.

![Nonchton plant](image)

Figure 5 Nonchton plant

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If the botanical importance of an herbal rests on its capacity to convey a detailed illustration of the structure of any given plant that it catalogues, then de la Cruz clearly had something else in mind. His illustrations lack copious botanical information and are instead strikingly ornate, painted in bold bright colors. The herbal’s illustrations, while beautiful and bold, fall short of a European ideal. A colonial elite commissioned a compilation of objective plant renderings, and what the authors produced was an aesthetically pleasing text deemed more decorative than scientific to Western audiences. While this herbal registers various medicinal salves, therapeutic practices, and herbal simples, de la Cruz’s illustrations do not fully disclose minutiae of the plant structure itself in his artistic renderings of New World flora and fauna instead de la Cruz encodes unique discrete particularities in his paintings of the plant specimen’s geographic and cultural context.
In effect, what de la Cruz produces, is a multivalent hybrid text\(^{58}\) that responds to the psychic and epistemic, as well as sociogenic wounds sustained by the Aztec community because of the colonial processes underway during the making of the manuscript. Such a move functions as a defensive attempt to de-stabilize the authority of colonial discourse.\(^{59}\) The glyphs function as a motif that interrupts the text. The notational dynamism and indecipherability to European readers of the glyph itself disrupts the illustrations and alphabetic descriptions employed throughout the herbal. In this vein, the semantic hybridity at work functions in subversive disregard to the conventions of traditional herbals even as it preserves indigenous forms of inscription and indigenous thought. As Homi Bhabha notes, “Hybridity…reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that the other ‘denied’ knowledge’s enter upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority.”\(^{60}\)

The use of glyphs, illegible to most Europeans of that time, not only reveals the ecological relationship between plants and their contextual landscapes, but also refers to the traumatic particularities of surviving colonization wherein indigenous forms of writing were actively being subordinated, translated, and/or replaced by alphabetic script. In other words, the disruption made by the glyphs at the level of the text gestures toward the traumatic intersection between Western and Mesoamerican forms of writing, dynamics taking place in the historical context of this text’s production. The preservation of these written motifs were a cultural defense mechanism against the erasure of Amerindian forms of writing occurring as a result of the colonizing process and its efforts to destroy indigenous culture.

\(^{59}\) Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 162.
As part of the colonizing process, Europeans quickly procured systematic compilations of American plant life. Imperialism, colonialism and botany converge to produce the trauma of colonization experienced throughout the Americas immediately after European contact. As an artistically structured instrument of communication, the Codex compels discussion of the colonial function of botany within European imperial operatives of power, particularly because many colonials (well into the nineteenth century) commissioned herbals, floral and hortuses of the New World. The appropriation of localized botanical knowledge worked within larger processes of ecological imperialism that set out to dominate and disrupt the natural viable economies adapted to indigenous populations.\(^6\) This disruption was not only of people but also of land, and animals, and all other biological life forms in the New World. The production and subsequent removal of this particular cultural object from the New World illuminates the colonial power’s ability to tap into, organize, and siphon localized knowledge out of the Americas. The multiple relocations and circulation of the Codex – from Tenochtitlan, to Rome, and back to Mexico provides insight into the way local knowledge operated across global coordinates during the colonial period. Much botanical knowledge, of the kind indexed by this commissioned botanical document, became rapidly integrated into larger efforts aimed at commercial productivity in the New World such as the large-scale cultivation of sugar, cotton, tobacco, indigo, coffee, and chocolate, for commercial trans-Atlantic export. In other words, the extraction of American botanical knowledge played a key role in the colonization of the New World’s landscapes and peoples. The Mendoza family, hoping to monopolize trade in herbs between Spain and her colonies

commissioned this document. Strikingly, the *Codex’s* removal from the New World charts and prefigures the route many “exotic” plants would later take following the colonization of the Americas. It is for this reason that the illustrations that make up the *Codex*, though considered crude, could have also perhaps been clever attempts at mitigating Iberian surveyor’s plans to locate, identify, and procure botanical specimens of medical value for large scale commercial gain.

**Recognizing Race: Redressing Colonial Trauma**

Specific details regarding the extraction of the *Codex* from its cultural context are difficult to trace. Even if one were to understand the Vatican’s acquisition of the document as occurring in “good faith,” elites, scientists, and thieves removed thousands of objects, artifacts, and texts from their Mesoamerican during the colonial period. Much like de la Cruz’s insistence on detailing the context in which plants grew, and preserving them through his writing, intergovernmental consensus on issues surrounding the recovery and repatriation of cultural property cohere on a similar assumption—context matters.

In fact, UNESCO’s 1970 “Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property,” asserts that cultural property loses its cultural, historical, and scientific significance when dislocated from its context of origin, including but not limited to, “rare manuscripts and incunabula, old books, documents and publications of special interests (historical, artistic, scientific, literary

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63 It is widely understood that cultural property constitutes one of the basic elements of civilization and national culture, and that its true value can be appreciated only in relation to the fullest possible information regarding its origin, history, and traditional setting.
etc.)” 64 It is for this reason that reactive measures ensure that the recovery and re-integration of cultural property in the collective memory and cultural heritage of a given population can take place. If one were to read trauma then, in the case of the Codex it is in fact intergenerational, communal, and varied and fundamentally bound to the experience of colonialism.

The collective need to re-integrate this cultural object back into its contemporary cultural milieu centuries after its production and removal confirms that this herbal signifies trauma. Cathy Caruth notes that if trauma must be understood as a,

pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. 65

The return of this manuscript marked a moment of intense national pride. Its curative value then, lays not only in the salves, simples, and herbs it catalogues. It is in its function as a significant colonial artifact that has returned and initiated processes of decolonial cultural healing. Its repatriation creates the opportunity for communities of Mexican origin to understand knowledge production of the colonial period. Moreover, it enables communities to re-member traditional knowledge and strategies and thereby unravel Eurocentric claims to universality and Truth.

The return also reflects the belated nature of the human experience of trauma. The reiterative return of trauma is what Caruth refers to as the belatedness of trauma or traumatic

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64 See Article 1 section (h) of Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970.
temporality. Caruth explains that trauma occurs too soon for the psyche to process it during the moment of initial wounding. In this sense, the wounded must confront their traumatic pasts endlessly, living day to day with a sense of skewed temporality. In other words, the return of the manuscript creates numerous opportunities for the Mexican cultural body and national imaginary to process the unforeseen impacts inflicted by Spanish colonization. While the onset of wounding may have commenced in 1519, (moment of European contact, or 1521 fall of Aztec Empire) the trauma “…lives in the present, and in the future, as much as the past that carries with it the original event.” It is for this reason that we come to understand trauma as “not simply one moment in history during which trauma appears prevalent.” Moreover, the Codex’s return illuminates trauma’s nonlinear temporal dimension. The reiterative return of trauma, which Caruth gestured towards, implies that we must take seriously, the mandate posited by Frantz Fanon, and return, “for years to come” to “bind up” the “tinctures of decay” left in our lands and spirits by imperialism.

Still, this particular negotiation of trauma, this return to the moment of wounding, as a step towards healing the cultural body must enable us to grapple with one of the most detrimental aspects of coloniality in the Americas: the role of race in the New World. Trauma studies elide ethno-racial axes and their role in colonial wounding and their function in the aftermath of trauma. If, as Anibel Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein posit, ethnoraciality became the machinery of coloniality and, “race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society’s

66 Ibid.
68 Ibid., 75.
69 Ibid.
70 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of Earth (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 249.
structure of power,” then it is unsurprising that the authors of the *Codex* racially mark themselves in the prefatory dedication and the postscript of the text.\(^{71}\) In effect, they literally configure “race” in and through the programmed relation between the dedication and the postscript that frame the body of the document. The performative aspects of this text—the dedication, post script, and use of Aztec symbols heretofore mentioned, reveal the ethnoracial dynamics which contour Martinus de la Cruz and Juan Badiano’s experiences and the overall construction of the text.

For example, on the first flyleaf of the *Codex* a note to the reader from de la Cruz describes the herbal as a “little book of Indian medicinal herbs composed by a certain Indian.”\(^{72}\) What follows is a skillful dedication to Don Francisco de Mendoza that merits lengthy citation:

> I can give great thanks, indeed to my Maecenas, but very little repayment…Indeed I suspect that you ask so earnestly for this little book of herbs and medicaments for no other reason than to commend us Indians, even though unworthy, to His Holy Caesarian Catholic Royal Majesty. Would that we Indians could make a book worthy in the King’s sight, for this certainly most unworthy to come before the sight of such great majesty. But you will recollect we poor unhappy Indians are inferior to all mortals, and for that reason our poverty and insignificance implanted in us by nature merit your indulgence. Now accordingly, I beg that your name, most noble sire, from the hand of your humble servant, in the spirit in which it was offered, or, what will surprise me, that you cast it out where it deserves. Farewell.\(^{73}\)

The elaborate dedication on plate 1 and 2 of the manuscript contains an allusion to the classical tradition in its reference to Maecenas, patron of the arts. This dedication bears the stamp of racialization in as much as it displays the conventional posturing germane to the

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\(^{72}\) Martinus de la Cruz, and Juannes Badianus, *The Badianus Manuscript* Trans. Emily Walcott Emmart (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), 205.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., 205.
mores within a system of royal patronage that requires the deification of the patron. It was common for subjects within Spain’s royal kingdom to publically bind oneself to the service of the crown with great zeal. While epistolary dedications to a deity, to the Virgin Mary, to royalty, to church dignitaries, or to nobility are commonplace in texts from the sixteenth-century what compels attention here, is that de la Cruz goes beyond recording the commerce between patron and author. He racially marks himself in this dedication, as an “inferior Indian” and in doing so de la Cruz artfully indexes the asymmetrical ethno-racial relations of domination,74 that were already firmly established in the New World little more than three decades after European contact. Moreover, his reference to the small dimensions of this “little” book works as a subtle double entendre: the document itself measures 15.2 x 20.6 x 2cm in size, and he offers this work up in an attempt to further rhetorically inscribe his supplicatory role in relation to his patron and to the Iberian Crown. We are reminded by Frantz Fanon that, “in the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man’s value.”75 Fanon matters centrally one of the earliest New World thinkers to theorize the psycho-affective injuries of the native intellect under colonial rule. His theorizations of the francophone Caribbean maintain an acute commitment to contemplating the impact of Eurocentrism on racialized experience in the New World.

74 Fanon posits that, “Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values. It is enough for the colonialist to affirm that those values have disappeared from or still better never existed in the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethics: he represents not only the absence of values but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values.” See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 41.

75 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 43.
The moment in the dedication when de la Cruz implores indulgence is enticingly suggestive. Addressing his Iberian patron he begins “But you will recollect” underscoring the fact that it his European patron who will emphasize his ethno-racial identity and make note of his inferiority. The yoking balance of this particular sentence is the multiple connotations entailed by the word “implanted” within it. The term “implanted” (a fitting term when considering botany) suggests the grafting or affixing of a foreign object or prosthetic element into a body or host. An interesting reference in that what was being transmitted and implanted into the cultural body of the Aztecs at the time the Codex was produced were racist doctrines and an entirely brand new social order based on Eurocentric domination. More specifically, what was being “implanted” were the doctrines propagating Iberian supremacy and indigenous inferiority, ideologies, which were constitutive of colonialty in the New World. Leaving readers to question whether or not de la Cruz’s dedication is deliberate artifice gesturing towards the relations of power between the colonizer and the colonized or candor behind a veil of esteem for his patron.

In a similar corollary, in the afterward to the “fair-minded reader,” Juan Badiano notes the following:

I beg again and again, most excellent reader, that you consider favorably the work I have put into this translation, such as it is, of this little book of herbs. For my part I would prefer to have my labor perish rather than undergo your most exacting judgment. Furthermore be sure that I spent some spare hours on this edition, not to show off my talent, which is almost nothing, but only because obedience which I very rightly owe to the priest and superior of this Monastery of St. Jacob, the apostle and most excellent patron of Spaniards, the very reverend Franciscan father, brother Jacob de Grado, who laid this task upon my shoulders. Farewell in Christ the savior. At Tlatilulco in the College of the Holy Cross, on the holy day of Saint Mary Magdalene, in the year 1552 after the restitution of the world. End of the little book of herbs,
which Joannes Badianus an Indian by race, a native Xochimilco, reader at the same college translated into Latin.⁷⁶

In the postscript like in the prefatory opening, Badiano like de la Cruz, racially marks himself for the audience as, “an Indian by race.” He too, signs his postscript with a Latinized name, ostensibly assimilating Eurocentric understandings of race by underscoring his obedience and deference to his patron and to “Christ the savior.” Similar to the dedication, the postscript adheres to the formal standards of submission, both accommodating and posturing to the demands of the dominant racial ideology. Along with indexing his ethno-racial identity, Badiano here strategically underscores not his craftsmanship and intellect but his obedience.⁷⁷ This epistle to the reader is rhetorically important because a compendium such as this was the first of its kind and marks a new type of knowledge production, and this shows that the authors were aware of the discourses of civility and barbarism and the colonial mechanisms out of which this translation emerged.

Whether or not de la Cruz, and Badiano truly embraced Euro-supremacy remains open for investigation. Their interventions within the herbal tradition function as counter-discourse. The performative aspects of the text underscore the fact that race and racial identity were constitutive of coloniality and the trauma of colonialism in the case of the Americas has a racial dimension. Colonial trauma necessarily interrupts modes of representation, as read through the dynamism of the glyph itself and through the rhetorical strategies of racialization, which frame the Codex. Such counter discursive disruptions

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⁷⁶ Martinus de la Cruz and Juanes Badianus, *The Badianus Manuscript* Trans. Emily Walcott Emmart. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1940), 325.

⁷⁷ Fanon’s research on the communal impact of colonialism in the late twentieth century reminds us that, “In order to assimilate and to experience the oppressor’s culture, the native has had to leave certain intellectual possessions in pawn” see Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 49.
include subversions of the conventions of writing, the subversions at the level of generic forms, and the inception and inscription of a new kind of race-thinking, which would centuries later, become systematic, authoritative, and scientific.\textsuperscript{78}

The enduring quality of native thought and symbols, parallels the enduring quality of colonial trauma. Understanding colonization as trauma in the Americas in and through a reading of the \textit{Codex} reveals the ways early American texts construct Mesoamerica as a site of articulation of subaltern knowledge.\textsuperscript{79} Restitution of subaltern knowledge in the case of the \textit{Codex} functions as a corollary to the cultural trauma sustained by coloniality. Examining representational practices which both undermine as much as they affirm Eurocentric standards reveals the ambivalent nature of hybrid discourse from the colonial period. The \textit{Codex} reflects a particular cultural situation where the intersections of knowledge and the function of ethno-raciality in the colonial setting are clear. Texts emerging out of this intersection bespeak trauma, and while many cultural artifacts are still outside of their sites of origin, the late twentieth century and early twenty first century have ushered in moments of restitution and communal healing.

Like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, who often return to the moment of European contact, and to the Mesoamerican and pre-Columbian practices that endure, this chapter opened by returning to a con\textit{(text)} of colonization. In what follows, I argue that an understanding of Curanderismo is needed in order to engage many of the major works within the Mexican American literary canon, and is particularly vital for understanding the post-

\textsuperscript{78} See the role of psychology and anthropology as colonial disciplines and the subsequent development of eugenics, phrenology and other forms of scientific racism throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth century.

Movement Chicana/o canon. This chapter is but one provocation, one attempt aimed at augmenting the field of trauma studies in a way that takes into account the communal epistemological and ethno-racial aspects of colonial trauma since European contact. The following chapters will explore how and in what ways Chicana/o writers represent trauma and healing via Curanderismo in their written works.
CHAPTER TWO

CURATIVE FIGURES: CURANDERAS, NEPANTLERAS, AND COMMUNAL HEALING

Western man needs me—a brown mestiza woman—whether he likes it or not. He also needs my way of knowing.¹

--Irene Lara, Healing Sueños for Academia

Coloniality did not destroy the healing arts used in Mesoamerica before European contact. Traditional pre-colonial healing arts (such as the ones indexed by the Codex²) that draw from Aztec ethno-botanical knowledge and cosmology remain in operation in Mexico, throughout the U.S., and in various spaces where members of the Mexican diaspora reside. The art of New World healing never left the Mexican people in spite of the Codex’s extraction from the continent. In fact, La Historia Universal de Las Cosas de Nueva España (1590), written by Spanish Friar Bernardino de Sahagún describes Aztec-healing arts in much the same way as the Codex, because the knowledge of Curanderismo showcased by de la Cruz and Badiano years earlier, was neither primarily, nor solely archived via printed alphabetic script.³ Indeed, Curanderismo survived the colonization of the Americas vis a vis collective cultural practice. In fact, Eliseo “Cheo” Torres and Timothy L. Sawyer provide an account of the contemporary role of Curanderismo in the U.S. Southwest describing how the story of the Codex circulated via oral history amongst people of Mexican descent for

² I will reference the Codice de la Cruz Badiano as, Codex.
³ This sixteenth century collection also knows as the Florentine Codex consists of twelve books written in Spanish and Nahuatl concerning life in New Spain.
hundreds of years throughout the U.S. Southwest. Unsurprisingly, then, as a situated knowledge whose material practice endures, Curandersimo underwrites much of the Mexican American literary tradition.

Varieties of media continue to index the literal circulation of Curanderismo throughout time and space. Sahagún’s text, like the Codex, and subsequent written works similar to it authored during the colonial period detail Aztec derived healing practices of significant cultural value, some of which remain in use by Mexicans in diaspora today. This dynamic of reaching into knowledge bases that existed in a pre-colonial past in the name of cultural preservation is only possible because people act as living repositories of cultural knowledge. As creative cultural agents, they preserve knowledge including alternative understandings of the world in and through embodied ritual practices and enactments, and written representations. For example, the contemporary cultural act amongst people of Mexican origin of wearing a safety pin during pregnancy is rooted in a practice from centuries prior. Wearing a piece of iron, or iron key around the body to protect the health of an unborn child during a lunar eclipse was practiced as early as the sixteenth century and is even referenced in Sahagún’s, Florentine Codex. Similarly, women in Mexico continue to use the herb known in Nahuatl as Cihuapatli, to stimulate uterine contractions, and the Codex

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5 See *Florilegio Medicinal* a Jesuit 18th century book written in 1711 on traditional medicinal healing practices amongst Indians missionized in the present day U.S. Southwest.

references the use of this herb for precisely that reason.\(^7\) That this knowledge was preserved, pushes against Brett Hendrickson’s assertion that we are unable to establish a link between Curanderismo and Aztec practices. The destruction of the Aztec world and establishment of the New World did however change the healing arts of Curanderismo through complex processes of hybridization and mestizaje\(^8\)--one of the many consequences of the colonial project’s rapid restructuring and mutation of every aspect of Mesoamerican life. Here, I wish to deploy the term *mestizaje* cautiously, and in a manner that acknowledges the productive mixture of identities in the Americas in a way that is sensitive to the fact that such processes of mixture resulted from a long layered colonial history of invasion, violence, and subjugation.\(^9\) This redefinition of culture and rearticulation of cultural practices over time continues today. Even now, our understanding and relationship to Curanderismo and Curanderas rapidly continues to shift just as worldwide economic relations guided by neoliberalism reconfigure culture in new ways, ever increasingly in the service of free trade.

Curanderismo no matter how broadly defined, has artistic and academic value as cultural property. Here, I am drawing from Latin American theorist, George Yudice’s understanding of “culture-as-resource,” whereby, he defines culture as including but not limited to ritual practice by which groups reproduce themselves symbolically, and or the distinctive ways by which some groups (usually defined as subaltern) distinguish themselves


\(^9\) Ibid., 25.
from dominant groups. Yudice argues that, “culture has expanded in an unprecedented way into the political and economic at the same time that conventional notions of culture largely have been emptied out.” As such, it is easy to see how Curanderismo’s trace-its discursive marks-now permeate the ivory tower to the same degree that Mexican American artistic traditions (including but not limited to novelistic and poetic discourse) invoke Curanderismo. In the U.S. Academy the discourse and cultural significance of Curanderismo has helped to generate and inform Chicana feminist theory. A body of thought that emerged in the 1990’s marked by a deliberate return and reliance on Aztec history and symbology, and led by key figures such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Alarcón, Cherríe Moraga, and Emma Pérez. Chicana feminist theory’s impact radically extended the Chicana/o corpus beyond the parameters put into place by the Chicana/o Nationalist Movement.

Curanderismo is more than a minority health care framework used by peoples of Mexican origin throughout the Americas, it is also a health care practice that shapes the concrete lived realities of many Chicanas/os and informs our understanding of Chicana/o contemporary creative and critical texts. In each case, both in healing and in terms of contemporary discourse, an acute attentiveness toward and investment in unconventionally unmasking the way power foments and affects one’s intersectional experiences of the world animates its practice. The impulse to mediate and cross binary rigid divides and find hybrid ways to re-imagine wellness, characterizes the representational strategies and analytic frames within Chicana/o literary studies. In other words, in its commitment to radical emancipatory communal change, Chicana feminism as a critical discourse maintains constitutive inter-

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11 Ibid., 9.
textual ideological overlap with the discourse of Curanderismo. This chapter explores the intersection of these discourses, tracing the ways in which they dovetail to forge paths towards holistic healing at this moment of late capital. Turning to Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Healing Wounds,” the book and film adaptation of Rudolfo Anaya’s Bless Me, Ultima, and representations of actual Curanderas in print, this chapter illustrates the ways in which the key concept trope of the Curandera figures centrally in these points of intersection.

I do not intend to give an all encompassing definition of Curanderismo—any attempt to do so would be reductionary at best. Broadly understood, Curanderismo is a health care practice used for the treatment of a variety of physical, psychological, and spiritual ailments. Interestingly, Chicana feminist scholars also draw from the knowledge and practice of Curanderismo in their production of art and theory and invest in theoretical processes that literary scholar Theresa Delgadillo refers to as Spiritual Mestizaje. The Chicana feminist theoretical framework and process of Spiritual Mestizaje is described by Delgadillo as:

the transformative renewal of one’s relationship to the sacred through a radical and sustained multimodal and self-reflexive critique of oppression in all its manifestations and a creative and engaged participation in shaping life that honors the sacred.  

Rooted in critical theorist Gloria Anzaldúa’s post-Borderlands work, this holistic framework, “embraces the materiality of the body, the presence of the intellect and psyche, and the grace of the spirit.” I depart from Delgadillo only to assert that this impulse is evident in Anzaldúa’s original 1987 Borderlands, before the advent of Chicana feminist written works full-scale development throughout the 1990’s. This is precisely the point where

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13 Ibid., 24.
Curanderismo and Chicana feminist theory intersect. Chicana feminist theory understands the holistic constitutive co-presence of the body, mind, and spirit in balanced unison. This axiom is a reformulation and a preservation of Curanderismo via, Chicana/o narratives, Chicana/o theory, and the long-historical re-institution of the actual practice of Curanderismo outside of Mexico. This overlap warrants an investigation because Chicana feminists are recovering, re-centering, and radicalizing the figure of the Curandera as a way to address the shared wounds of colonialism that endure. They redeploy cultural traditions and cultural practices to fashion ways of challenging the social diseases of classism, sexism, homophobia, and nationalism by drawing heavily from Curanderismo. Curanderismo serves as a palliative whole body recourse to those who set out to account for the often overlooked traces of violence and the trauma of colonialism, particularly for those who understand that some of these traces surface anachronically as contemporary wounds. According to George Hartley, Curanderismo and its restorative decolonial posture is “a mode of practical consciousness that offered indigenous peoples (including mestizos) a concrete yet discreet means of resisting the colonizing impact of the Spanish Conquest and with it the initial moment of modernity-coloniality.” The survival of Curanderismo then, points to the vitality of a people, who have historically had to create, imagine, and fashion numerous ways to oppose colonization and to self-heal.

Hence, what follows focuses squarely on how Curanderismo provides a framework for healing and dealing with colonality-including its circulation and representation in the Chicana/o literary canon, as well as its transmutation in the critical tradition of Chicana literary studies vis a vis Chicana feminist theory. By looking at how and why writers

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represent Curanderas in the early twentieth century, I will show that contemporary Chicana/o literature is irrefutably, bound up and genealogically linked with the cultural conservation and representation of the discourse of Curanderismo. In fact, the influence of the language and the tenets of Curanderismo, and its ideological underpinnings as a hybrid New World decolonial healing practice result in the continual troping of the Curandera figure throughout the Mexican American literary archive.

THE POWER OF LA CURANDERA & THE CENSORSHIP OF CHICANA/O STUDIES

Curanderas are significant because they are the central mediators within the practice of Curanderismo. The Curandera’s body serves as a living bridge. The term applied to recognized practitioners functioning within the healing system of Curanderismo, the Curandera or Curandero “represents a healer who is part of a historically and culturally important system of health care.” These healers serve as central figures within contemporary Mexican American communal networks of healing; they are embodied mediums in which knowledge of the healing arts themselves are stored and made operative. As such, Curanderas permeate Chicana/o literature as key concept figures. They serve as re-occurring archetypal tropes that point to a longstanding native intellectual history that has endured the passage of time and the effects of multiple colonial projects. Through various channels of conveyance, Curanderismo transmits culturally significant medicinal knowledge, and for the most part operates outside of the panoptic gaze of biomedicine proper. Recently,

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16 While healers can identify as male or female, I will refer to the feminine form for the remainder of this chapter.
there have been movements in psychology,\textsuperscript{19} ethno-medicine, and holistic medicine that seek to recalibrate understandings of health and wellness to promote optimal human functioning from alternative perspectives, and these shifts have elicited studies surrounding Mexican American folk healing across numerous disciplines.\textsuperscript{20} Because appropriative medical practices rely increasingly on alternative frameworks of health and wellness, Curanderismo, like other forms of ethno-medical or ethno-botanical insight (like acupuncture, allopathic medicine, Chinese medicine, etc.), has started to have a more global appeal.

In spite of the promise of growing interest in alternative modes of healing, there are threats to the primary disciplines where knowledge of Curanderismo in general and about Curanderas in particular are located. For instance, very recently, Texas senator, Dan Patrick began promoting legislative bill SB1128,\textsuperscript{21} following Arizona’s SB 2281- a 2010 legislative effort designed to ban Ethnic Studies, including the study of Chicana/o or Raza literature in public schools. The appropriation and/or suppression of these insights sheds light on the reasons and stakes behind the recent censor of Ethnic Studies and makes them glaringly clear. Often projects led by women of color that critically engage what it means to holistically heal one’s self and/or community by any means required, (both in texts and in the activist and or academic world outside of texts) are seen as radical acts of defiance and read as an affront to

\textsuperscript{19} See the development of the field of Positive Psychology and see burgeoning field of Naturopathic Medicine.

\textsuperscript{20} For a discussion of how the historic presence of Curanderismo dovetails with the ecologically driven interests in homeopathy and organic food supplies see Theresa Delgadillo, \textit{Spiritual Mestizaje: Religion, Gender, Race, and Nation in Contemporary Chicana Narrative} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 17.

\textsuperscript{21} This bill is part of larger efforts to ban ethnic studies and operates on the premise that Latino history is not Texas or U.S. history.
the status quo. This is precisely the role of a Curandera. She invites policing because her function is to holistically impart healing by uncovering the ill person’s (his)story and in doing so recovering the sick person’s soul. This is why Curandera Elena Avila co-articulates her understanding of wounding, illness, and healing with the power of revealing the ill person’s hidden narrative. In fact Avila notes, “Every illness has its story, and the job of the healer is to uncover that story.” Ergo, Curanderas must be vigilant warriors, aware of those threatened by their power to heal. Notwithstanding, women of color have undertaken the work of critically theorizing socio-political and academic interventions in the name of social change and in the name of healing, albeit from the margins in spite of the all too familiar pushback from the status quo. Curanderas remind us that, Western philosophical binary oppositions wound us by harmfully shaping the way we understand the world through fixed modes of social division and by establishing that the rational mind is the sole origin of knowledge. In other words, there have always been Curanderas working within communities of color in a variety of ways and these figures signal a threat so much so, that legislators set out to eclipse their stories, contributions, and frameworks because of their power, agency, and capacity to heal.

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22 Numerous women-of-color incorporate the project of holistic healing as a guiding tenet in their frameworks including but not limited to Toni Morrison, Louise Erdrich, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrí Morage and Audre Lorde. Lorde notes in 1988 A Burst of Light: Essays, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation and that is an act of political warfare.”


25 Ibid., 434.

26 It is also worth noting that the University of New Mexico has for the last fifteen years offered a Curanderismo course called, “Traditional Medicine without Borders: Curanderismo in the Southwest & Mexico.”
The mechanisms by which the production of knowledge become implicated with power structures today while distinct, are as complex as they were at the time a book such as the *Codex* was commissioned, produced and removed from the Americas. I argue that it is because Ethnic Studies in general, and Chicana/o Studies in particular remain un-apologetically consonant with the promotion of Chicana feminism’s decolonial political ideals, and set out to culturally produce knowledge on their own negotiated communal terms they have been challenged since their institutional inception during the 1968 Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). Ethnic studies, has again come under institutional attack and as a result Chicana feminist discourse which functions as a counter-hegemonic emancipatory strategy for Chicana/o Latina/os in the U.S. is also under attack. And yet, we can ask what does it mean to censor texts that foreground decolonial healing?

Over and against the view of censorship, and in an effort to push against these oppressive politics, a closer investigation of Curanderismo at precisely this historical fissure is in order. This is of great urgency, particularly because such legislative drives to sever youth\(^{28}\) from access to critical textual representations such as those texts that engage Curanderismo, which mirror and inform their lived realities is crucial. Chicana/o communities are in need of decolonial healing and Curanderismo continues to serve as a culturally appropriate remedy.\(^{29}\) In fact, thinkers across disciplines invoke Curanderas and

\(^{28}\) See article, “The Historian as Curandera” where historian, Aurora Levins Morales points out that, “Another way that colonial powers seek to disrupt a sense of historical identity in the colonized is by taking over the transmission of culture to the young.” Levins Morales, Aurora, “The Historian as Curandera,” JSRI Working Paper #40, The Julian Samora Research Institute, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, 1997.

\(^{29}\) Catriona Ruenda Esquibel defines decolonization as, “… the ongoing process to end oppression and servitude and to restore respect for indigenous knowledge and ways of life. Decolonization requires both spiritual healing and decolonial resistance. To heal one must acknowledge that Indigenous and African traditions…were never completely suppressed by
engage in the study of their function precisely because of their capacity to transform the work of, and intervene in, the lives of people in need of healing. Such moves shape the ways cultural agents see and understand themselves, and in turn influence their own capacity to shape the world. Legislative moves legalizing censorship are happening at the very moment that the institutional delinking of cultural value from cultural origin is taking place across the globe. This phenomenon is taking place alongside the digital reproduction of art forms, the classification of intangible cultural heritage, and the appropriation of cultural forms of property. Consequently, this begs the question: for who can knowledge of non-canonical writing, and the study of ethnic history in general and knowledge of Curanderismo more specifically have cultural property value, and/or instrumental value for that matter?

Chicana/o written works not only foreground clearly the colonial, postcolonial, postindustrial, and global incumbencies of Mexico and Mexican Americans as being marked definitively by discourses of race, exploitation, and power but they represent and preserve the vital ways the communities out of which these cultural productions continue to emerge produce decolonial processes in direct response to oppressive relations of power. Simply put, Mexican Americans not only gesture towards and respond to the traumatic wounds of coloniality and its multiple ongoing vestiges in their writings, more importantly they also


30 See Aurora Levins Morales, see George Hartley see Irene Silva, see Marcos Pizarro

31 “Culture has become a grab bag into which all kinds of technological innovations are deposited as a means to protect the ownership claims of transnational corporations.” See George Yudice, The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 218.
create hybridized ways to theorize, respond to, and holistically heal from the material and epistemological realities of contemporary life.\textsuperscript{32} Curanderismo in its most recent manifestation— in the world outside of the text, and throughout Chicana/o contemporary discourse functions as one of the many strategies, which “…attempts to bridge the contradictions of our experiences.”\textsuperscript{33} Beyond simply a type of folk medicine or religious practice, Curanderismo is a powerful and in some cases incendiary framework, because it is part of a decolonial synergistic mode of healing and more importantly is central to Chicana/o written works and rooted in practices that deliberately\textsuperscript{34} reach back into non-European aboriginal knowledge systems that operated before the time of European contact. This return back in time in the name of regenerative recovery— requires a caveat. This deliberate return to a time before subjugation is a geopolitical imperative in terms of knowledge production and identity formation. It continues to also hold practical instrumental (healing) value in the lives of Chicanas/as and Latina/os in the U.S. because people of Mexican origin continue to employ Curanderismo as a way to heal.\textsuperscript{35} 

\textsuperscript{32} Chicana Feminists, U.S. Black Feminists, and Third World Womanist scholars consistently gesture to the centrality of theories that emerge out of the “margins” and/or out of the concrete lived experiences of women of color. See Barbara Christian’s 1987 article “The Race for Theory”; See Paula M.L. Moya’s (2002) Learning From Experience Minority Identities: Multi-Cultural Struggles; See Cherrie Moraga notion of “Theory in the Flesh” from This Bridge Called my Back: Writing by Radical Women of Color (1981) 

\textsuperscript{33} Anzaldúa, Gloria, and Cherrie Moraga, eds. This Bridge Called My Back: Writing By Radical Women of Color (Water Town: Persephone Press, 1981), 23. 

\textsuperscript{34} Stacey Alba D. Skar notes that Chicana/o literature maintains and is committed to “…un deseo de incorporar la mitología precolombiana de Mesoamérica a su imaginario colectivo” [a desire to incorporate Precolombian Mesoamerican mythology into its collective imaginary] in Voces Híbridas: La Literatura de Chicanas y Latinas en Estados Unidos (Santiago: Ril Editores, 2001), 40. 

\textsuperscript{35} According to estimates, “Traditional healing practices among Mexican and Mexican Americans may be as a high as 50-75% in some parts of the United States” See Maritza Montiel Tafur, Terry K. Crowe and Eliserio Torres, “A Review of Curanderismo and Healing Practices among Mexican and Mexican Americans” Occupational Therapy International
disarticulates the cultural production of knowledge about healing, trauma, and health from foundationalist beliefs circulating within Western Philosophy. This matters at the level of ideas because it pushes against the very notion that the only ideas about medicine and healing claims to Truth are those authorized by biomedicine or those that assume the colonial modern patriarchal separation between the flesh and the spirit.\footnote{Elisa Flaco and Irene Lara, \textit{Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives} (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 11.}

\textbf{(RE)MEMBERING CURANDERISMO: REMEDYING BODIES OF KNOWLEDGE}

Self-healing by traditional ritual practice is not unique to peoples of Mexican origin. In fact, folk medicine is as varied and complex as the geographic, linguistic, racial, and cultural contours of the Americas. Curanderismo can be defined as a set of \textquoteleft\textquoteleft\text{folk medical beliefs, rituals, and practices that seem to address the psychological, spiritual and social needs of traditional people…with its own, theoretical, diagnostic, and therapeutic aspects.}''\footnote{Arenas, Silverio, Herbert Cross, and William Willard. \textit{“Curanderos and Mental Health Professionals: A Comparative Study on Perceptions of Psychopathology,” Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences} 2. No. 4 (December 1980): 407-20.}

As a system of thought, it pushes against the impulses of Western biomedicine in its commitment to examine the spiritual and psychological needs of all patients. Consequently, it is feasible to see the linkages between Curanderismo as practiced by communal health practitioners, within Chicana/o Latino communities and Curanderismo as an ideological phenomenon fueling Chicana feminist discourse across disciplines within the Academy and in political movements throughout the Americas. In either case, there is a clear counter hegemonic impulse that is rooted in a commitment to unmask relations of power that often

go unseen, coupled with a concomitant drive to heal from the wounds contaminating a body, or cultural bodies through culturally significant hybridized knowledge centered on embodied\textsuperscript{38} ritual, self-disclosure,\textsuperscript{39} self-reflection, and self-critique.

Their capacity to navigate the margins, their unique critical consciousness, and their distinct locus of enunciation inform Curanderas and Chicana feminists alike. In \textit{Biomedicine and Alternative Healing Systems in America: Issues of Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender}, Hans A. Baer describes the hegemonic status of biomedicine within the United States. Similar to the ways power functioned to establish the superiority of alphabetic script at the time of European contact, (as discussed in chapter one) and how writing was a central determinant of civilization, so too, have medicinal systems come to be hierarchically organized. Baer notes that,

medical pluralism involves hierarchical relations among medical subsystems; these hierarchical relations tend to mirror the political, economic, and social relationships and divisions of the larger society; and in the American hierarchical medical system, only one subsystem, biomedicine, has come to enjoy preeminence and, with the support of social elites, attempts to exert dominance over subordinate subsystems.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{38} Here I am referring to embodied in regards to the physical locus of the of the curandera’s body as the location of experience and as the storage site where the knowledge of Curanderismo is housed.

\textsuperscript{39} Anzaldúan scholars, AnaLouise Keating and Gloria González-López note that, “…this self-disclosure and self-reflection are not (ever!) ends in themselves; they are, rather, part of a larger, recursive process.” Keating, AnaLouise, and Gloria González-López, eds. \textit{Bridging: How Gloria Anzaldúa's Life and Work Transformed Our Own.} (Austin: University Texas Press, 2011), 2.

Often overlooked by the U.S. mainstream, Curanderismo operates on the lower rungs of this very hierarchical system of value that organizes social life. And yet, Baer notes that “…despite the biomedical establishment’s attempts to restrict the practice of alternative healers, a number of heterodox medical systems continue to thrive in both rural and urban areas in the United States.”41 Because access to health care is and remains un-even, Curanderismo has functioned as an organic surrogate and recalcitrant means of healing within historically underserved communities. Research conducted in West Texas indicates that up to 75% of Mexican Americans incorporate traditional medicine into their healthcare practices.42

As access to healthcare narrows even further still, and the costs of medical treatments increase, many Americans subscribe to alternative medicinal systems to seek healing for their ailing bodies. In theorizing the body as a medium, and its role in relation to the art of healing across cultures, Bernadette Wegenstein notes that, “Western culture since the sixteenth century has developed methods for opening the body and examining it for symptoms of disease or other conditions to be eradicated.”43 This is the primary approach that biomedicine takes in locating the sources of illness, diagnosing illness, and developing therapeutic treatment options used for healing the human body. Wegenstein goes on to note that, “Medicinal practices in some cultures, by contrast take other approaches based on fundamentally different assumptions about the nature of the body in relation to illness.”44 It is precisely out of these, anti-foundationalist, “fundamentally different assumptions” that

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41 Ibid., 179.
44 Ibid., 23.
Curanderismo emerges as a systematized healing practice that follows an alternative approach to understanding illness and disease, trauma and healing. Curanderismo’s framework for understanding both illness and wellness is one that breaks with the tenets underpinning Western biomedicine, particularly those foundational beliefs which rest on the quasi-divine treatment of and unquestionable acceptance of Cartesian Dualism. In fact, an entirely different set of philosophical, spiritual, and physiological axioms govern Curanderismo. This practice of care does not look for sources of illness solely within internal bodily pathology nor does it consider the spiritual dimension a hermetically sealed off irrelevant or independent realm from the material. Curanderos believe that it is not enough to heal the body; one must heal the soul. For instance, Curandera Elena Avila notes, “A soul that is off balance is said to be suffering…an illness as real as a physical illness. All aspects of the self suffer, and one will experience diseases that affect one’s body, mind, emotions, spirits, soul, family community and nature.” As such, it attempts to recalibrate balances interstitially between various domains characterizing the human experience, the spirit being one. For this reason, Curanderas, like Chicana feminists, mediate and theorize the in-between-spaces theoretically, artistically, and as agents who have holistic healing in mind.

Contemporary Chicana/o literature is highly invested in the figure of the Curandera precisely because she produces non-written forms of historical discourse, via ritual healing, dance, prayer, and story telling and because she continues to circulate within Chicana/o letters. Chicana/o feminism considers written discourse only one out of many processes or

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46 Ibid.
47 From this point on, I will emphasize the feminine form Curanderas, to focus on female gendered healers.
strategies of representation. Through various embodied performative movements
Curanderas articulate, produce, and convey alternative understandings of healing and like
Chicana feminists in the Academy they operate by employing a holistic approach to healing
across various mediums and divides such as the U.S./Mexico border geographically and by
treating body, mind, and soul holistically. In addition, they serve as intergenerational
transmitters of cultural knowledge and as communally centered bastions of knowledge they
pass on understandings of traditional curative healing.

In Chicano Folklore: A Handbook, María Herrera-Sobek describes three of the most
common ailments traditionally treated by Curanderas within Mexican and Mexican diasporic
communities and points to the diverse cultural traditions informing this practice of healing.
She writes,

Both folk ailments and folk remedies are derived from indigenous,
Spanish and Mexican as well as African traditions. Folk ailments such as
susto [emotional shock], empacho [a type of indigestion], aire [cold
draft] all have their respective folk remedies to cure them.

One of the core practices used to cure within Curanderismo is the limpia or barrida (as noted
in chapter one). The barrida, which is performed by a Curandera is a ritualized process,
comprised by a set of choreographed embodied actions. The barrida (which in English
designates a sweeping motion) is a physically performed ritual, which commonly takes place
within Curanderismo (See Figures 1, 2, & 3). As with most treatments offered by

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48 “The writing process is but one example or representation of the ‘path of conociemintio’
in its broadest sense of spiritual, holistic transformation” See Ricardo F. Vivancos Pérez,
49 See “Proyecto Comprender study” house in UTPA’s Border Studies Archive for digitized
audio recordings of Curandera’s who work on both sides of the U.S./Mexican border.
practitioners of Curanderismo, there is no set fee for services, clients determine what they are willing to offer up as payment. The borrowing of this single tenet within Curanderismo in isolation could radically alter the way health care operates in the U.S., since it remains presently guided by increasingly neoliberal imperatives making healthcare excessively costly when accessible.

Figure 1 Artist: Carmen Lomas Garza

Figure 2 Artist: Carmen Lomas Garza
Curanderas perform barridas for a variety of ailments. Culturally agreed upon norms, determine when and for what duration a Curandera will perform the barrida ritual. Most ethnographic and folkloric studies to date seem to agree that healers perform this ritual on a client on one occasion, or on several occasions throughout the span of several days. In fact, Curanderas more often than not reiterate this process given that healing requires an ongoing process. Ethnographic analysis describes barridas as the following:

The basic ritual at the material level is the barrida or spiritual cleansing...The objects most commonly used in barridas are eggs, lemons, garlic, purple onions, doves, and black chickens along with piedra alumbre (alam), candles, oils perfumes, incense and the stalks or branches of certain herbs.\(^{51}\)

The barrida constitutes a non-alphabetic text. While there is much debate surrounding whether or not it is fruitful to consider kinesthetic movement and ritual performance as a text, this work considers it useful. At its most basic a barrida is a performative ritual act, which

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transmits and reiterates culturally inscribed meanings to activate healing. Practitioners engage in ceremonious illness-specific rituals and prayer to transmit a sense of healing and the restoration of balance. In their discussion of the importance and dire need to uncover alternative native sexualities in the study of the early American period, scholars of Native literary studies, Stephanie Fitzgerald and Hilary E. Wyss remind us that, “What constitutes a text and how we read across textualities in turn redefines history.” In this vein, the barrida is a powerful longstanding treatment in as much as it is a text that inscribes healing and balance.

In their study of Mexican American folklore Trotter and Chavira, describe the repeated brushing motion done from the top of a client’s body and back down again during a barrida ritual below. Here the ritual described exposes not only the constitutive dynamic of interaction between Curandera and client, during a healing ritual but warrants a return to Walter Mignolo’s understanding of what constitutes writing. Trotter and Chavira note:

While being swept, the client may either be standing or lying down and must be concentrating on his maker, or any other benevolent influence or spirit…Patients are swept from their head to their feet, with a curandero making a sweeping or brushing motion with an egg, a lemon, an herb or whatever appropriate object is deemed necessary.

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53 Robert T. Trotter II and Juan Antonio, Curanderismo: Mexican American Folk Healing (Athens:University of Georgia Press, 1997), 82.
This healing ritual acts as a complex semiotic interaction: the Curandera conveys a particular message and the client perceives this message according to a shared body of cultural knowledge.⁵⁴

Mignolo reminds us that, “Sign production and transmission across cultural boundaries and negotiations between oral discourses and different kinds of writing systems opens up new” scholarly horizons.⁵⁵ During all barridas, the Curandera usually recites specific prayers acting as a medium whereby clients perceive the invocation of spiritual beings in the aim of restoring a person’s health. After the ritual, a Curandera typically destroys all objects used to conduct the barrida making the ritual practice difficult to trace. Many Curanderas explain that their healing techniques span across three domains, which are not mutually exclusive, the material, the spiritual, and the mental.⁵⁶ Barridas are culturally circumscribed, however practitioners have the freedom to spatially inscribe meanings in their own ways during the ritual performance itself. This aspect emphasizes the creative power and agency of the Curandera in the practice of Curanderismo.

In order to understand a barrida, one must note that,

While the ritual specialist may change, the framework of the ritual performance remains fairly constant because it is collectively constituted.

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⁵⁴ “Semiotically, a graphic sign is, then, a physical sign made with the purpose of establishing a semiotic interaction. Consequently, a human interaction is a semiotic one if there is a community and a body of common knowledge according to which (a) a person can produce a graphic sign with the purpose of conveying a message (to somebody else or to him-or herself); (b) a person perceives the graphic sign and interprets it as a sign produced for the purpose of conveying a message; and (c) that person attributes a given meaning to the graphic sign.” Walter D. Mignolo, The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 78.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 23.

through socially sanctioned activity sequences. Ritual technologies include shared knowledge that justifies a ritual performance, the types of ritual objects, the patterns of action that are associated with harnessing power, and ritual performance settings.57

Commenting on the importance of serving as a point of confluence, mediation or cross-section amongst knowledge basis and ritual technologies, Mexican Americanist, Eliseo Torres notes the importance within his own community to openly discuss “rituals and herbs and… the reasons why Mexican-American peoples still maintain a strong belief in the remedial use of … plants and rituals.”58 Hence, the rituals and the use of botanical knowledge are networked technologies employed by Curanderas which have been central components characterizing historical and contemporary healing practices of the Americas. Torres goes on to note that:

the tradition of the Mexican folk healer, or curandero, has been an important part of the fabric of life. It pulls together elements of a multiplicity of worlds, of the past, of the present-and perhaps of the future as well, as conventional medicine begins to re-imagine itself as a discipline that encompasses ancient traditions of healing.59

Similarly, Chicanas in the Academy have taken their unique positionalities and locus of enunciation, as a means of theorizing and constructing a radical poetics with its own set of neologisms based off of a re-imagining of the past in a manner that maintains a direct linkage to Curanderismo. For example, Nepantla, is a Nahuatl term that has been re-imagined and

59 Ibid., 1.
deployed within Chicana feminist discourse to describe not only the in-between and blurry experience of the borderlands but also the critical acumen that opens up as a direct result of negotiating the fraught borderland experience. More specifically, in a 2002 short essay which reflects on the critical text, *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, titled “(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces,” Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa takes up the term nepantla, to specifically invoke and describe the function of a bridge and the psychic experience of serving as a living bridge between worlds. She writes:

Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla, a Náhuatl word meaning tierra entre miedo. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. Nepantla es tierra desconocida and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable even alarming feeling.⁶⁰

In Anzaldúaan logic, nepantla refers to the space where activism and spirituality converge to produce new knowledge that seeks cultural healing⁶¹ and decolonization.⁶² Throughout her entire literary oeuvre, Anzaldúa calls Chicana feminists, and other cultural workers in activist

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and academic circles alike, to reclaim the often nebulous and uncomfortable in-between space of nepantla in order to gain insight and understanding of their complex lived experiences and to heal past wounds. Wounds here are understood as the trauma sustained through the violence of colonization, through the ongoing experience of coloniality, through societal oppression, and/or cultural exclusion. A state of nepantla, a technology mediated through the Curandera (who serves as the living bridge) emerges directly out of the fraught processes of the contact zone including but not limited to the violent processes of transformation and assimilation.

I join, George Hartley who understands Anzaldúa in relationship to Curanderismo, by examining her distinct poetics. Anzaldúa engages these ideas in her children’s book titled, *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/ Prietita y la Llorona*. However, elsewhere, in a poem titled “Healing Wounds” published posthumously in 2009, Anzaldúa poignantly testifies to the central role of the Curandera in healing the ongoing wounds inflicted by colonization and the experience of coloniality. It is in this poem where Anzaldúa makes clear the inspirational force behind much of her work. Here, she specifically takes up the discourse and imagery of Curanderismo through the powerful scene of none other than a Curandera enacting a barrida ritual on her own body. Anzaldúa writes:

“Healing Wounds”

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63 See *Voces Híbridas: La Literatura de Chicanas y Latinas en Estados Unidos* (Santiago: Ril Editores, 2001), 42. “En vez de sugerir una trayectoria lineal de transculturación donde se altera la subjetividad según el proceso de deculturación y asimilación, Nepantla se ofrece como una manera de concebir el estado confuso y borroso que caracteriza la conciencia fronteriza capaz de redefinirse constantemente.”
I have been ripped wide open
by a word, a look, a gesture-
from self, kin, and stranger.

My soul jumps out
scurries into hiding
i hobble here and there
seeking solace

trying to coax it back home
but the me that’s home

has become alien without it.

Wailing, i pull my hair
Suck snot back and swallow it

place both hands over the wound
but after all these years

it still bleeds

never realizing that to heal

there must be wounds

to repair there must be damage

for light there must be darkness. 64

The first three lines of the poem are as follows: “I have been ripped wide open by a word, a look, a gesture—from self, kin, and stranger.” The first line of the poem harkens back to a key

paradigm, fundamental to Anzaldúa’s writings-poetry, prose and authohistoria- that of la herida abierta or open wound. This unhealed open wound is presented to readers in Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking 1987 written work titled Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza. Here she vividly imagines the rajadura, or open wound, she theorizes throughout many of her subsequent writings, and notes that, “The U.S.-Mexican Border es una herida abierta where the third world grates against the first and bleeds.”\(^6^5\) The first line then, signals two distinct bodies being torn apart through an act of colonial wounding. The first body is that of the speaker of the poem who testifies to the horror of being “ripped wide open” and is also, simultaneously, an allusion to that of the territorial body, or land mass divided in the geo-physical formation of the U.S./Mexican border established by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. In both cases, the consequences are as spiritual as they are material. In the first two lines of the poem, Anzaldúa gestures towards two coterminous bodies and their wounding, the body of the Chicana and to the ancestral homeland.

The first poetic inscription then, offers up an invitation to read this poem as authohistoria, a term Anzaldúa coined to describe women-of-color interventions into and transformations of Western authobiographical forms of writing.\(^6^6\) Moreover, the second line extends our understanding of the type of violence inflicted on the speaker of the poem, and summons the historical underpinnings of life on the border. The wounding reaches beyond the ethno-national division and territorilization of the borderland. Violence graphs the wound onto the speaker’s physical and spiritual body via lived experience. The “words,” “looks,” and “gestures” that form a tapestry of quotidian life one can assume, are metonymical stand-

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ins for the mechanisms by which normativity disciplines bodies into conformity via discourse, surveillance and profiling, and the violence of physical policing. They signal the social diseases of hetero-normative sexism, racism, classism, xenophobia and nationalism Anzaldúa analyzes throughout all of her written works. The dash punctuating the end of the second line typographically recalls the rajada and breaks the second and third line in half emphasizing the totalizing and thoroughly devastating ways in which wounding occurs at the hands of a “self,” who has internalized her own coloniality and is also brutalized because of her irreconcilable differences. The “looks” and “gestures” are mechanisms, which further exacerbate the wound within what is understood as an ostensibly safe “kin”[ship] network, or cultural network and at the hands of the “Other,” here dubbed, “stranger.” The first three lines are followed by one of the three full stops in the poem indicating the complete and total devastation suffered by the wounded.

The seven lines that follow refer to the spiritual outcome characteristic of this type of wounding, an outcome that often goes unacknowledged un-inscribed, unmarked, and unseen. The brutality of colonization has not only laded her intersectional identity queer and therefore deviant, it has fractured her into disaggregate parts. The speaker of poem is spiritually broken. She writes, “My soul jumps out/scurries into hiding/i hobble here and there/seeking solace/trying to coax it back home/but the me that’s home/has become alien without it.” The alliteration of the “s” sound adds to the serpentine quality of the poem. It is here, where Anzaldúa subtly invokes a state of nepantla. For her, nepantla is the, state of transition between time periods, and the border between cultures.

*Nepantla* is the Nahuatl word for an in between state, that uncertain terrain
one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, and gender position to another…”

Given Anzaldúa’s description of what it means to inhabit “uncertain terrains” the case of susto the speaker clearly experiences here not only leaves her compromised and feeling like an “alien” but has frightened her very soul from her body, a body that was already in crises. Here her word choice explicitly evokes the damaging history of the term “illegal alien” and problematizes not only a long U.S. history of anti-immigrant sentiment but her (mis)recognition as an undocumented citizen by a society who often constructs Chicanas as perpetually “foreign.” No longer a whole integrated subject, the “words” “looks” and “gestures” have gone beyond breaking her skin. The prior wound inflicted by Iberian and Anglo colonization have terrorized and frightened the already injured speaker of the poem. Here Anzaldúa conceptualizes wounding beyond the physiological by reading trauma as the moment the soul and body part ways. Wounding here is compounded and stems from modernity’s foundationalist acceptance of Cartesian Dualism; a philosophical framework that obscures the physical, physiological, cultural, and spiritual contours of her wounds.

Hurting and in turmoil, the wounded attempts to re-integrate her soul, she tries to “coax it back home.” Anzaldúa here has the speaker of the poem unsuccessfully attempt to recover, and fuse her broken self and bridge yet another breach that has been imposed, the divide between body/soul. This disjoining of soul from body, part from whole also subtly inter-textually gestures to the Aztec myth of Coyolxauhqui who is dismembered by her

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brother Huitzilopochtli during their battle at the sacred serpent mountain.\textsuperscript{68} It is however her capacity to recognize that she has “become alien” that enables readers to legibly read the Chicana subject as empowered in spite of her wounding. The speaker of the poem subscribes not to an understanding guided by biomedicine but by Curanderismo. It is Curanderismo’s framework, which recognizes soul loss and therapeutically addresses it with soul retrieval that drives her impulse and commitment to recover what was lost in the name of decolonial healing. Simply, the speaker’s situated knowledge of Curanderismo opens up the possibility for the wounded to re-cover from her wound.

Hartley’s reading of Anzaldúa as the, “Curandera of Conquest” in his analysis of her children’s book \textit{Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita and La Llorona} aptly recognizes her as a decolonial healer. He goes on to note that, “The Chicana’s process of recognizing and purging herself of this internalized alien and constantly self-damning perspective and replacing it with a positive, re-indigenized self-orientation is the primary act of decolonizing that Anzaldúa’s writings make possible.\textsuperscript{69} What emerges in the final lines of this poem is an allusion to the recognizable image of La Llorona within the allegorical framework of a Curandera who must now engage in self-care-and heal herself by performing nothing other than a limpia ritual. The concluding lines nimbly shift the emphasis between these two very recognizable key concept figures often metaphorically re-imagined and re-inscribed throughout Mexican American writing.

The poetic lines: “Wailing, i pull my hair/suck snot back and swallow it/” conjures the image of La Llorona who in Mexican Cultural mythos typically wanders crying, with

\textsuperscript{68} See Florentine Codex.
long flowing hair in search of her lost children. In a clever re-working of the image, Anzaldúa’s Llorona has lost her soul, and is overcome with pain, no longer whole. The “suck snot back and swallow it/” is precisely where the switch from Llorona to Curandera takes place. In six words, Anzalduá evokes both the inconsolable “wailing woman” in mourning and simultaneously shifts, and transfigures the speaker into La Curandera.\textsuperscript{70} The speaker of the poem has no other choice but to heal her own self. The practice of sucking out an object placed in a body through witchcraft is a common practice within Curanderismo and common in barrida rituals.\textsuperscript{71} The following lines, “place both hands over the wound/but after all these years/it still bleeds” detail the ongoing ritual healing of the colonial wound that must be repeatedly cleansed through many rituals time and time again since coloniality remains. It is here where the Curandera, the quintessential nepantlera arrives at conocimiento. Anzaldúa ends “Healing Wounds” with a balanced understanding of the role of the nepantlera. She is the one who must operate guided by the insight drawn from Curanderismo. Admittingly, she confesses that she “never realiz[ed] that to heal/there must be wounds/to repair there must be damage/for light there must be darkness.” Fundamentally, then, she reveals a central axiom in regards to the relationship between Curanderismo as a material practice and the human subject: the recovery or reintegration of the self is a recursive ongoing process. The only end in mind is to unify and balance out the fragmented self and render it whole through pre-colonial ritual practices.

\textsuperscript{70} One of the well-documented techniques of practicing Curanderas is to suck and spit particular joints during cleansing rituals. “Treatment by sucking is generally repeated several times before the chizo is extracted…” See Elsie Clews Parsons “Curanderos in Oaxaca, Mexico,” The Scientific Monthly Vol.32 no.1 (January 1931): 60-68.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 60.
Curanderas in the Print Imaginary

cultural productions, speaks to the depth of her presence (physical and symbolic) in shaping communities of Mexican origin by explicitly practicing Curanderismo. The Curandera figure is a reoccurring figure in texts that focus on the borderlands as a reminder of how we are to think of these healers as “living bridges” thereby signaling to readers that wounding in the Mexican diaspora is frequently correlated with the formation of borders. These symbols, which forge a communal spirituality, are what Laura E. Pérez refers to as an alphabet, marking between and beyond the social text of dominant, and dominating orders: a spirit writing...toward understanding the reharmonization of the mind-body-spirit...a craft work that is not solely personal but perhaps the most pressing ideological and political work at the heart of the ‘decolonial.’

Curanderismo provides a vocabulary and grammar to a colonality of power that exists everyday, and which by virtue of that finds expression in the lives of its adherents including and perhaps especially, by storytellers.

Put another way this cursory enumerative list underscores the notion that this figure appears trans-generically and trans-historically precisely because Curanderas serve a powerful role within communities of Mexican origin and as the Chicana/o canon burgeons, so does our understanding of this trope. In addition, in their works of poetry Carmen Talfolla, Diana Garcia, Pat Mora, Teresa Palomo Acosta, and Ana Castillo and Jimmy Santiago Baca’s, *Martin and the Meditations on the South Valley* invoke the figure of the Curandera.

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73 See Pat Mora “Bruja” and “Curandera” from *Chants* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1994).
Alongside poetry, this figure is theorized in Ana Castillo’s (2001) collection of critical essays titled Massacre of the Dreamers, and even appears in youth and children’s literature such as in, Gloria Anzaldua’s Prietita and the Ghost Woman, and Clara and the Curandera/Clara y la Curandera, by Monica Brown. In the realm of short story Curanderas appear in Lucrecia Guerrero’s Chasing Shadows: stories, Estella Portillo Trambley’s Rain of Scorpions and Other Stories, as well as in Demetria Martinez’s “Sign Language” from her collection Confessions of a Berlitz-Tape Chicana, and The Block Captains Daughter. Curanderas also surface in Tey Diana Rebolledo Women’s Tales from the New Mexico WPA Diabla A Pie as well as in her critical monograph, Women Singing in the Snow. In the visual arts, Carmen Lomas Garza’s artistic pieces have visually represented Curanderas in mid-limpia ritual. However, the most paradigmatic and substantial encounter with the Curandera figure within the Chicana/o literary corpus is in Anaya’s 1972 classic, Bless Me, Ultima.

RUDOLFO ANAYA’S ULTIMA

Rudolfo Anaya’s 1972 novel, Bless Me, Ultima, a cultural product that flowered out of El Movimiento, remains one of the most important works within the Mexican American literary corpus to date. Anaya received the Quinto Sol Literary Prize in 1972 celebrating his contribution to literary nationalism and led to his wide recognition as one of Chicana/o Literature’s “big three.” This unique bildungroman dubbed, “a masterpiece of the margins” details the relationship between a young seven-year-old boy named Antonio and a mystical Curandera named Ultima. Anaya’s novel fictively imagines how a boy learns to

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75 This refers to Tomás Rivera, Rolando Hinojosa and Rudolfo Anaya.
navigate what Theresa M. Kanoza describes as a “world full of opposites” in the New Mexican village of Guadalupe during the World War II era.\textsuperscript{77}

Throughout the novel, Ultima teaches Antonio culturally specific life lessons rooted in their ancestral healing traditions and helps him to recognize the importance of his own powerful relationship to the material and immaterial, to land and to spirit. As Ultima heals members of the community with the young boy at her side, she intimately reveals the mysteries of the living earth and takes Antonio, deep into the world of Curanderismo. As his apprenticeship with Ultima unfolds Antonio’s relationship to his community, his immediate family, and most importantly to his Catholic faith begin to change. He ultimately comes to learn about how Ultima heals, and must reconcile this knowledge with his dominant Western views of the world. He is able to do so only when he learns one of the central premises undergirding Curanderismo, namely, the importance of embracing an integrated perspective on illness and wellness, one that considers spiritual, emotional, and physical health as always already imbricated.

One of Antonio’s major theological and philosophical conflicts is that he is unable to understand why evil deeds he has witnessed go unpunished, and why innocent and blameless people sometimes suffer. Because of his confusion, Antonio begins to question his own faith and grapple with his own relationship to God. After witnessing the execution of a WWII veteran, the drowning of his atheist friend, and violent threats made on Ultima’s life, Antonio arrives at a newfound spiritual understanding that departs from the teachings of his village priest, Father Barnes specifically, and his Roman Catholic faith in general. He departs from his faith, only far enough to allow himself to embrace and integrate Ultima’s teachings and

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
what he has learned about the powers of Curanderismo and this, inevitably reconfigures his relationship to Catholicism.

Throughout the novel, the young boy petitions God in prayer and supplication asking for answers to his complex ontological and theological questions. When Antonio’s questions go un-ananswered, his relationship to Ultima offers up a surrogate pathway towards understanding, through an alternative approach to tackling ontological and spiritual questions. This culturally infused alternate epistemological pathway is full of spiritual, medical, and cultural, knowledge, and is one in which Antonio is able to fashion and maintain a new kind of connection to the sacred. Anaya reveals that, Antonio, “…went alone to church and kneeled and prayed very hard… [and]…asked God to answer [his] questions, but the only sound was always the whistling of the wind filling the empty space.”78 Undeniably haunted by the prospect of spending eternity in hell, and overwhelmed with feelings of condemnation for his own sins, by the end of the novel, with Ultima’s help, Antonio finds a new level of spiritual balance through Curanderismo and reconciles his fraught relationship with his creator and with a violent society. By the end of the novel Anaya replaces the feeling of emptiness of the cathedral with the sacred fullness of the land. In essence, Ultima leads Antonio much like Father Barnes, for as Curandera Elena Avila notes in her memoir, Woman who Glows in the Dark (1998) “God is at the exact center, the precise mother drum of the entire relationship we call Curandersimo.”79 Ultima leads him to God via Curanderismo.

Anaya’s novel shows that it is through Ultima, that Antonio comes to understand how his very own spirit, “shared in the spirit of all things.”

Antonio is so conflicted by several rigid binaries that add tension to his already uneasy experiences as a young child such as: the power of good vs. the power of evil, religion vs. atheism, an eternity in hell vs. an eternity in heaven, and the pull of his mother’s bloodline vs. the pull of his father’s bloodline etc.

Antonio searches for direction in his own life, as he negotiates the tensions of his childhood and reconciles his spiritual struggles with Ultima’s help. A quintessential nepantlera, then, her capacity to navigate matters of the world from the spirit realm is what draws members of the community and young Antonio to her for help. As Enrique LaMadrid points out, those crucial moments require mediators (Curanderos and tricksters) who possess an overview of the world and the ability to synthesize. Such an overview of the world includes ethno-botanical knowledge, and spiritual insight that can frame even the most mundane circumstance or situation as a matter of the spirit. Antonio notes, “She spoke to me of the common herbs and medicines we shared with the Indians of the Rio del Norte. She spoke of the ancient medicines of other tribes, the Aztecas, Mayas, and even of those in the old, old country, the Moors.”

Ultima trains Antonio and imparts an archive of knowledge about healing. This preservation of the archive mimetically mirrors and realistically captures how Curanderismo evolved in the Americas even as the decline of Aztec society took place and Roman Catholicism attempted to supplant traditional ways of being and knowing. As mentioned, Curanderas are the embodied site where the recording, storage and transmission

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80 Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*, 15.
81 Enrique R. La Madrid, “Myth as Cognitive Process of Popular Culture in Rudolfo Anaya’s *Bless Me, Ultima: The Dialectics of Knowledge*” *Hispania* Vol. 68 no.3 (Sep., 1985): 496.
82 Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*, 42.
of knowledge of Curanderismo takes place—Anaya’s Ultima is no different. And so, it is fitting that Antonio must find his footing somewhere in between these two frameworks.

Rudolfo Anaya’s novel focuses squarely on the power of the Curandera as a cultural repository of knowledge and offers a paradigmatic aesthetization of the figure that post-Movement authors continue to invoke and build upon.\textsuperscript{83} It is her commitment to communal-minded strategies of survival that people revere and that some people also frequently fear and condemn to death. Those who seek out Ultima for help either are, in physical anguish, or are in a state of psychological or spiritual torment. There are some wounded members of the community, who are unable to get to Ultima and therefore perish. For example, the community of Las Pasturas is hard-pressed to deal with one particular veteran who has come home from the War and shows signs of what psychiatrists refer to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. At the opening of the novel, before Ultima’s arrival to town, Antonio watches in silent witness as community elders shoot this troubled veteran named Lupito in retaliation for his killing of the town’s sheriff in cold blood. In the middle of the night during a scuffle in which Lupito was clearly not of sound mind and body, an angry mob of men hunt the war veteran turned fugitive. Lupito who is in crises in what seems like a dissociative break from reality experiences visual and auditory hallucinations. It is clear to the townspeople that, “the war made him crazy.”\textsuperscript{84} Antonio, a silent on-looker witnesses Lupito’s death and confesses that he, “… saw his bitter contorted grin…. [and will] never forget those wild eyes like a trapped, savage animal.”\textsuperscript{85} He goes on to note that “the man they hunted had slipped away

\textsuperscript{83} Enrique R. La Madrid, “Myth as Cognitive Process of Popular Culture in Rudolfo Anaya’s Bless Me, Ultima: The Dialectics of Knowledge” \textit{Hispania} Vol. 68 no.3 (Sep., 1985): 497.

\textsuperscript{84} Anaya, \textit{Bless Me, Ultima},15.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 18.
from human understanding; he had become a wild animal and they were afraid.” While there is no explicit mention of Ultima being able to heal Lupito, what we learn of her powers, certainly suggests that had Ultima arrived sooner, perhaps this type of communal violence would not have taken place. Anaya makes her power as a Curandera legible throughout the remainder of the novel and ends the novel by having Antonio perform Ultima’s burial rites. His novel, like Ultima’s life has a timeless appeal.

However, in spite of its significance as one of the best-selling Chicana/o novels of all time, Anaya’s novel is also one of the many books, which currently sit on the Tuscon Unified School District’s notorious banned book list. In fact, since 2012 Bless Me, Ultima has been actively smuggled into Arizona public schools. It remains one of the many “wet books” trafficked back into Arizona schools by recalcitrant proponents of Ethnic Studies, by educators who refuse to deny students exposure to multi-ethnic American fiction, and even by members of activist groups such as those within the Librotraficante movement. Incidentally, at the same moment that access to the novel is actively institutionally censored in Arizona through the use of book bans, the novel itself has for the first time been translated into film and put on the big screen. Put another way, in stark contrast to the controversy surrounding the suppression of the novel as in the case of Tucson Independent School District, in February of 2013 Anaya’s classic returned cinematically to the public imaginary and was shown across the nation offering consumers the opportunity to engage Anaya’s classic tale, albeit in a different medium and at a price.

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86 Ibid., 19.
87 Activist led national movement led by Tony Diaz to return banned books which anchor Ethnic Studies curriculum into Arizona School District.
Consonant with the exploration of how, when, and why texts return to particular sites of cultural production described in the previous chapter, Ultima’s return to the big screen similarly begs understanding, because it reveals the complexities undergirding the ways textual representations within American letters, particularly minority letters fit into established overlapping hierarchies of knowledge and culture. *Bless Me, Ultima*’s filmic production speaks to many interesting points. Namely, the canonical influence of Anaya’s original text, the novel’s curious relationship to ideology, the peculiarities and contradictions associated with culture inherent within this moment of accelerated globalization, and the present day desire to imagine ways to circumvent the dead-ends offered by a U.S. health care system in collapse are all points of interest.

Surprisingly, this Mexican American written work turned film appeared on the big screen through none other than the fiscal backing of a member of one of the U.S.’s richest families. Walmart’s billionaire heiress, Christy Walton (daughter in law of Walmart mogul Sam Walton) bankrolled the film and pushed for its cinematic adaptation after having reportedly fallen in love with Anaya’s novel firsthand. Walton, reporting to the *Los Angeles Times* notes that *Bless me, Ultima* helped her get through very turbulent periods in her life and for this reason she subsidized the production of the film. In an interview with the LA press she mentions holding fast to some of the central themes conveyed in the novel, precisely when her three-year-old son was diagnosed with stage 4 Kidney Cancer in the 1980’s. She, like Anaya’s titular character, opted to rely on herb and plant based forms of healing as part of a life or death struggle to get her son cancer-free.\(^{88}\) *Bless me, Ultima* helped

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Walton “weather that period” and overcome the challenges in her life at that time. Walton’s particular relationship with Anaya’s novel is but only one voice that pays homage to the utility and extent to which literary works from the Chicana/o canon enable processes of critical intervention, transformation, healing, and existential re-creation in the lives of readers. Walton, who procured Rudolfo Anaya’s blessing before funding the film, openly reveres the notion of faith, and the respectful relationship to nature and traditional values that Anaya’s novel foregrounds. Walton’s association with transnational enterprise and with the film’s production however begs questions regarding how to interpret her particular cultural investment in bringing Anaya’s work to life on the big screen.

Walton’s investment was clearly vital to the production of the film, *Bless me, Ultima* and yet, the irony here is that Walmart as a transnational corporation maintains an incongruous relationship to those same core tenets Walton claims animate and anchor her longstanding love of the novel. In fact, because of the way flows of capital presently operate, her billions, the very funds which brought Anaya’s film to the big screen, and that invested in the narrative’s cultural value, are at the same time implicated in a slew of complex practices. Practices including but not limited to questionable economic ethics, transnational threats to environmental justice, labor union opposition, Walmart’s recent 2011 homage to Pinochet, or most disturbingly relevant for the purpose of this chapter, Walmart’s destruction of indigenous sites of Mexican cultural significance. Here I am specifically referring to the construction of a Walmart Superstore less than two miles away from the Pyramid of the Moon in Teotihuacán, Mexico which for Mexican poet Homero Aridjis was like Walmart

89 Ibid.
“planting a staff of globalization in the heart of ancient Mexico.”

These are issues that Anaya’s text does not specifically reference or anticipate but nonetheless maintains the capacity to speak to the heart of precisely because the novel creates the space were one is able to embrace the often misunderstood power and ancestral logic of the Curandera.

The adaptation of Anaya’s work at this historical juncture reveals the uneven ways cultural forms such as Bless Me, Ultima function, are deployed, or in George Yudice’s language are managed, and reveal the ways in which structures of power are guided and operated by economic interests. This adaptation and return of Anaya’s text is emblematic. Much like the return of the Codex, it makes legible, which cultural bodies can invest in and benefit from the maintenance of culture. According to George Yudice in The Expediency of Culture, “culture-as-resource” gets its traction from our diversity. In the case of Anaya’s novel, cultural forms can be rejected as part of Ethnic Studies curriculum yet embraced on the big screen by Walton; we can assume then that Anaya’s narrative and Ultima’s way of healing must be “managed” by private enterprise. Yudice writes that beyond being understood as a simple commodity, “culture-as-resource” is the linchpin of a new epistemic framework in which ideology and much of what Foucault called disciplinary society are absorbed into an economic rationality. In fact, the primacy of land and cultural identity, an impulse that promotes the maintenance of culture and the preservation of traditional knowledge bases and ancestral cultural property in the case of Walmart’s relationship to the

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92 It is interesting to note that there are many U.S. cities that do not have and have fought to block the construction of Walmart stores including but not limited to New York City, Seattle, San Francisco, and Boston etc.

93 George Yudice, Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003),1
remake of Anaya’s novel is diametrically opposed to the relationship of Walmart to the sacred indigenous sites in Teotihuacán. The site on which Walmart broke ground is one of the most significant archeological zones in the Americas. In this event the final arbiter of whether or not this world heritage archeological site should be respected as such, was not the wise teachings of a Curandera figure, seen as the judge and jury and harbinger of health and balance by members of the Mexican and/or Mexican American community- it was capital.

In the world within the text, Ultima brings Antonio’s life into balance. She acts as an embodied spirit level. Similar to the spirit levels used by metalworkers, carpenters, and stonemasons her refined sensitivities as a Curandera determine her accuracy and capacity to intervene and balance out dire situations based on her intuitions and inclinations. Antonio describes his meeting with Ultima, in the passage below. He notes that she,

took my hand, and I felt the power of a whirlwind sweep around me.
Her eyes swept the surrounding hills and through them I saw for the first time the wild beauty of our hills and the magic of the green river…The four directions of the llano met in me, and the white sun shone on my soul. The granules of sand at my feet and the sun and sky above me seemed to dissolve into one strange, complete being.”

With Ultima’s help, Antonio gains a new understanding of the llano one in which he is central and where he for the first time experiences a holistic sense of balance and direction. Readers are able to gauge the true meaning of this new awareness particularly when understood in relationship to the fact that Antonio felt overwhelmed by whether or not he

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94 Anaya, Bless Me, Ultima, 12.
would take on the ways of Lunas (his mother’s people), or the Marez (his father’s people). In essence, Ultima’s influence is paramount. In helping Antonio find his true calling, she in reality aids in determining the economic future of his family. Readers learn that Antonio’s three older brothers having returned from the War no longer wish to economically contribute to their household and because Antonio, is the last son left it can be assumed that he will take on the economic responsibility for the financial wellbeing of his family.

The post-1945 realist context depicted in the world of the text closely mirrors the shift in global expansion that took place for Mexicanos in the U.S. at this time. It is at this time that the Southwest experiences a shift and Mexicanos go from a centralized regional identity to the mobile identity associated with the global moment. Antonio’s family then is pulling away from living solely in the llano, and Antonio’s dad can no longer hold on to his life-long dream because “…the war had ruined his dream.” Therefore, Ultima’s influence cannot be taken lightly. Anaya here is offering a new way of looking at the figure of the Curandera by re-signifying her in a positive light. Antonio notes: “My father’s dream was to gather his sons around him and move westward to the land of the setting sun, to the vineyards of California. But the war had taken his three sons and it had made him bitter.” Ultima attempts to maintain peace with/in a family in conflict and her guidance arrives at precisely the time that the Mares and the Luna families need her to ward off the susto caused by larger economic and political forces taking place around the globe. Ultima’s power however is complex. It can negotiate many intra-communal dynamics but it cannot change the post-1945 economic reality for Antonio’s family.

95 Ibid., 14.
96 Ibid.
Furthermore, Anaya’s Curandera does not disturb ideology, in comparison, the contemporary Curandera, the one that Chicana feminists invoke is a far more disruptive figure. Anaya’s Ultima sets the terms for what is spiritually right and wrong, she levels out the conflict, injustice, and spiritual imbalances that present themselves in manifold ways, but she does not necessarily defy gendered roles wholesale. Anaya is in many ways unable to re-deploy the figure of the Curandera outside of hetero-patriarchy. There are moments when Ultima, confronts power head on, and these moments include a direct confrontation with both men and women considered evil in an effort to undo their spiritual workings. In these moments of confrontation, she restages the dynamics that harm the mental, physical, or spiritual wellbeing of individuals or in some cases the wellbeing of the entire community. However, she remains a woman who like many women is bound to domestic negotiations. Complex dynamics of gender governing domestic space primarily fetter her to gendered labor inside the home, but in addition, she has the added responsibility of practicing the curative arts of Curanderismo for her family and her community. Ultima is powerful. In terms of holistic healing, she is both revered and feared because she like most Curanderas in the world outside of the text asserts a power to heal, recuperate, restage and spiritually balance out affairs within her community. Anaya’s Ultima signifies radical alterity and her resources, epistemic framework, and her methodology for being within and healing her community is rooted outside of Cartesian Dualism and Western epistemology. For this reason, contemporary representations of the Curandera are highly invested with attempts to manage how we see her, and determine whom she can serve. Her numerous representations beg the question: for whom can the healing art of Curanderismo have legitimate instrumental value?
Anaya’s mid-twentieth century characterization of Ultima is a counterhegemonic one to the extent that he presents Ultima as benevolent. As the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Norma Alarcón have poignantly pointed out and cleared the theoretical space for us to consider, the dominant binary governing the understanding of gender identity for Chicana women is the virgin/whore dichotomy. This rigid binary constrains the women who fall short of the constructed ideal of virgin. They are deemed whores or in the case of a Curandera they are labeled a witch, therefore it is common to see Curanderas characterized as brujas, or hechizeras (Spanish terms for witch). Irene Lara’s work is useful here for understanding what makes Anaya’s 1972 representation of Ultima not only dynamic and fresh but to some extent oppositionally different. The narrative reveals at its opening that,

It was because Ultima was a curandera, a woman who knew the herbs and remedies of the ancients, a miracle-worker who could heal the sick. And because a curandera had the power she was misunderstood and often suspected of practicing witchcraft herself.

Here, Anaya lays out Ultima’s mis-reading in clear terms. The Curandera figure is often depicted by writers as powerful, and therefore policed as a witch. Irene Lara’s work describes the pattern of violence and policing of women who are comfortable enough to express spirituality on their own terms. Lara reminds us that, as an empowered female cultural figure, la Bruja symbolizes power outside of patriarchy’s control that potentially challenges a sexist status quo. It is this power that Lara suggests we reclaim and harness as an oppositional

97 Norma Alarcón, “Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism” Cultural Critique No. 13 (Autumn 1989): 57-87.
98 Anaya, Bless Me, Ultima, 4.
positionality. In this sense, Anaya’s novel speaks to a longstanding violence against Curanderas but falls short of locating the mistreatment of the Curandera as patriarchal policing. Ultima, therefore is unable to fully address the patriarchal wounds within the novel. Like other Chicana feminists, Irene Lara goes much further than Anaya to explicitly advocate for, “…the development of a bruja positionality within Chicana/Latina studies that includes developing our own bruja-like epistemologies in the re-membering, revising, and constructing of knowledge as well as participation in other forms of social change.”

Anaya’s representation of the Curandera pushes back against the notion that all Curanderas are brujas, or witches, an understanding that led to the persecution and execution of some of the women who openly practiced Curanderismo in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest. Anaya’s portrayal shows the townspeople accusing Ultima of practicing witchcraft, yet the narrative does not end with Ultima dying at the hands of an angry mob. Instead, Ultima’s final moments are merely moments where she crosses over into a new dimension after a direct confrontation with evil that goes awry. She asserts that she is “not dead” but instead is on her “way to a new place and a new time.”

Anaya’s work is in fact responding in its own right to the persecution of Curanderas albeit with a character that for the most part does not disturb gendered ideology in the domestic sphere in any incendiary way.

In the world outside of the text it is undeniable that woman who exercise autonomy and control over their bodies, their destinies, and within their communities often become the target of violence. In fact, the print record reveals that the grotesque ways in which Curanderas were in many cases throughout history considered morally corrupt, dangerous

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100 Ibid., 13.
101 Anaya, Bless Me, Ultima, 260.
charlatans, and sinister figures and communities brutalized them as such. A 1898 article from the Spanish language newspaper, *La Verdad*, which circulated in Las Cruces, New Mexico details the death of one such, “hechicera” (see Figure 4) from the Yucatan whose cadaver was hung by foot from a tree for public display after having been brutally murdered. The newspaper notes that a woman named Dominga was “savagely assassinated” by severe blunt force trauma to the skull. Jose. F Villanueva admitted to stoning the Curandera Dominga to death, sitting on her crushed head, and later hanging her body in a nearby tree for voracious dogs to eat her remains. This overkill, this need to not only kill but to further stage for public view the death of a Curandera says a lot about whose body can become the target of violence within a given community. While Curanderismo in fact denotes a capacity to heal, the number of deaths one is able to access in the historical record reveals Curanderismo’s limits, and underscores the pernicious ways in which violence against women manifests itself. Dominga unlike the Curandera fictively imagined in a romantic light by Anaya became the target of violence. The violence directed at her and other women declared brujas points to the limits of Curanderismo’s decolonial strategies in a terrain of social institutions grounded in patriarchy. Male violence in particular seems to hold out Curanderas as responsible for not healing the most urgent ills of the community.

This is all to say, Anaya’s novel sympathetically invests in re-thinking public misconceptions and mis-understandings of Curanderas as brujas in three key ways. First, *Bless Me, Ultima*’s central narrative displays Ultima’s impact on those around her, as benevolent, this includes her impact on both individual family members and on members of the community. Ultima is a source of inspiration and healing and enables Antonio to bring an otherwise unstable worldview into complete balance and holistic unity. Secondly, Anaya
clearly links evil, malice, and witchcraft with Tenorio and not Ultima decoupling the understanding of an empowered female figure as necessarily a witch. He does this by explicitly showing the ways some community members feared Ultima under false pretenses and mis-read the very agents who were in actuality practicing witchcraft. In addition, by including a subtle critique of institutionalized religion and war, he shows that perhaps Ultima’s way of knowing is indeed a more holistically sound way of being in the Word.

Thirdly, Anaya’s text invites a re-reading of the Curandera figure by specifically unmasking the way the Curandera’s body often becomes the target of lethal violence, and in doing so elicits readers to think about the way these figures have and continue to function as bodies requiring discipline within communities.

Hence, the misrecognition of the Curandera as bruja in terms of the logic of cultural capital during the present period of late capital is dangerous because what is at risk of being lost is the healing, transformative, and decolonial function of the Curandera and the epistemic value of her knowledge being rooted outside Cartesian Dualism.

 Outsiders fear and attempt to violently contain the Curandera within gendered modes of power and this is a reinscription of and recreation of colonial violence. Anaya’s recasting of Ultima as benevolent on the one hand does the work of rendering her non-threatening, but on the other, even as it lauds the capacity of the Curandera to restore people from spiritual trauma, and illness, all the same, it does not free Ultima. Anaya’s rendering does not disturb patriarchal masculinist ideologies, which demand Ultima’s conscripted containment within domestic space. Anaya’s Ultima remains bound to gendered logic. This marks Anaya’s loving portrayal as one that constitutes an act of a different kind of trauma through containment in cisheteropatriarchy. The new Chicana feminist theoretical deployment of the
Curandera “un-sutures” the Curandera figure from Anaya’s rendering and from the not-so fully healed wounds of colonialism in order to “free” the Curandera figure from intra-communal gendered restrictions while still addressing the shared wounds of colonialism through Chicana feminist discourse. Healing the wounds of colonialism demands re-occurring ritual practices because healers must persistently engage and remedy colonial wound(s). It is for this reason that Chicana feminists begin with in their own disciplinary fields and have taken the Curandera trope and radically invested in the figure in new ways. In fact, they craft a far less gender conforming Curandera one who can exist in all of us, one who is unbound to the domestic sphere, and one who has the capacity to heal not only bodies suffering from susto or empacho but entire institutions in need of healing and decolonization.
Muerte de una hechicera.

Con los detalles más horripilantes describen algunos órganos de la prensa yucateca, la muerte de una pobre mujer, que en Valladolid fue salvajemente asesinada.

José J. Villanueva M. (e) “Socotuch” se dirigió el viernes por la noche al paraje “San Miguel,” situado a inmediaciones de la ciudad, y sin motivo aparente alguno sacó fuera de su casa á una pobre mujer que vivía allí y con una piedra le destrozó el cráneo, sobre el cual se sentó luego. Colgó después el cadáver en un arbol por medio de una cuerda atada á un pié y la abandonó á la voracidad de los perros.

En seguida volvió á la ciudad y avisó á su padre José Conception Villanueva, que había matado á la bruja. El padre dio aviso á la autoridad que conoce ya de tan horroroso crimen.

El criminal mató á la indefensa mujer llamada Dominga Mis por creerla hechicera.

El juzgado de primera instancia, instruye hoy el proceso y de los datos recogidos hasta hoy, resulta que el desgraciado Villanueva, como á las doce de la noche y acosmetido de locura, de que ha dado pruebas otras veces, penetró en la casa de su víctima, y atribuyéndole su locura, como yerbera, la acosmetió á pedradas.
CHAPTER THREE

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:
THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSIBILITY OF TRAUMA IN AMÉRICO PAREDES’
GEORGE WASHINGTON GÓMEZ

Américo Paredes remains one of the foremost scholars of Mexican American Studies. Co-founder of the Center for Mexican American Studies at the University of Texas in Austin, Paredes, prolifically detailed the contours of contemporary life in Greater Mexico. Chicana/o writing (both critical and creative) is informed directly by the critical paradigms born out of Paredes’ body of writing. His written works speak to Detrás de Cada Letra: Trauma and Healing in Contemporary Chicana/o Literature, precisely because they pivot around a distinct sense of masculinized and racialized loss experienced by Mexican Americans at the turn of the century. Paredes’ 1958 book, With his Pistol in his Hand: A Border ballad and its Hero, remains a foundational text for the field of Mexican American Studies. Here, Paredes knowingly inscribes in his protagonist Gregorio Cortez a resistant masculine heroic model for dealing with the trauma of coloniality experienced in the borderlands. By his measure, Gregorio Cortez is a man who,

epitomized the ideal type of hero of Rio Grande people, the man who defends his right with his pistol in his hand, and who either escapes at the end or goes down before superior odds-in a sense a victor in defeat.  

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1 Gregorio Cortez was a Mexican American outlaw who became a folk hero of the Southwest and is memorialized in corrido (song), literature, and film.

Gregorio Cortez was in fact a legendary epic folk hero imagined and venerated through song, and Paredes’ study of Cortez remains significant because the corrido tradition predates the development of and remains inter-textually linked to Chicano prose fiction.3

But *With his Pistol* was not Paredes’ only attempt to think through the ways border subjects become marked by, and must deal with coloniality in the southwest. He imagined the effects of coloniality on Mexico-Texans years prior. His much earlier work attempted to imagine, characterize, and define border trauma in a way very different than his 1958 text on the heroic Cortez. An analysis of *George Washington Gómez*, with this in mind grants us an opportunity to rethink *With his Pistol in His Hand* in a new light in general, and to further our understanding of pre-Movement Chicana/o writing in particular. In fact while Paredes does explore the ways sociogenic trauma was visited upon Gregorio Cortez he glosses over the ways in which the trauma continues.

*George Washington Gómez: A Mexico Texan Novel*, provides insight into what literary modernism looks like for Mexican American authors of Paredes’ generation. This narrative imagines the plight of a modern man who has broken away from a longstanding relationship to his ancestral lands and from his Mexican American cultural heritage. There are two landscapes at work: one literal landscape connected to a lived historical past that is rapidly fading, and the other, a symbolic landscape connected to a shifting cultural imaginary that is fundamentally exacerbated by trauma. What drives a wedge between the two landscapes are the women and their roles in the novel. Paredes’s novel shows that the modern Mexico-Texan is no longer part of the masculine colonialist Texas landscape but uncannily relegated to the re-colonized and re-feminized “modern” Anglo Texas domestic space of the

3 Corridos are narrative folk songs/ballads that record history, legend, and lore and transmit oral history.
20th century. The generational rift, or “breaking away” from the revered ranchero lifestyle and the days of the chaparral, which Paredes openly laments, comes hand in hand with psychical injury. The psychic impact associated with experiencing anti-Mexican racism on the border accompanied the re-territorialization of a previous Mexican colonial space and needs to be specifically theorized to fully understand trauma in regards to Mexican experience in the Southwest.

In *George Washington Gómez: A Mexico-Texan Novel*, Paredes fictively chronicles the life of his titular character Guálinto Gómez, a Mexico-Texan coming of age in the early twentieth century borderlands. Readers follow Guálinto from infancy to adulthood and gain a sense of the quotidian pressures associated with growing up in the Rio Grand Valley in the 1930’s. His story takes shape under the aegis of industrialization and Paredes highlights the complex processes of modernization taking place in the borderlands as a dense socio-historical backdrop to Gúalinto’s story. This tension between the personal evolution of characters and the drastic socio-cultural revolution, taking place in the historical context of the novel grants readers access to an ideal alternative site from which to reconfigure understandings of trauma writ large.

Guálinto’s lauded birth, turbulent subject formation, and eventual cultural assimilation highlight the psychological effects of his surroundings on him. A tumultuous “eternal conflict between two clashing forces,” characterizes his cultural upbringing, and progressively distances him from his family and from his Mexican American identity. Through a gradual process of traumatization and subjective splitting, Paredes details what

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influences Guálinto to drop his given name and take on the anglicized name “George” by the end of the novel. Guálinto, destined to be “a great man who would help and lead his people to a better life,” grows up to reject his communal mandate and all but cut ties with his family. Because Paredes brings together the gendered, racial and psychological dimensions of Mexico-Texan life as part of his novelistic discourse, the chapter asks what does studying Remigio, Guálinto, and Maruca’s character formation expose about their psychological struggles with Anglo American dominance on the U.S./Mexican Border? Moreover, how are those struggles further compounded by the concomitant function of gender at the cross section of racial terror and male patriarchy? While Paredes’ work displays the aesthetic devices common in modernist writing of this period, these same devices enact specific representations of the gendered and racialized effects of trauma. Considering these characters in light of their experiences enables the tripartite aim of this essay: first, to look closely at an often-overlooked character in light of trauma: second, to contemplate the function of inheritability as it relates to Remigio, Maruca, and Guálinto; and third to produce a theoretical assertion regarding what Paredes’ narrative offers to both Chicana/o literary studies, and literary trauma studies scholarship. By exploring these specific points, this chapter demonstrates how Paredes’ novel exemplifies early twentieth century trauma fiction.

Cathy Caruth’s work on the psychoanalytic dimensions of trauma and affect in relation to literature marked a watershed within the field of literary studies and initiated the exploration of the political, historical, and ethical contours associated with the human experience of trauma and its representation. More recently, literary scholars have looked beyond early preoccupations within psychoanalysis to contemplate racial and gendered

6 Ibid., 125.
particularities of psychic experience in relation to paradigms of sadness, nostalgia, grief, mourning, and melancholia. This work adds to the theoretical dialogue centered on structures of feeling by exploring the specific sociogenic relationship between Mexican American experiences of wounding and their literary representations. By embedding Guálinto within the cultural, historical, social, and political specificities of the border, Paredes presses and enables readers to understand not only what John González calls “Border Modernity” but to discern the varied nature of what I have come to call border trauma.8

George Washington Gómez like other early twentieth century multi-ethnic U.S. texts is an example of contemporary ethnic trauma fiction because it showcases conceptual issues such as the “belated,” and “inheritability,” along with the impact racism plays in traumatic experience.

By “border trauma,” I am referring to the complex matrix of racialized anti-Mexican violence, injustice, and poverty and the fundamental shifts taking place in regards to race, class, and gender in the borderlands during this period. This includes the psychological impact such processes have on Mexican American subjects-a phenomenon that I argue Paredes is attempting to represent. Unlike other discussions of trauma that rarely invoke representations of Mexican American experience as a site of exploration, border trauma bears a colonial trace and is linked to such experiences. It is rooted in the violent processes of territorilization occurring at the U.S./Mexican Border. It works in tandem with systematic processes of public (institutions of learning) and private (in the domestic sphere) coercion.

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8 John González’ concept of, “Border Modernity” is a useful paradigm that accounts for the radical asymmetrical material and cultural transformation of the borderlands between 1900 and 1940.
with specifically racialized and gendered contours taking shape in this region. It is in *George Washington Gómez*, that Paredes best fictively imagines the complex U.S./Mexico borderland’s landscapes and (more importantly for this work), the disquieted Mexico-Texan subjects therein. Paredes achieves this by displaying the symptomology of trauma. In fact, many of the tropological continuities that are found within trauma fiction including fragmentation, collapses in narrative time, repetition, and/or other formal and stylistic elements that mimic the intrusive symptoms associated with the experience of trauma can be found within this work. While these devices dovetail with the tropes that have come to define modernist writing, I read these tropes through a lens of trauma across the Chicana/o archive to look at the impact of racial wounding on Chicana/o literary productions trans-historically. Reading trans-historically, reveals how border trauma is in fact an extension of coloniality. While there is a significant body of Paredes scholarship on *George Washington Gómez* specifically, this work places it in dialogue with trauma scholarship that is attentive to the experiences of raced bodies and the critical examination of how trauma and loss is aestheticized within minority letters.9 José Limón’s *Américo Paredes: Culture and Critique* (2012) explores the notion of racialized psychological loss and cogently asks, “…Is it possible to see George [Guálinto] as a melancholic subject?”10 Taking seriously Limón’s query, means tracking the larger social etiological processes behind Guálinto’s unsettled psychic formation and symptomology.

By looking at the role of memory, (a central component for understanding human

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experiences of trauma)\textsuperscript{11} in relation to Remigio, Maruca, and Guálinto’s lived traumas, we glean what elements of Paredes’ novel provide theoretical insight on the operations of trauma. Because many of the social dynamics produced by structures of race and violence that Paredes fictionalizes remain operative today it is salient to look closely at the larger social dynamics implicated in the production of loss, melancholia, and trauma in minority letters.\textsuperscript{12} Understanding Guálinto as a melancholic subject negotiating his loss opens up the space to think about Mexican American literary representations of psychic trauma and complicates arguments centered on the “resistance paradigm” within Chicana/o studies.\textsuperscript{13} Following Anne Cheng, this chapter cautiously moves toward theorizing representations of Mexican American experiences without naturalizing racial wounding or subscribing to “psychichal essentialization.”\textsuperscript{14}

**RANGERS, RETALIATION, & MEXICO-TEXAN MASCUINITY**

The novel’s opening scene immediately places readers in the middle of a brief but

\textsuperscript{11} Cathy Caruth, *Trauma Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1995), 63.

\textsuperscript{12} Many of the psychologically damaging dynamics Paredes represents remain in operation today. For instance, thousands of Texas public schools remain as segregated as they were 60 years ago. Furthermore, incarceration rates among Latinos continue to rise. Moreover, a recent 2009 Harvard dissertation opposing immigration reform authored by Jason Richwine arguing that Hispanics have lower intelligence quotients than their white counterparts registers that Anglo-dominance and racism continues to impact minority experience in the U.S.


dangerous encounter between a group of Texas Rangers and two Mexico-Texans during a traffic stop involving a horse and buggy and a group of rangers on horseback. The infamous and armed rebel businessman Lupe “The Little Doll” Garcia (the central character’s uncle) is momentarily detained and questioned at gunpoint by several rangers. By opening George Washington Gómez with a “dark brown” face inviting the disciplinary arm of the state, Paredes immediately stages the antagonistic and racially asymmetrical operations of power working between the Texas Rangers and Mexico-Texans throughout the borderlands during the early twentieth century. He makes tacit the ever-present role of violence in the lives of Mexico-Texans. And it is this policing of the borderlands, a practice traced throughout the first section of novel that is integral to the production of border trauma.

As historian Benjamin Heber Johnson notes in Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and Its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans, the Texas Rangers embodied the American frontier myth, and as agents of virulent racism they worked to keep, “Tejanos in their place throughout the nineteenth century.” In this particularly tense scene the armed rangers traveling by horse rush to interrogate a set of non-Anglo travelers. The buggy, which the Texas Rangers spot in the distance, appears to be led by “suspicious” characters. Paredes writes the following: “The driver was sitting on the right, and even at that distance the rangers could see that his face was a very dark brown. They spurred their horses

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15 According to Paredes, the word *rinche*, from “ranger” is an important one in border folklore. It has been extended to cover not only the Rangers but any other Americans armed and mounted and looking for Mexicans to kill. See Américo Paredes, *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and its Hero* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1958), 24.
into a lope and strung out to surround the buggy (emphasis mine).”\(^{17}\) While Mejicanos in the buggy are not described as committing any distinct infraction, the Texas Rangers have enough information to consider these men persons of interests merely because they are raced subjects inhabiting the borderlands. Paredes indexes the normative threat and magnitude of violence at the hands of the rangers taking place in San Pedrito from the onset of Guálinto’s epic. In doing so he points to the quotidian character of 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) century racial profiling encountered by non-white travelers with limited English language skills and “Negroid features” in the American South (an occurrence that unsurprisingly continues today).\(^{18}\) These ongoing racially discriminatory and potentially lethal encounters exact individual and communal costs.

Guálinto, Remigio, and Maruca each experience border trauma. They each are undeniably exposed to institutional, individual, and cultural policing taking place in the inauspicious borderlands in which they live. Each one of them inhabit a space where their community is policed and their respective bodies’ are subject to state-sanctioned lethal force. However, Maruca must uniquely negotiate this reality and must contend with the familial authorities around her. She is abused by the communally maintained patriarchal modes that require her disciplining at the hands of those closest to her. In the case of Guálinto and Remigio, they in turn become participants in their own mimetic acts of regulating the borderland space; Remigio vis a vis the sediciosos and Guálinto through his eventual role working with United States counter intelligence.


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 11.
The memories of those violent anti-Mexican borderland relations, quotidian in the lives of Mexico-Texans yet no less brutally traumatic, are integral to narrating Guálinto, Remigio, and Maruca’s stories. The characters in Paredes’ novel witness acts of violence, and act as repositories for those memories of violence. They return, willingly and subconsciously, to those memories of brutality and loss in an effort to work through and beyond their psychic wounds. Even when the characters are consciously unaware of the personal impact racial violence has had on their lives (such as in the case of Guálinto), the way their respective lives unfold clearly registers the significance of border trauma and its concomitant symptomatic effects—flashbacks, re-occurring nightmares, and melancholic assimilation. Their lives bear the trace of border trauma and readers can safely assume that working through the attendant psychological impact of their injuries is a life-long process.

For example, a scene in part one of the novel, takes place at the secret camp of twenty-three sediciosos led by Anacleto de la Peña. Clearly, riffing off of a true historical event Paredes describes a group of renegade Mexico-Texans hiding in the brush of the llano enmeshed in a Plan de San Diego-like project to ambush the rangers and gain control of the llano. Paredes in Pistol (1958) notes: “In 1915 a band of about forty sediciosos (seditionists) under Ancieto Pizaña raided Norias in King Ranch” and were apprehended three days later. Describing the sediciosos, in George Washington Gómez Paredes points out that, “Their clothes were soiled with blood, grass stains and manure. The dust had worn itself into the leather of their boots; their hats were misshapen and torn. Only their eyes

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19 Benjamin Heber Johnson’s Revolution in Texas: How a Forgotten Rebellion and its Bloody Suppression Turned Mexicans into Americans, offers an in depth analysis of Anglo/Tejano rivalry and substantiates the claim that the Texas Rangers were perpetrators of racist violence fueled by Anti-Mexican racism.

looked new, their listening, waiting eyes.”

Such a vivid description draws attention to the materiality and corporeality of the body and its functions, and alludes to a state of organic putrefaction that mirrors the cultural and political shifts in the region, shifts that include the cultural erosion of the Mexico-Texan cultural body. Interestingly, this particular description also evokes a postmortem forensic detailing of a group of lifeless bodies through its imagery of decay. Their male bodies can easily be confused with the land as the sediciosos are coterminously inscribed as part of the landscape. Paredes stages what John González characterizes as a moment of “apocalyptic rupture” for Mexico-Texans in the lower Rio Grande Valley. Guálinto’s life takes shape at the very moment that Mexico-Texans underwent a “…communally traumatic experience in which the radical social displacements of modern life developed within the dynamics of racial domination.” In fact, as historian Benjamin Johnson notes in the 1915 uprisings sediciosos, “… mounted an impressive series of raids” against Anglo farmers. However, “Vigilantes, in response, began killing ethnic Mexicans-in some cases engaged in mass executions-and driving many rancheros off their lands.” In as much as it elaborates on violence and death, Paredes’ description is juxtaposed to the renewed political subjectivity binding and animating this potentially powerful group of rebels who unite in opposition to Anglo-American power. Lamenting over the loss of his ancestral rights to the land Feliciano notes:

21 Ibid., 23.
23 Ibid., 10.
I was born here. My father was born here and so was my grandfather and his father before him. And then they come, they come and take [the land], steal it and call it theirs…But it won’t be theirs much longer now, not much longer I can tell you. We’ll get it back, all of it.\textsuperscript{25}

Through Paredes’ narrative, which details the relationship between racial wounding, psychological trauma, and memory-Mexico-Texan identity is laid bare. Each of the characters negotiate tremendous individual and communal loss and the material impact of Anglo domination. By reflecting the psychic effects attendant with confronting and working through that loss Paredes builds a robust index of Mexico-Texans negotiating trauma.

The men nestled amongst the thorny brush poised and ready to kill American patrolmen shout as they fire their arms. The \textit{sediciosos} here, while described as ready for violence, resist being read as mere criminals and unruly bandits. They are characterized more sympathetically than the Texas Rangers and the self appointed armed bands of Anglo-American vigilantes that patrol the town of San Pedrito and appear throughout part one of the novel. As the \textit{sediciosos} act out in retaliatory violence Paredes has each of the men articulate the network of crimes they have fallen victim to. They call out, “For my father. For my cousin. For my brother. For my ranch, you thieving sons-of-bitches!”\textsuperscript{27} They indict the Texas Rangers for the lives and lands lost through processes of violence and modernization. Their word choice is telling: “cousin,” “brother,” and “ranch” reveal the intense violence they have experienced with/in their extended families, the patriarchal dimension of this violence, and the geographic and economic evisceration enacted by the Texas Rangers.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 23.
In this way, readers are hard-pressed to interpret the *sediciosos* as cold-blooded killers. Through Paredes’ depiction, the *sediciosos* are the ones who carry the effects of the ranger’s brutality in their wounded psyches and are even described as wearing a bodily mark of those wounds on their countenances. Paredes would have us read in, “…their faces a slow suffering.” They make the communal experience of border trauma transportable through time and space, and are the means by which Paredes brings racial violence to the fore. And yet, Paredes resists depicting the rebels hiding in the brush in a completely utopian or potentially edenic light. His complex description of the insurgents is prefaced a few pages earlier with a subtle cautionary disclosure revealing why Mexico-Texans easily refute discourses of solidarity circulating in the region, namely, that border Mexicans, “…knew there was no brotherhood of men.” Paredes goes to great lengths to showcase the complete disintegration of relationships and the crumbling integrity of familial bonds caused by white supremacy. The metaphors of the family signal the inevitable dissolution and ultimate failure of the seditionist band and the way wounding is mobilized and invoked in the service of “false” politicized brotherhoods.

More importantly, it is here, at the seditionist camp, that we are introduced to 15 year-old, Remigio. This young boy is cleverly named after the Catholic saint, St. Remigius who at the extraordinary young age of only twenty-two was ordained and consecrated to the priesthood in spite of his youth in the year 459. In spite of his youth Paredes’s character, Remigio is called to the brotherhood of *sediciosos*, who set out to make atonement for the deaths that have occurred in San Pedrito at the hands of the Texas Rangers. Remigio, “a

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28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 19.
very young boy who looked out of place in his overalls, straw hat, and heavy work shoes shut his eyes and turned his face away” from his new-found leader Lupe Garcia. Much like his religious namesake, Remigio is understood in relationship to his age. The sufficiently liminal, vulnerable, and undifferentiated space of young adulthood can be understood as a further disoriented space for Remigio who is figured in and through his lived border trauma. His body and person are featured in crises. On the one hand, Remigio’s attire marks him as “out of place,” anticipating and gesturing towards the wider sense of cultural dislocation experienced by a younger generation of Mexico-Texans in the Southwest. On the other hand, Remigio’s inability to engage in mob violence and revenge, his initial failure to wholeheartedly perform adult Mexico-Texan masculinity is also registered through descriptions of Remigio’s irregular dress. As a result of witnessing his father’s murder he is described as ill-groomed, further marking and emphasizing his traumatic wounding and underscoring its effects: his unstable emotional state, his subjective displacement and fragmented identity. Like Guálinto, Remigio loses his father to white supremacist violence and attempts to supplant his father’s role by joining forces with the rebels.

However, in a moment of clarity Remigio gathers courage and attempts to depart from the violent band. He asks Lupe Garcia for permission to leave the seditionist camp:

His straw hat in his hands …[he] cleared his throat, his long face pale and trembly. He tried to speak softly but his voice broke. He hesitated then spoke in a high rasping whisper. ‘I would like to go home,’ he said…Remigio twisted his hat. [To which Lupe replied] in a calm friendly voice. I didn’t expect this of you, Remigio. ‘You haven’t fired a shot yet.’ Remigio shifted his

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weight from one foot to the other and toyed with his hat “well sir, I –I was thinking last night. Now that they are- they are dead. Well, I guess my mother and the younger ones need me.”

The trauma of witness here has left Remigio literally off balance. It has distorted and strained his capacity to articulate his desire to flee the band of rebels that function as his surrogate family. Remigio pauses, and Paredes’ deployment of the typographic dash as a decisive diacritical mark in this scene foregrounds the pain with which Remigio struggles to refer to himself both as a stable, unitary “I” and to articulate that “they” (being his father and brother) are in fact dead. The em dash here signals Remigio’s psychic splitting and the fundamental rupture and interruption of his thought processes. He is unable to narrativize the act of racial terror that has disintegrated his patrilineal ties. He is tempted to relinquish his opportunity to mimetically take on the role of the celebrated and heroic corrido figure. The impact of witnessing and surviving racial torture disables him from fluidly articulating such an impossible confession. He has all but psychologically collapsed under the effects of border trauma. His desire is to take on the role as “man of the house” but the codes of masculine conduct require that he act as a proxy for his murdered father and engage in violent revenge.

In a painfully cruel reply Lupe denies Remigio’s request to leave the band by activating Remigio’s traumatic memory. This returns the young boy to a moment of discrete psychological wounding; here he flashes back to a personal moment of anti-Mexican agnatic rupture. In a passage that merits lengthy citation Paredes notes:

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32 Ibid., 25-6.
Lupe tilted his head to one side in a parody of reminiscence. Just how do people scream when they are being burned to death? Come on Remigio, tell me. Remigio’s lips twitched, he blinked and twisted his straw hat. I bet you would have liked to have a rifle, then, hiding there in the brush, watching the rinches drinking whiskey and laughing. Remigio began to cry. ‘Don’t sir! Don’t!’ he said Please stop, please stop.’ He covered an ear with one hand his hat still in the other. ‘You saw and heard it all, remember? Your little brother screaming and your father yelling Shoot! For the love of God shoot! Remigio dropped his hat and put both hands over his face. Sobs shook his spindly frame…Sobbing noiselessly he returned to the place where he had left his rifle.\(^{33}\)

Here, Remigio’s body acts out symptomatically, “twitching,” “blinking,” and “twist[ing]” contorted by the reactivation of his memory, forced to relive the source of his psychic trauma. In a sadistic move Lupe’s question resounds the awful din of suffering which Remigio heard when he witnessed his family member’s murders. By activating Remigio’s traumatic memory, the young boy has no other recourse than to return to the band of twenty-three as a way of belatedly answering his father’s painful appeals to “Shoot!” in spite of having expressed his initial overwhelming desire to leave. He must return to the “flawed brotherhood,” and return to the rifle, here read as a phallic symbol of Mexico-Texan masculinity and partake in the retaliatory violence against the Anglo American much like the central character Guálinto, Remigio takes part as an agent in his own act of policing the borderland space.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 26.
Moments later Remigio who returned to the mob of twenty-three seditionists, but who had continued to sob uncontrollably, watches the assault of a sequestered Anglo American man taken hostage by the rebels, and abruptly joins in on the attack. With his rifle in his hand he,

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turned and emptied his rifle into [his] back as he lay face down. Then he ran and got his horse and tried to make it trample the corpse, but the horse would not do it. So Remigio slid from the saddle and took a machete from his saddle scabbard. He hacked at the corpse until the machete hit bone and stuck. Then he tried to trample [the American] with his big clumsy farm shoes, but two men took him by the armpits and dragged him away. When they let him go he sat beneath a tree and cried, high and loud like a girl.34
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Both the murder itself and its recollection triggered by Lupe are mechanisms of control used to keep Remigio in his place in the case of both the state sanctioned terrorist tactics employed by the rangers and by the leader of the Mexico-Texan rebel band. In each of these instances Remigio has little recourse than to re-process and rehearse the nightmare of witnessing the lynching of his father and brother and as a result he engages in his own act of psychological warfare and brutality. Remigio, like Guálinto embodies border trauma.

Paredes highlights Remigio’s demented state and describes his face as “twisted in hatred and fear.”35 Consistent with the tropes used throughout trauma fiction Paredes figures his clear psychic break by including a flashback to a moment of racial wounding. Remigio is triggered and returns to his moment of unspeakable loss. What makes Remigio stand out and further figured as “out of place” is that he clearly violates the codes of violence that even the

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34 Ibid., 28.
35 Ibid., 28.
sediciosos who have no aversion to brutal force maintained. Remigio does not merely lash out in violence towards an Anglo man to participate in communal retaliation in the name of his murdered father and brother, more disturbing still, out of his own trauma and in a dissociative move, he publically desecrates and mutilates a corpse until he is physically pulled away. Readers get a clear sense that Remigio, like Guálinto and many other Mexico-Texans in this novel are in fact, “…fated to a life controlled by others”\textsuperscript{36} and this fate in the case of Remigio is linked to the racial terror and resulting psycho-pathological damage encountered by the Mexico-Texan in the early twentieth century borderlands. Remigio serves as an archetypal representation of the total disintegration of psychic stability associated with experiencing border trauma of this sort. Beyond this scene Paredes makes no further mention of Remigio but it is safe to assume that for this young man there can be no experience unladed by his traumatic memory and his experience of border trauma.

**GENDER, WOUNDING & BORDER HOPELESSNESS**

While Remigio’s role provides an opportunity to understand the way masculinity and the memory of historical trauma render him helplessly deranged, Maruca sheds light on the way patriarchy regulates and brutalizes the lives of young Mexico-Texan women on the border. Guálinto’s two older sisters are named Maruca and Carmen. Maruca is described as a free spirit and the least studious of the three siblings. Unlike Maruca, Guálinto and Carmen nervously walk “gravely” together on the first day of school.\textsuperscript{37} Maruca on the other hand, “…went skipping ahead of them, stopping now and then to look for wild flowers that were not there, to tease a toad with a stick, or to whirl round and round on the ball of one foot,

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 111.
arms stretched out like a dancer.” Much like Guálinto, Maruca encounters her own set of
hardships and by the end of the novel has moved far away from her family and from South
Texas.

Guálinto’s birth, his primary schooling and his subsequent professional and political
choices are carefully detailed and central to Paredes’ plot. Comparably, scant critical
attention and narrative time is allocated to the character development of Guálinto’s sisters-
Maruca and Carmen. These young women are not singled out, nor chosen to become leaders
at the time of their birth, nor do they represent anything particularly hopeful about the lives
of border women in the 1930’s. In fact, Paredes’ depiction of Maruca and Carmen reveals the
way gender plays a quotidian, naturalized role in subordinating women of Mexican origin to
male patriarchy in the American South.

Paredes’ description of Guálinto’s birth as described by Feliciano, widely understood
as the “heroic” “warrior-like” strong patriarchal figure in the novel goes as follows:

A boy this time! Gumersindo went suddenly from grief to joy. A boy, a boy.
The doctor says he weighs nine pounds if he weighs an ounce. Feliciano
slapped Gumersindo on the back. Fine! He said his face twisting into a smile
“It’s like the Gringo game where you have strike one, then strike two, and the
third time you hit the ball.”

The unabashed pride resulting from the birth of this family’s newest male child is undeniable.
Sadly, this pride rests on the fact that Maruca and Carmen’s births are both seen as “strikes.”
Their very lives are understood as synonymic to failure. Indeed, the novel inscribes beliefs
that mirror wider societal gender asymmetries circulating in the American Southwest,

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38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 13.
asymmetries that were maintained in the dilapidated shacks on the outskirts of San Pedrito. Unsurprisingly, both Carmen and Maruca are silenced, hushed, and told to shut-up on several occasions throughout the novel. Guálinto is encouraged to get an education while the young women are encouraged to drop out of school by both Maria and Feliciano. Maruca and Carmen contribute to the Garcia-Gómez household through their domestic labor. Maruca and Carmen act as caretakers and even as nurses, and Maruca is given charge of the “housework.” The experiences of the women are layered with an entirely different set of gendered risks and challenges. While Paredes forecloses the reader’s capacity to assess Maruca’s psychological state what he clearly make legible is that she is kept in line through physical disciplining.

Interestingly, José Limón on the one hand cleverly asserts that "Critics of this novel have paid too much attention to George and conventional politics" yet he goes on to suggest that “Feliciano and the vibrant regional culture and radical hope that he signifies offer a much better focal point for understanding how to continue to be Mexican in America.” That the Mexican patriarch is already the celebrated focal point within and outside the novel goes without saying, patriarchy ensures this reading by design. In fact, for Limón, Feliciano offers a means by which one can explore a pathway to what he calls a “radical hope.” In spite of being a wonderful financial provider and family oriented man he offers little to Maruca and Carmen in terms of academic support. In fact Feliciano has a dyslogistic attitude towards their schooling. Paredes’ type of narrative realism is guided by the social codes common in

40 Ibid., 154.
42 Ibid., 35.
43 Ibid., 32.
patriarchal regimes. He offers a clear narrative depiction of gender inequality and Feliciano’s bid of no confidence towards Maruca and Carmen reveals the radically hopeless understandings of gender inequality communities of color continue to maintain. For there is nothing hopeful about Feliciano’s gendered treatment of the women in his family and the ordinary ways early 20th century Mexico-Texans actively reified male patriarchy. Maruca and Carmen’s raced bodies are not only implicated in the border trauma resulting from their social milieu, there are gendered borders policed by men and women within their own community and within their own homes that these young women must negotiate, for this reason they are secluded to their homes and treated as weak in body and mind.

Put another way, while I concur with Limón’s reading of Feliciano as “… prudent and wise enough to recognize that an Anglo-driven, racist, and economically exploitative modernity has come to the Valley.” I depart from Limón to assert that this character, nonetheless, remains largely blind to the ways conventional gender roles subordinate women. For instance, at sixteen, in the eyes of her mother Maruca is “no longer deemed a school child.” The patriarch Feliciano sadly asserts that “[Maruca] already has more education than any woman needs” and unsurprisingly Maruca’s schooling comes to a halt. Women are implicated in a complex matrix of patriarchal domination, since race, class, gender and sexuality are structurally imbricated in ways that ensure the maintenance of patriarchal arrangements. Contrary to Limón’s reading the communal maintenance of such arrangements offer women limited hope.

44 Ibid., 152.
46 Ibid., 154.
For Maruca, there is no safe space. Her mother lashes out in violence when she learns Maruca is pregnant. In a telling scene saturated with violence, Maria brutally cudgels her daughter:

There Maruca was waiting, crouching in a corner like an animal. Her mother came in and the girl stared dully at the barrel stave. Maria paused as if undecided how to begin. She stared at her daughter for one terrible silence. Then she whispered gustily, “Pu-! Pu-!” Suddenly she screamed, “Puta, puta, puta! You whore! You whore! She lifted the stave in both hands and brought it down on Maruca’s back. Maruca dropped to her knees from the blow. María kept screaming and striking. “You bitch! You filthy-dirty-bitch” She punctuated each curse with a thudding blow on head, shoulders, back.47

Guálinto watches on as a silent witness. Clearly, Maruca receives each physical blow but as Guálinto watches the scene of violence becomes but another trigger and traumatic stressor for Guálinto. He looks on and “The blows stunned him as if they were pounding on his flesh.”48 He physically attempts to steady himself overcome with nausea and confusion. His sister depicted here as a cowering animal, suffers through her mother’s blows. María strikes her pregnant daughter disciplining her with brutal violence for her sexual transgression. She does however initially appear hard-pressed to discursively construct her daughter in misogynistic terms. María is momentarily immobilized and transfixed. However, she eventually capitulates and disparagingly indict her as “puta, puta puta!”49 She calls Maruca

47 Ibid., 224.
48 Ibid., 224.
49 Ibid., 224.
the epithets used to evoke shame and censure for women who violate the norms of the virgin/whore dichotomy, norms that serve as the central litmus test of idealized womanhood. Maruca is castigated for having reproductive control of her own body, a body that is subject to policing through discursive categories, gendered boundaries and in and through political and cultural borders.

Fittingly, her mother beats her with a rod, a symbolic phallic reminder that patriarchal notions of morality, decency, and familial and cultural loyalty will forever marginalize her and regulate both her gender and her fate. It is not hard to believe that at the close of the novel Maruca flees the Rio Grande Valley. Beat by her own mother Maruca has broken the moral codes assigned to her by Mexico-Texan masculinity. It is not only her life at stake but the life within her as well and therein lies the inheritability of her wounding. Border trauma as experienced by Maruca means that both her home and the wider Mexican American cultural context ascribes to patriarchal violence and for this reason she must flee. For Mexican-American women this means that the borderlands offer little to no space that is free from disciplinary violence. This scene radically departs from Remigio and Guálinto’s encounters with racial injury because Maruca’s body is physically imbricated even within the boundaries of her own home in ways that the men’s bodies are not. Her body is physically beaten. She is isolated and put into hiding and when she showed her face it “was white and haggard and her eyes were red from crying.”50 This goes beyond inheriting or introjecting a symbolic loss she is physically disciplined for violating gender norms in addition to being subjected to the radical change and cultural loss accompanying Anglo domination throughout the region.

50 Ibid., 228.
BORDER TRAUMA: WOUNDING THAT RESISTS REPRESSION

And yet, while their cultural loss affects the women distinctly, Guálinto’s loss is also bound to gendered modes of division. At the moment of his birth Guálinto is no longer a part of the masculinized landscape of the old ranchero days.\(^\text{51}\) One could even say that he never was. He was literally birthed into a new socio-cultural reality. His exclusion from his father Gumersindo and uncle Feliciano’s generation is also marked by his educational experience in the American classroom, and by how he seeks comfort and respite in the domestic sphere. In line with other modernist works whose narratives offer ambiguous endings, Paredes closes his novel with Guálinto as an assimilated self-loathing subject. The novel ends in an overall gloomy and un-resolved way. Much like Remigo, Guálinto must fashion his own hyper-masculinized role without the guidance of his father. The foreboding sense that Paredes leaves readers with has everything to do with the fact that Guálinto has broken away from his people, and with the fact that he has aligned himself with the dominant culture. Racial discrimination has helped to author Guálinto’s own self-denigration, teaching him to hate himself.

Paredes makes clear throughout all of his published writing that he was always fully aware of the fact that his elders and the members of his natal community were seen as little more than “abysmal savages.”\(^\text{52}\) In fact, most of Paredes’s written works yoke around the

\(^{51}\) As an interesting aside, Antonio Cuitla’s the main character of Paredes’s novel *The Shadow*, demise is co-articulated with his relegation to the domestic sphere during an intense battle with “susto.” Unable to successfully obtain a complete limpie from the town Curandera because of his unwillingness to adhere to communally maintained practices, Cuitla dies. Cuitla vows that, “He would never sink that low. Sitting around a fire, telling stories passing on to others ignorance and fear. He was above that. See Américo Paredes, *The Shadow* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1998), 80-1.

impulse of indexing the fading practices of great cultural significance to Mexicans on the border and around the social and cultural antagonisms between Anglos and Mexicanos. Paredes hangs on to the image of the Ranchero figure and to the historical memories of that older generation of men, which one could argue, he sees himself fully a part of. He makes it a point to comment on what it means to witness practices, songs, and sayings of another generation slip away. Guálinto is but a novelistic figuration of Paredes’s anxieties and fears.

In fact, the dedication to With His Pistol in his Hand is as follows:

To the memory of my father who rode a raid or two with Catarino Garza:

and to all those men who sat around on summer nights, in the days when there was a chaparral, smoking their cornhusk cigarettes and talking in low gentle voices about violent things: while I listened.\(^{53}\)

Clearly, the generation to which Paredes belonged and the generation that Paredes esteemed is not Guálintos. In the same way, in A Texas-Mexican Cancionero: Folksongs of the Lower Border, Paredes affirms that those of “[his] generation” do not carry “a sense of shame in their old ranchero background.”\(^{54}\) Fittingly, in George Washington Gómez the chaparral’s campfire is no longer existent, and has been transformed and transposed on to the architecture of the front porch. The fixed, built, modern and sturdy architecture of the porch here is read as juxtaposed to the “one-room shack made of mud, sticks, and pieces of lumber” of times passed.\(^{55}\) In a telling scene, one night as Feliciano, Don Pancho and Don Jose talk on the porch, readers are told that Guálinto clandestinely, “eased himself down on the edge of


the porch” to eavesdrop on the exchanges between the men.”56 Paredes notes that in this meeting of men, “The tobacco went around in silence except for the crackling of the corn husk leaf as the men rolled their cigarettes.57 As Guálinto sat on the margins of this space “Gualinto wished he were inside” the house,58 because he was too cowardly to hear the older men speak of “fearsome things.”59 Unlike, Paredes and the men who hold no shame of who they are, Guálinto comes to take on shame and something far worse cowardice and susto.

In fact, it is because of his exposure to those intergenerational stories which he cannot handle hearing, that Guálinto days later is overtaken with a bout of “susto” that Doña Simonita La Ciega, the Curandera, is summoned to heal. This Curandera is “blind but could see things other people could not.”60 Paredes notes that Doña Simonita had to be called and that she ushered in “an air of mystery and danger in the room a mixture of church and doctor’s office.”61 It is not the modern medicine at the hands of an Anglo doctor such as the one summoned to assist at Guálinto’s birth, but a communally respected Curandera who heals Guálinto. During his limpia, “Gualinto felt that he was floating toward Doña Simonita through limitless space. He felt very sleepy and deliciously tired. His body became lighter and lighter except for his eyes.”62 Interestingly, one day while catching ants with one of his friends named Chico Veras, Gúalinto witnesses the murder of Filomeno Menchaca. This however does not send him into fright sickness. We are told that:

56 Ibid., 85.
57 Ibid., 85.
58 Ibid., 86.
59 Ibid., 88.
60 Ibid., 95.
61 Ibid., 98.
62 Ibid., 98.
Gualinto had stood watching it all, his hands tightly clenched around the
the pickets of the fence, his face pressed against them. He wanted to run
when he saw the men walking out but he could not, anymore than he
could take his eyes off the stained carcass sprawled on the woodpile."

Guálinto has witnessed a murder and comes home unsettled but this event does not make him
ill. His mother recognizes his disheveled state and commands: Go into the house, you
coward." This is all to say that Guálinto has witnessed more than enough cross-cultural and
inter-communal violence first-hand, and yet, what makes Guálinto a cowardly figure is that
he is cut off from the generation of older males in the novel.

The cumulative effects of border trauma take their toll on Remigio, Maruca, and
Guálinto distinctly. Each of these subjects negotiate incredible loss. According to David Eng
loss “names what is apprehended by discourses and practices of mourning, melancholia,
sadness, trauma and depression." Recent developments in the clinical study of trauma are
incorporating race cognizant approaches when theorizing the impact of racism and identity
formation. One such attempt at indexing forms of race-based trauma suggests that stressors
or triggers can include: racial harassment, discrimination, micro-aggressions, witnessing
ethniovience, historical or personal memory of racism, institutional racism, or the constant
threat of racial discrimination.

Borrowing from Cheng, Limón reads the source of Guálinto’s wounds as originating in

63 Ibid., 56.
64 Ibid., 54.
65 David L. Eng, and David Kazanjian, eds. Loss: The Politics of Mourning (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 2003), 2.
67 Helms, J E., G Nicholas, and C E. Greene. "Racism and Ethnoviolence as Trauma:
his murdered father’s sociocultural status as a “non-border Mexican who disappoints George.”  

José E. Limón further elaborates, “George’s melancholia is set in motion by his awareness of his father’s sociocultural status, an awareness probably reinforced during his childhood by seeing thousands of poor immigrants entering the area after the Mexican Revolution began in 1910.”

One must look beyond merely labeling Guálinto as an assimilated subject par-excellence, and move beyond simply pathologizing Guálinto’s political choices. Limón asks that readers contemplate Guálinto’s choices alongside an attempt to understand the psychological dynamics that lead to his melancholic introjection.

Departing from Limón, I argue that what has left Guálinto fractured, and indeed traumatized is his overall experience of border trauma. Even if Guálinto’s father had been a Mexico-Texan and not a disparaged fuereño (foreigner) Guálinto would not have been able to sidestep what Limón himself describes as the longstanding U.S. anti-Mexican sentiments or “the toxic residue” of xenophobia.”

Sadly, for Guálinto the act of racial injury that kills his father is not the only lethal encounter at the hands of the Texas Rangers that he is aware of. Witnessing his sister being battered in an act of domestic violence, and navigating a dehumanizing Anglo-centric school system cumulatively impacts his subject formation. In fact, within Paredes’ narrative Guálinto witnesses and lives through more than enough race-based wounding to make him incapable of fulfilling his communal mandate. Intra-familial injury, patrimonial wounding, communal oppression, and Anglo domination abound. He is indeed “haunted” but it is by the acts of anti-Mexican violence which surround him, and which threaten to discipline his behavior at every turn. Multiple discrete catalytic wounds

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69 Ibid., 23.
70 Ibid., 9.
author his trauma. Guálinto’s relationship and knowledge of the trauma of racial violence, particularly his repeated exposure to the systematic abuses of legal authority, unfolds quite distinctly from Remigio or Maruca. Interestingly however, Guálinto exhibits anxiety beyond that of the paradigmatic modern subject despite the fact that he did not witness his father’s lynching first hand. Intrusive thoughts, alterations in cognition, psychological re-experiencing of painful events all register and illustrate his ongoing negotiation with loss. Although spared exposure to his father’s literal death, he nonetheless mourns this loss.

At the beginning of the novel, while Guálinto is still but a baby, Gumersido, Guálinto’s father is fatally brutalized by Texas Rangers. In his final moments alive, Gumersindo attempts to act as a buffer between the real prospective peril of ranger violence and Guálinto’s mediation and full understanding of the structures of race and violence in which he is embedded. It is here that he demands as his dying wish that his son not come to know “hate.” The homonymic play on Guálinto’s last words, “No hate. No hate” his stilted phrases mumbled and pushed passed bruised lips, “My son. Musn’t know. Ever. No hate. No hate” gesture towards the importance and expediency of Gumersindo’s dying request. \(^{71}\) Guálinto is not to be told of how his father’s life was taken. This critical omission makes Guálinto unable to fully interrogate the role of the rangers and the function and impact of white supremacy and state power on his own life. This omission is at the root of Guálinto’s “conflicted psychological condition.” \(^{72}\) For Cheng, reminds us, “There are still deep-seated, intangible, psychical complications for people living within a ruling episteme that privileges

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\(^{72}\) Ibid., 23.
that which they can never be.”

Even, Feliciano who at this point takes on the role of primary guardian of Guálinto laments Gumersindo’s final adjuration. Although Feliciano seems to be concerned more with denying Guálinto the opportunity for revenge, what is clear is that Guálinto’s ignorance about his father’s death does more harm than good. Paredes notes,

Now Feliciano was sorry he had promised such a thing to a dying man. It would be very hard to keep such a terrible truth from this male child. Never to tell him how his father died, never to give him a chance at vengeance. That was a hard task, and it was not fair to the boy either for after all, what were men for but to live and die like men. What would he give to have a son who would avenge him if some day he were at last killed by the rinches.

Here, Gumersindo has strategically positioned himself to externally mimic his son’s psyche, through his attempt at shielding his son from the truth. This attempt to dissolve his son’s direct confrontation with racist violence and protect Guálinto from being overwhelmed by the pain exacted by racial terror is futile. Paredes here indirectly underscores the inheritable quality of racial wounding. In the case of Gumersindo and Guálinto, it is not that the trauma of murder or lynching at the hands of the Texas Rangers is so aberrant, and so anomalous that it fundamentally breaches the wounded person’s capacity to fully register the wound but it is because it is in fact longstanding, quotidian, and ubiquitous and has the capacity to recruit Guálinto into patterns of hate and retaliatory violence that Gumersindo attempts to

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sever a historical account of his death in order to terminate trauma’s transmissibility. And yet, like an old wound that scars the body, Paredes suggests that historical violence of this kind and scale resists repression and makes itself known both in the psyches of the border subject and within the cultural body. After a rupture in narrative time Guálinto becomes complicit with the matrix of power operatives modernizing the borderlands and turns against his own. Guálinto acts out in unison with operatives of racial power. Ultimately, he becomes an agent of border trauma himself. Because Guálinto has inherited a great loss, he has come to “know hate.” His assimilation becomes a vehicle for managing some of his own border trauma. Put another way, participating in border surveillance offers him a way to institutionalize his denial of racialized trauma. He is unable to participate in any ethnic based challenges to the status quo because this would force him to recognize and deal squarely with his own racial wounding. Precisely, for this reason a visit to Doña Simonita the Curandera as an adult would have been therapeutically in order. Unfortunately, by the time Gúalinto assimilates into George, he wants nothing more than to, “get rid of [all] Mexican Greaser attitudes.”  

Sadly, his experience of border trauma has led him to shut out tradition entirely, precluding himself from access to traditional healers altogether.

In much the same way that the sound of canon fire jolts the family upon arriving into Jonesville, so too does the past reverberate and disquiet Guálinto towards the end of the novel. Guálinto’s dreamscapes reveal the subconscious turmoil produced at the cross-section of his Mexico-Texan identity and the complex overlapping cultural histories he struggles to reconcile. In fact, readers learn that the transmission of the trauma of violence has not been cut off. That Guálinto should continuously have the same “mother-loving dream” whereby he

75 Ibid., 300.
reconstitutes himself into a scene at the battle of San Jacinto, and re-narrates the battle so that Santa Anna is immediately lynched and therefore unable to sign the Treaty of Velasco exposes the cultural wounds, which no dying request by Gumersindo can circumvent.\textsuperscript{76}

While much has been written about this scene, it is important to do so with an understanding that Guálinto is suffering from clear-cut border trauma. His is a loss that supersedes melancholic mourning set in motion by any relationship to his father. Guálinto, “always woke with a feeling of irritation. Why? he would ask himself. Why do I keep doing this? Why do I keep on fighting battles that were won and lost a long time ago? Lost by me and won by me too? They have no meaning now.”\textsuperscript{77} Guálinto who now goes by the name George, who by the end of this narrative appears to have all but completely assimilated, marries the daughter of a Texas Ranger, and takes work as an agent of counterintelligence for border security and is described as ending up with little more than a “feeling of emptiness [and] of futility.”\textsuperscript{78} Unable to reconcile or to forget his inherited histories of loss, and his experiences with racial terror, he has instead forgotten his communal mandate. Indeed it is not solely his dad’s lethal encounter with the rangers but an ongoing process of historical re-membering of Mexican American culturally significant losses that has psychologically overwhelmed Guálinto.

It is for this reason that \textit{George Washington Gómez} exemplifies theorist Cathy Caruth’s notion regarding trauma and history. According to Caruth, “History like trauma is never simply one’s own, history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other’s

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 281.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 282.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 282.
Remigio, Maruca, and Guálintro embody the varied nature of border experience and the manifold catalysts that potentially trigger border trauma. Guálintro’s dream sequence becomes the only means by which Paredes symbolically returns Guálintro to his history, and Mexican American cultural identity which at the end of the novel he has clearly turned away from. Indeed, Remigio relives his personal nightmare while awake and Guálintro is brought into a communal historical nightmare while asleep. Guálintro’s reoccurring nightmare is perhaps what makes his political vantage point at the end of novel cohere. While he is saved from being a voyeur to the murder of his father he remains embedded in longstanding structures of patriarchal violence and white supremacy, which stretch beyond the loss of his father. It is because he has witnessed Maruca’s violation at the hands of their mother and has been exposed to a history of patriarchial violence that Guálintro’s melancholic assimilation and border trauma is inevitable. Through Guálintro, Paredes explores what it would mean for a Mexico-Texan to stake out a new trail- to not know hate. Through Remigio, Paredes shows how the performance of a violent Mexico-Texan masculinity does not mitigate the effects of border trauma. Through Maruca Paredes reveals the gendered contours of border trauma. Most notably, for women in the borderlands there is neither sanctuary nor any allies with whom they can begin to interrogate or deconstruct patriarchy. Maruca is wounded physically and verbally, and castigated by her own family for her infractions.

In each case understanding these characters, requires accepting the notion that trauma may be transitively transmitted in and through communal memory and raced and gendered bodily experience. Unsurprisingly, Guálintro, and Maruca have no choice but to sever their connection to their family. Guálintro experiences the trauma of violence by witnessing

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Maruca’s disciplining just as Remigio does by witnessing his father’s murder. This re-engagement with loss in either case poses an injunction. In the case of Remigio he is called to engage in retaliatory mob violence and in contrast, for Guálinto his perpetual nightmare, actuates the memory of violence and perpetuates the disordered turbulent reality we can easily imagine will come as a result of his increased distancing from his family, severance from his natal community, and his abandonment of any cultural allegiance to his people. As readers exit the narrative Maruca remains little more than a modern Malinche figure, a woman who has betrayed her community by transgressing Mexico-Texan patriarchal and cultural codes. The phenomenology of border trauma is gleaned through Remigio, Maruca, Guálinto, and even when its disruptive psychological effects go unrecognized or are efficiently sublimated the ongoing effects make themselves known. They each carry affective burdens that are not entirely their own. Through such a reading of Guálinto we are in a better position to critically re-appraise With His Pistol in His Hand in general and Paredes’ fondness with Gregorio Cortez in particular, and to think about how Gregorio is a composite of all of the characters heretofore discussed. In the same way that we are urged to think about the ways the fate of Gregorio Cortez cannot be separated from the fate of the community Gualinto’s story offers up a similar communal warning about the damages incurred through border trauma and the ways we pass this wounding along.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ramon Saldivar, Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 36.
“Del Otro Lado,” a narrative poem written by Gloria Anzaldúa in 1986, tells in brief a subaltern history that resonates with many people of Mexican origin. In a move recognizable to many Chicanas/os she begins her poem with the ruinous arrival of the Spanish, underscoring the sheer devastation that ensued because of European contact and colonial rule. In five lines, she condenses three hundred twenty-seven years of violence, by describing the destruction of the Aztec empire alongside the brutal colonization and enslavement of Mesoamericans by the Spanish empire. She goes on to describe and

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1 Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa Papers, Benson Latin American Collection University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas Austin.
poetically inscribe the birth of the Mexican race, which has been struck-through and re-written with the racial specification as the “meztizo” race, underscoring the violence imposed on the Mexican body by the “hatchet.” The “hatchet” here metonymically represents international treaty law, namely the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Indeed, violently wounded, the land here personified as a gendered and racialized body-bleeds. Ultimately, Anzaldúa ends this stanza with her most powerful trope—that of la herida abierta.²

Instead of obscuring the continuities of the colonial past it is important to be aware of the incompleteness of colonial projects. The effects of colonialism remain unfinished and so too are the mechanisms people of Mexican origin have fashioned to confront and heal from its effects. For these reasons, this chapter begins by invoking a portion of one of Anzaldúa’s incomplete drafts. This stanza clearly indexes processes of revision, rethinking, clarification, construction and belated return—concepts that are central to understanding post-Movement writing. In addition, it presents the open wound or herida abierta directly linked to colonialism and to coloniality.³ Most importantly, it theoretically and philosophically highlights that which is unfinished and incomplete. Focusing upon the way in which this iteration of Anzaldúa’s stanza forestalls a sense of completion, I center that incompleteness

² Herida abierta means open wound. It is a critical paradigm in Chicana/o Studies, which Anzaldúa developed and deploys to refer to the borderlands themselves and to life in the borderlands. Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 25.
³ In “ON THE COLONIALITY OF BEING: Contributions to the development of a concept,” Maldonado Torres assert, “Coloniality is different from colonialism Coloniality is not simply the aftermath or residual form of any given colonial relation. Coloniality emerges in a particular socio-historical setting, that of the discovery of and conquest of the Americas. For it was the context of this massive colonial enterprise, the more widespread and ambitious in the history of humankind yet, that capitalism, an already existing form of economic relation, became tied with forms of domination and subordination that were central to maintaining colonial control first in the Americas, then elsewhere.” See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “ON THE COLONIALITY OF BEING: Contributions to the development of a concept,” Cultural Studies, 21:2. (May 2007): 243.
in the service of my aim: to embrace the notion of situated knowledge production and by doing so underscore that knowledge production is never value free, ahistorical, or constructed in a vacuum. It is in fact culturally constructed, reproduced, and situated. Anzaldúa’s oeuvre draws attention to what Aníbal Quijano refers to as “coloniality” or colonialism’s legacies or far-reaching incomplete effects. More specifically the oppressive systems of power (epistemic, racial, economic) initiated during colonialism remain operative and these modes of power manifest in ways unforeseen.

In the same way that national and territorial boundaries are unfinished and are constructed and reconfigured through a variety of negotiations in “Del Otro Lado,” the landscape of Mexican American literature as a whole has changed. The literary landscape has shifted since the Chicana/o Nationalist Movement because of the continued impulse to address inequality—a drive that remained long after the end of the movement itself. The literary landscape also continues to change because of the tremendous work of recovery projects that keep the parameters of the Mexican American and/or Chicana/o literary archive bi-directional and elastic.4 Recovered works, such as the George Washington Gómez discussed in the previous chapter, and works by a new cadre of Chicana/o writers continue to complicate how and what we come to define as Mexican American literature, and/or Chicana/o literature. Yet, despite the unique ways the archive expands, we must continue to ask: what unites the three separate sections of the Mexican American archive? What binds written works by writers of Mexican origin in the U.S. writing before El Movimiento, during the Chicano Movement, and in the post-Movement era? How does one make sense of the

ongoing metaphors surrounding colonial trauma and healing circulating within and across the archive?

One particular written work, which has already enabled us to answer these questions, and continues to capture and inspire critical attention is inarguably Anzaldúa’s 1987, *Borderlands: La Frontera the New Mestiza*. This written work’s attentiveness to the ways we wound, and the ways we heal shores up its enduring importance and capacity to command attention across many disciplinary fields of scholarship. Anzaldúa’s critical concept of *la herida abierta* centered on geographies of memory, pain, and home singularly altered Mexican American literature and theory by making previously unaccounted for trauma legible. The paradigmatic shifts ushered in by Anzaldúa opened up the discursive space to explore experiences and dynamics of power largely unaddressed during *El Movimiento*—namely the experiences of Chicanas in general and queer Chicanas/os in particular.

Much like Anzaldúa, Chicano writer Manuel Muñoz charts a similar geography of wounding using his own distinct coordinates of pain and home. Like Anzaldúa, Muñoz maps a critical imaginary, which re-deploys the trope of *la herida abierta* as the basis for narrating the complex dimensions of trauma and healing shaping the dynamics of *el barrio, la familia*, and *el cuerpo herido*. Just as Américo Paredes’s early twentieth century writings imagine the shared ways Mexico-Texans transmit wounds and affective burdens across generations, Manuel Muñoz’s collections of short stories written more than half a century later, similarly show how pain, and our palliative attempts to self-heal continue to bind and transform both individuals, and entire communities. Paredes, Anzaldúa, and Muñoz are writers whose works are representative of different historical periods and because of this implicate distinct cultural

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5 Manuel Muñoz employs Anzaldúa’s metaphor to describe the dynamics shaping the neighborhood, the family, and the wounded body.
and political contexts in their written works. They each engage what we now (thanks to Anzaldúa) understand as la *herida abierta*. Muñoz’s work is central to understanding the invocation of wounding, and healing in the post-Movement Chicana/o canon precisely because it suggests that our connections to each other fuse in direct proportion and through our attention, to our respective *heridas*. Furthermore, it is this attention to the *herida abierta*, in its numerous manifestations, that binds together the Mexican American literary canon.

Muñoz’s prose distinctly characterizes both post-Movement and post-Borderlands writing by providing a new cartographic understanding of the borderlands. His updated mapping imagines the borderlands beyond the treaty made “fence across [Mexico’s] body” that Anzaldúa described. Muñoz aestheticizes the wound and in doing so transposes it beyond the U.S./Mexican border to include the central California valley region. His narrative cartography renders the complexities of a U.S. Chicana/o community, the importance of critical relationality, and an awareness of our interdependence as a crucial required component for the healing of one’s own trauma. Put another way, while Paredes allows us to think through trauma as generational, and Anzaldúa maps the gendered and heteropatriarchial contours of our wounds and situates them at the border, Muñoz’s work shows us how this wound not only remains, but also transposes across space and time.

This chapter grounds its discussion of the archive, trauma, healing and home using short stories from two collections by Manuel Muñoz’s: *Zigzagger* (2003) and *The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue* (2007). To show how the paradigm of *la herida abierta* operates within Muñoz’s short stories, both in terms of mapping alternative geographic coordinates for the borderlands, and in terms of how he maps queer masculinity, and sexuality on to race. Indeed the Mexican American literary archive (pre-Movement, Movement, and post-
Movement) is networked by trauma, and healing. Writers throughout the canon have been in trans-generational conversation surrounding the inimical experience of coloniality. Representations of wounding and healing bind their written works and express how and in what ways we self-heal. By placing Manuel Muñoz in relationship to other key Mexican American literary forerunners, this chapter charts out some of the major shifts in the archive.

NETWORKS OF TRAUMA AND HEALING

In *The Networked Wilderness: Communicating in Early New England*, Matt Cohen explores indigenous communication systems and investigates processes of information exchange amongst New England settlers, and Algonquian Natives. Cohen exposes how struggles over information technology constituted settler/native interactions. Cohen’s basic unit of analysis is a “publication event,” that is tantamount to historical evidence of events taken as “embodied acts of information exchange.” Cohen goes on to note, “The [publication] event is also constituted by its retransmissions subsequent to the original publication moment, some anticipated by the participants and some beyond their control.” In this sense, Cohen locates various multimedial, aural, and inscribed communicative technologies such as books, trails, songs, medicinal practices, and wampum as distinct instantiations existing on the same communicative continuum. Drawing from Cohen then, Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, is a publication event functioning alongside several others that collectively networked to form a canon. A distinguishing feature of said canon is that it specifically invokes Curanderismo repeatedly as a technology to address wounding and

7 Ibid., 7.
healing. Cohen describes technology thusly, “Any socially agreed-on mechanism for producing interpretations of the world that can circulate relatively intact is understood to be a technology, including languages, policies, machines, books, wampum, or medical practices.”

Contemporary media studies and critical theory addressing the network as a form offer a distinct way of extending understandings of the Chicana/o archive. In theorizing networks as “specific technologies of power,” Alexander R. Galloway points not only to the various architectonics across divergent networks but also to the differences in values and motivations across such systems. Galloway writes:

> There are many kinds of networks; they are not internally simple nor globally uniform. Some networks are rigid and hierarchical while others are flexible and resist hierarchy…one network form might be in conflict with another, and indeed, might be specifically derived to exploit or disrupt other network forms.  

Here, the concept of the network serves as an allegorical index for understanding the ever-changing discursive nexus we call Chicana/o literature. The written works of individual authors such as Anzaldúa and Muñoz signify linked technologies and processes, individual texts that are intertextually linked, or linked in their topicality as discrete nodal points, or “publication events,” within a literary network. This network continuously re-imagines wounding and healing, works to thwart hegemonic imperatives aimed at subordinating Chicana/o subjects, and reaches out across multiple spatio-temporal directions. This is all to

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8 Ibid., 9.
say, the works of Anzaldúa and Muñoz, Martinus de La Cruz and Juan Badiano, Rudolfo Anaya, and Américo Paredes are only some of the “publication events” which belong to a larger network of writing that to varying degrees is inspired and animated by the notion that Curanderismo can be used to heal trauma. “Publication events” are not limited to literature. They can include dances, songs, rituals, and various types of inscriptive representational practices (semasiographic, sculptural, digital etc.).

**Broken Promises of Home**

Anzaldúa and Muñoz point out and represent the experiences that remained barred from the Chicana/o literary imaginary. To think of them in tandem, immediately brings the forerunners John Rechy and Cherríe Moraga to mind. Rechy and Moraga’s writing cleared the literary terrain for Anzaldúa and Muñoz and while the powerful written works emerging at the time of the Movement passionately agitated for the self-determination, political empowerment, and cultural integrity of Chicana/os by revolutionary voices such as Alurista, or Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzalez-their heterosexist imperatives left many Chicanas/os outside of the movement. *City of Night*, and Moraga’s 1983 collection of prose/poetry *Loving in the War Years*, accounted for ideals and experiences entirely distinct from those espoused by Chicano nationalism, by addressing the homophobia and sexism that so characterized the Chicano Movement. In *Queer Aztlán: The Reformation of Chicano Tribe*, Moraga underscores the communal importance of queer Chicanas/os in “healing those fissures that have divided us as a people.”

She notes that, “…lesbians and gay men have a significant

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spiritual, cultural, and political role within the Chicano community...[as] activistas, académicos y parteras y políticos, curanderas y campesinos.”

More specifically, *City of Night*, narrates the experiences of a tormented Chicano traveling throughout the U.S. As a novel, this text can without a doubt, be considered its own nodal point or “publication event” within the network of trauma and healing charted by twentieth century Chicana/o writers. This gothic tale is full of wounding loss, abuse, exclusion, trafficking, and substance abuse and anticipates the kinds of texts that emerge well after the movement. In it Rechy successfully depicts his troubled youth and the street world he inhabits by allowing his readers to, “face- its unique turbulence, unique beauty,...and...unique ugliness.”

For the central protagonist, there is no home, and there is no possibility for healing. *City of Night*, is a narrative so far removed from the ideals of *El Movimiento* that its topicality and raw exploration of torment and suffering places this work off the map. Its coordinates are somewhere extremely peripheral to the Chicano literary canon, or to borrow from Rechy, his work and his characters were understood as--“rejected: exiled exiles.” And yet, without his work, our ability to understand the contemporary canon alters radically because Rechy was the first to trouble the commonplace notion of home and the comforts it evokes. If for Rechy, there is no home and there is no healing in 1963, for Anzaldúa there is a home but it is, “this thin edge of barbwire” a place of terror and exclusion. By extension for Muñoz, there is never a question if the characters he creates in his collections feel a sense of being at home.

11 Ibid.
13 Ibid., vii.
His characters are central figures to every household, and to the larger community but for Muñoz home is a place of broken promises, as well as a site where healing may begin.

In *Zigzagger* and *The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue*, Manuel Muñoz provides a rendering of contemporary quotidian life in the California valley region. The localized space that Muñoz constructs as the contemporary setting of his collection of narratives is a borderlands that abrasively abuts the Silicon Valley. Recognized by its information technology hubs this geographic site is profitable and contrasts highly with, and impinges upon, the communal landscape making up *The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue*. What Muñoz is able to successfully conjure in this spatial imaginary is a place that is highly resonant with Anzaldúa’s localized description, “…of where the first world grates against the third and bleeds.”

Muñoz, writing from a period of rapid destabilization and accelerated globalization is able to render a new localized and transposed mapping of the borderlands for his readership. Similar to Anzaldúa’s prior description of the U.S./Mexico borderlands as *la herida abierta*, the relation between geography and self, and wounding and healing are exposed and simultaneously produce an intimate and nuanced understanding of what “home” means for each of Muñoz’s characters. In fact, Muñoz is in metaphoric conversation with Anzaldúa by extending the cartography of the wound.

By providing raw, intimate accounts of interpersonal wounding, he disrupts the code of silence within and between Chicanas/os. Refusing to focus exclusively on racial alterity, Muñoz points our attention instead to the interstices—to the intersection where loss, gender, sexuality, death, and pain conjoin. Collectively, these stories expose the ways the trope of *la herida abierta* continues to shape Chicana/o literature. He presents the wounds of his

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protagonists, but also, sheds light on how such an open exposure of one’s suffering can open up unforeseen paths towards healing. This route toward healing appears through radical compassion, acceptance of difference, and an acknowledgement that identity is constituted by irreducible intersectionality and recognizing this as a means of forging, recognizing and strengthening inter-subjective and communal ties. Like Anzaldúa, and other Chicana/o writers his narrative is about those painful terrains characterized by loss and what it means to negotiate one’s tenuous relationship to a larger community.

Muñoz plays with ambiguity throughout each one of his stories. He does so by only offering his readers unresolved endings and denying narrative closure. He leaves readers ensnared by the wounds his characters confront and resolve. He points, and suspends the reader’s narrative gaze directly at moments of raw trauma and wounding and this subtly poses a community oriented call for lamentation. By doing this, he shows trauma’s communal dimension by showing how the trauma of one affects all. Each character is at some point forced to come to terms with their own sense of trauma and often times more importantly with the ways in which one’s own wounding is bound to that of an other’s. He constructs this by interweaving and dispersing characters amongst each of the separate stories. Muñoz’s call for lamentation and healing then, is a communal call. Above all, each of his stories both return to and foreground distinct herida abiertas.

In Zigzagger (2003) Muñoz debuts twenty-three short stories detailing life in California’s central valley and much like Rechy who decades prior artistically conveyed the

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dark and gritty worlds of Texas, New Orleans, Chicago, New York and Los Angeles Muñoz clearly conveys the isolation and pain of the California borderlands. Each one of his stories imagines how loneliness and isolation affects his highly differentiated characters. In one particularly insightful piece, Muñoz examines the acerbic experiences of minors forced to temporarily live outside of the supervision of their biological parents at an isolated and seasonally abandoned agricultural labor camp. In this narrative, the labor camp is a desolate site, which routinely comes into use outside of Bakersfield, California. By narrating a day in the life of a queer teenager turned surrogate caretaker, Muñoz unveils and wrestles with the precarious socio-cultural and legal dislocation and desperation of immigrant and migrant laborers in the United States. His story makes palpable the incredible obstacles faced by migrant laborer families in the U.S. He provides readers with an inside look at a world not often seen, and he does so through the poetics of the Chicana/o literary imaginary.

Muñoz’ short story entitled “Campo” invites us to briefly observe what the lives of youth and children residing at the labor camp are like. He offers a textual space where he makes legible the human costs paid by immigrant and migrant laborers in a society that too often relegate these costs to the unseen. This short story fictively imagines albeit an uncomfortable site where readers can come to know what it means to see through the eyes of members of migrant laborer communities, thereby opening the discursive space to explore the undeniable power differentials and traumatic diasporic realities of Latinos living and working in the U.S. in fictionalized form.¹⁷ Through this narrative, the opportunity to make critical assessments of the impact of the law on the lives of migrant communities and to grapple with what Anzaldúa referred to as the “intimate terrorism” of life in the borderlands

¹⁷ Other notable authors within the archive that highlight the struggles of Raza laborers include but are not limited to: Tomás Rivera, Helena Maria Viramontes, and Rudolfo Anaya.
and the complex place Latino youth figure within the neoliberal circuits of labor becomes accessible.\footnote{Gloria Anzaldúa, \textit{Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza} (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 42.}

The young teenage boy assigned to serve as communal caretaker, supervises the children of migrant laborers as they are away conducting farm work. The unnamed teenage boy, who for unclear reasons is unable to work in the fields alongside the adults, tires under the huge responsibility of his assigned task. Unable to sleep at night he rests, staring up at the stars through the holes in the roof of his shack worrying about his duties as caretaker, and contemplating his limited freedom. As the narrative unfolds, townswomen notify city officials about the unkempt minors and, “Campo” ends with an encounter between an unnamed immigrant youth serving as temporary guardian of the group of fifteen children and a member of law enforcement. In this final tragically evocative scene the officer is sent by the state to investigate what readers can logically infer is a case of child neglect, child endangerment, or undocumented immigrant detention just as an unexpected stranger arrives and attempts to intervene and negotiate the fate of the teenage boy and by extension the fate of all of the children in his care.

A set of small cabins located in an abandoned orchard outside of a town serves as the setting to Muñoz’s story. These living quarters are on the extreme margins, beyond the external perimeter of the town. The camp is a multi-faceted space. It serves as a place of refuge to workers and their children by providing temporary shelter free of charge, but it is also a site policed by authorities. Muñoz reveals that the mayor himself frequently visited the grounds and “arrested workers who tried to live there free of charge.”\footnote{Manuel Muñoz, \textit{Faith Healer}, 52.} Inhabited only in
accordance to the seasonal labor activity and agricultural needs of the region, the camp is for the most part desolate. Readers learn that, “It was only at the beginning of summer that the labor camp-off an even more vague strip of road than the one that began to falter after the county courthouse-was started up again.”20 The spatial coordinates of the temporary labor camp abut the main town and reveal the stark contrast in living conditions between settled (here read as more economically privileged stationary town residents), poor agricultural workers (who can afford meager housing), and hopelessly poor migrant laborers who have no place within the boundaries of the town to occupy. Through his narration, Muñoz provides a glimpse at the concrete abject living conditions of the U.S. labor camp, always embedded but often obscured within a global context that demands cheap labor-intensive farm work at the hands of immigrant and migrant laborers. In this context, minors sit on the bottom rung of this stratified framework of economic power. Here Muñoz’s narrative gestures towards the dire ongoing circumstances involving migrant children in the world outside of the text. Conditions which prompted President Obama on Monday June 30, 2014, to appeal to congress for two billion dollars, “to address the flows of tens of thousands of unaccompanied minor children arriving at the U.S/Mexico border.”21

Muñoz describes the town, which borders the camp as a “… place for wide open-porched houses, white wood painted just this past spring.”22 The immigrant and migrant laborers are always already spatially, temporally, and socially dislocated from the core of the town and from the confines of said porches. This is what enables their invisibility. The

20 Ibid., 52.
22 Manuel Muñoz, Faith Healer, 51.
architectural landscape within this narrative invites readers to question the relationships, which work to constitute core and periphery, economically powerful and powerless, and the attendant asymmetrical relations based on inclusion and exclusion, which operate within Muñoz’s fictional reality. A cursory assessment of the living conditions of real life laborers reveals that such relationships are evident in real time and space. Furthermore, Muñoz notes the following:

The workers, though, do not live close to downtown. Past the county courthouse, with its palm-lined lawn and arc of black gate, the main road continues and then blanches away to a crumbling thinner passage...Past these structures away from the sight of the rest of the town is the workers’ neighborhood.23

Readers learn that even further still, beyond the workers “crumbling” neighborhood and diametrically juxtaposed to the neatly manicured “gated” architecture of downtown, in the unseen outskirts of the town, live the migrant and immigrant laborers. Spatial proximity to the core of the town in this narrative then, indicates socio-economic status. As Juan Vicente Palerm notes in his study of migrant and immigrant laborers in the Santa Maria Valley, “The vast majority of these workers, 90 percent are foreign born; most come from Mexico.”24 In Muñoz’s story the migrant workers comprise a mobile stream that cannot be bound or corralled within the perimeters of the, “wide open-porched houses” making up the core of the town. One can assume that the laborers must travel in accordance with the fluctuating demands of employment and can rarely afford the fiscal means required to attain and

23 Ibid, 52.
maintain fixed residential housing of this sort. It is for this, and many other reasons that Muñoz’s migrant laborers have no choice than to live unseen and “hidden from view” in the labor camp. Muñoz’s artistic production not only unveils the presence of the laborers and their children, but also highlights the mobile identities and migratory flux required to operate within the present global economy. Muñoz’s story “Campo,” signals and transmits valuable insight to readers regarding the diasporic nature of workers and the living conditions of the laborers temporarily residing in U.S. labor camps. The living conditions presented in Muñoz’s story mirror the conditions in several labor camps making up the U.S. agroindustry. More often than not, such as in the story, “Campo” home is a place that is characterized by a lack of electricity, no running water, extreme isolation, and limited possibilities for sustained and continued employment. To be home, offers no promise of comfort, stability, or security.

The fixed sturdy architecture of the town porches, and even clearer still, that of the county courthouse make manifest the ossified powerful legal parameters aimed at protecting town residents. As Muñoz narrates, it becomes clear that the agricultural workers, and immigrant and migrant laborers are often located outside the reach of such protections. The experiences of Muñoz’s characters are highly stratified and differentially positioned according to gender, linguistic capacity, national identity, and socio-economic status. As a post-Movement writer, Muñoz resists renderings that essentialize identity. However, the hybrid identities of his characters do little to protect them from the inequality they encounter. Munoz’s representations convey the precariousness of youth within immigrant and migrant laborer communities in the U.S. In addition, they flesh out a new dimension of Anzaldúa’s *herida abierta*. Here, Anzaldúa’s well-known description of the borderlands located at the

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U.S./Mexican Border is re-worked. However, that herida remains.²⁶ Anzaldúa mapped out a vague and undetermined place created by unnatural boundaries in Borderlands, and Muñoz transposes and fictively re-imagines this place along new geographic coordinates.²⁷ In Munoz’s text the “1,950 mile long open wound” that Anzaldúa theorized reaches farther and exists beyond the U.S./Mexico divide.²⁸ In the post-Movement period, that herida is as mobile as the bodies of Mexican origin excluded from the life of white picket fences and culturally split by the U.S. border’s fence rods.²⁹

The conflict in this story begins to unfold when a woman sees the young man passing through the town. The affluent women of the town sit around the porch and discuss seeing the teenager with his unruly trail of children. The young man who remains unnamed throughout Muñoz’s entire story in Anzaldúan lexicon is an, Atravesado. In her border epistemology, Anzaldúa posits that Atravesados are those who reside between geographical borders, and/or must learn to cross, rigid, and oppressive normative boundaries. She notes: “Los atravesados live here: the squint eyed, the perverse, the queer, the half-breed, the half dead; in short those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal.’”³⁰

A particular scene where the central character ventures into town provides insight into the consequences of such crossings. By leaving the temporary labor campsite to purchase food for the children in his care, a concerned member of the community sees Muñoz’s main character and he is therefore, “caught” in the act of border crossing. It is for this reason that

²⁶ The wound.
²⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 25.
²⁸ Ibid., 24.
²⁹ Ibid.
³⁰ Ibid.
the, “…length of porch talk turns to the barefoot children.\textsuperscript{31} Shock, concern, and anger immediately overwhelm the townswomen. Seeing the barefoot and barebacked children under the guardianship of Muñoz’s queer teenage central protagonist drives them to take legal action and alert the law. In the women’s eyes the youth’s presence in town space alone merits trial before the law. The young man’s physical body contradicts their expectations of a normative maternal body and the children’s unsightliness indexes uneven racialized economic relations that the town’s women prefer to remain hidden from view. Here, the porch and the courthouse function as coterminous spaces, where the town’s women discursively and juridically mediate the welfare and future of the youth residing at the labor camp. They serve as sites of litigation that will determine the minors’ in question, legal status. The women convene and decide whether, or not the youth is criminally negligent or eligible for some sort of provisional remedy. While Muñoz offers no resolute conclusion what is clear is that border crossing continues to be interpreted as an affront to the established social order whether it take place at the U.S./Mexican border as Anzaldúa described or the transposed heterosexist and economically fomented borders re-imagined by Muñoz.

Further authenticating him as an \textit{atravesado} the young man accompanied by his trail of barefoot children stops to look longingly at a dress in the town’s craft store window. Interestingly, the extreme socio-economic inequality he must negotiate on a daily basis does nothing to hinder his momentary interpellation as a consumer. Muñoz notes that “At the sewing store, as they wait for a light, the boy ignores the traffic and stares at the white dress with the poppies, flowers he recalls seeing outside of Bakersfield on the way north.”\textsuperscript{32} In this scene, Muñoz’s character momentarily escapes his duties as caretaker, no longer mindful of

\textsuperscript{31} Manuel Muñoz, \textit{Faith Healer}, 55.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 55.
whether the children in his custody run out into traffic or not. A vibrantly alluring textile he sees in the retail window, but which he has no financial means to attain has hailed Muñoz’s young subject. Gender codes dictate that only the townswomen, “… like to visit the sewing–and-crafts store” and that only “…the women in town stop to admire the white almost sheer cloth, the brilliant, delicately small orange poppies that pepper the fabric.”

This scene can be read as yet another border crossing. In this moment the young man commits a two-fold crossing of herteronormative gender roles, both by serving as sole caretaker to a group of children and by publically admiring a commodity sought after by only the women in town. Muñoz in this scene gestures towards global capital’s ability to recruit all kinds of subjectivities as laborers and consumers. Here, Muñoz grapples with the question of liminality through his central protagonist, who suspends social conventions by temporarily stopping in front of the craft shop. His status as an unwelcomed and illegitimate inhabitant of the town’s space, doubly marks him as an atrevesado and makes him on this occasion, hyperbolically visible. Visibility for the atrevasado can be lethal. In this case, as in many other instances migrant laborer visibility invites the disciplinary hand of the state. What Muñoz’s work underscores is that the danger of such border crossings can never be taken lightly or overly romanticized, the crossing of various borders (geographical or otherwise) “…is attended by terrible costs of poverty, illness, and abuse” not to mention criminalization. Muñoz’s story exposes how (legal) recognition for the youth of the labor camp is more often than not tantamount to criminalization. It is at this moment where the

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33 Ibid., 51.
young man stops to admire the commodity in the window that a particular passerby decides whether, or not she should take action and contact the legal authorities.

Muñoz dramatizes the predicaments confronted by hybrid subjects in an increasingly globalized world economy. Readers learn that each night with great angst the young man lies awake, “...and remembers the deserts of Arizona, the strange coolness of Washington…” and quietly recounts all the places he has traveled when he too followed the demands of the market.\(^{35}\) His mobile identity is what enables his exhaustion and makes him eligible for exploitation. However, this young man has been deemed unfit to work in the fields. Described as “dangerously thin” and “bent at the waist”\(^{36}\) he shoulders the burden of caring for the camp’s precarious youth. Contrary to popular belief the work required for farm labor is highly specialized and physically demanding. Muñoz leads readers to infer whether, or not his central character is physically disabled or just deemed unfit to work by other means. While the role of ableism in this story remains unclear, what is clear is that his characters have no access to health care. It is for this reason among other reasons that the young boy must constantly ensure that the children in his custody do not over-eat the fruit that abounds in the labor camp. On one level, it is clear that he guards the children’s consumption as a means of safeguarding them from illness. From another angle, Muñoz reveals the complex reality of consumption in a neoliberal context, that is, consumption is sustainable for a select few and off limits for particular bodies.

Moreover, Muñoz makes clear that the gendered boundaries, which regulate the lives of the children in this narrative position the minors of the camp differentially. Each day the young man,

\(^{35}\) Manuel Muñoz, *Faith Healer*, 58.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 53.
wonders if the end of the day will bring the end of his caring for them, if he’ll be allowed to move on as he pleases, because he is older and can care for himself. Of the children, he feels the most pity for the little girls, for they will be held close long after they will want to leave these lives. 

As part of this powerful narrative about the human costs of farm labor Muñoz offers a highly compressed rendering of the hierarchical dimensions of power within a community dependant on the agroindustry. Certainly, women face a distinct profound displacement and the central character though young, can accurately gauge the alternate power differentials the young girls will no doubt encounter. While agricultural labor offers women the ability to become wage earners, wages are low and the cost of housing, and/or the impact of sending remittances trans-nationally leave women with little resources. On the other hand, often times, gendered economies recruit women towards unregulated informal sectors of trade, which place them at higher risk for abuse and exploitation. When women do not participate as full time wage earners, families often designate them to perform the unpaid labor associated with domestic duties to which Muñoz’s character alludes.

Here Muñoz complicates the gendered roles and expectations and shows how both men and women come to play valuable roles as caretakers, by supplying the labor necessary for the duties of child rearing. This labor, however differentiated and vital, is usually unpaid. Often unable to pursue their own volition and tethered to the needs of their family and community women disproportionately lack access to health care, economic resources, and higher education. “Campo” mirrors and exposes the human features of the global world and offers a microcosmic glimpse at the lives of peasant economies and the youth who navigate

\[37 \text{Ibid., 58.}\]
them. The young girls who will more than likely take on the role as caretakers do not have the option of leaving their families and being completely self-determined. Muñoz’s ability to render the dimensions of the herida abierta in a new way, in a way that reconfigures and transposes its dimensions beyond the geographical coordinates of the U.S./Mexican border links his work to that of Anzaldúa, and to some extent Paredes. This creates a network of writers across the archive who are in discursive conversations surrounding the complex experiences of wounding and healing that characterize Mexican American communities. His is a story of the borderlands. As Latin American theorist Alberto Moreiras asserts “…the borderlands have moved northward and within” and for this reason narratives such as Muñoz’s illuminate the reasons why issues concerning immigrant and migrant laborers concern us all.38 We have the power to impact and reconfigure the concrete lived realities of our nation’s most vulnerable laborers and the curious and vulnerable place children figure in U.S. hierarchies of power and Muñoz’s representation opens up a narrative world where we can begin to engage the ethical impact these processes have on human beings.

At the end of the story the town’s women, so bothered by seeing the teenage boy “trespass,” alert authorities and inform them of the presence of the minors living in the, “skinny cabins in the trees.”39 Soon after, authorities arrive at the labor camp. Startled and with no legal recourse, the main character struggles to maintain control of the frightened wards upon the arrival of the law. The children scramble in fear, and cry out in Spanish, struggling to make sense of the encounter. This moment merits lengthy citation:

39 Manuel Muñoz, Faith Healer, 52.
He is calm when the man approaches; he tries to gather the children who are not ill from fruit, wonders whether or not to put out the fire for lunch. The man in the beige uniform says something to him that he cannot understand, and the boy sees that he will not be able to explain, make the man understand that the mothers and fathers will be arriving any day now and wondering, that they all might miss each other as they head back south on the highway, the bordering fields holding the orange poppies.40

The power differentials in this scene are clear-cut. The disciplinary power of the state has the power to decide whether or not the main character has exercised reasonable care of the children and if in fact he is guilty of trespassing. The atravesado cannot respond. In her description of the homophobic terrorism for lesbian Chicanas of the borderlands, Anzaldúa notes that this kind of shock leaves border subjects immobile. She writes about similar when Mestiza women are silenced by shock. She notes that, “Petrified, she can’t respond, her face caught between los intersticios, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits.”41 In total fear and vulnerably unable to respond Muñoz’s youth is questioned by the authorities, and is silent before the law.

The agro-industries effects on its laborers and their extended families are multi-scalar. By linking the boy’s situation with that of the dislocated parents, Muñoz’s readers are able to gauge the local impact global processes of trade have on the individuals who make up the immigrant and migrant labor force and by extension this impact has on entire families and communities. The characters in the story “Campo” are guilty of being brown, young, queer (in the case of the caretaker) and poor. The teenage guardian petrified and linguistically incapable of communicating his situation is unable to articulate what is going on when interrogated by the state. Carlos G. Velez-Ibanez and Anna Sampaio note the following regarding the intersection of capital expansion and agricultural labor:

40 Ibid., 60.
41 Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 42.
The migration, whether international, national, or regional, entails social dislocation, depopulation of local areas, cultural fracturing of the human developmental process, and virtually forced adaptation to new localities. Each of these consequences has severe impacts on the material provisioning of households and on the ability of households to predict the availability of future subsistence requirements so as to create relatively secure social platforms.\footnote{42 Carlos G. Velez-Ibanez and Anna Sampaio, \textit{Transnational Latina/o Communities: Politics, Processes, and Cultures} (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 5.}

The children in Muñoz’s story belong to such fractured households. The exploitation of the human actors involved in this story collectively comprises the fulcrum upon which processes of agricultural neoliberalism rest. The workings of capital have shifted. Global capital now demands more than ever before a hyperbolically increased mobility of labor forces that can traverse numerous boundaries, these differential mobile identities are for the most part Latinos living and working in the U.S. Immigrant and migrant communities remain increasingly diasporically entangled in rapidly proliferating exploitative economic webs. According to the National Center for Farmworker Health, seventy percent of all farm workers were foreign born those from Mexico primarily from west central Mexico (Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán but also from Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Puebla, Morelos and Veracruz) and Central America. The youth in Muñoz’s story are at the mercy of those around them.

In an unexpected twist, a fellow Latino steps in and intervenes by answering the officer’s questions in English and by offering the officer what seems to be either a bribe or proof that he has the monetary means to intervene in the lives of the youth at the camp. Muñoz offers no solid conclusion to his story but the dollar bills the man flashes to authorities suggests that money can interrupt the workings of law. Capital communicates what the young man cannot. Nonetheless, “Campo’s” ending is indeterminate. What is clear
is that a radical act of compassion, by a person with no direct connection to the children of the camp has the capacity to alter the outcome concerning the children at the camp. Readers must then imagine the outcome of this particular encounter because they never find out if queer desire successfully intervened to save these atravesados from the hands of the state. The narrative in fact ends with no airtight resolution, but instead an incomplete understanding of the welfare of the children.

That economic forces have moved the borderland(s) northward and within is now undeniably clear. Neoliberal hegemonic processes of trade, rapidly subvert the immigrant difference, and/or the immigrant imaginary as seen through Muñoz’s story, effectually leaving his characters in dismal conditions. Information concerning the future welfare of the teenage boy, the young children, and the biological parents temporarily pulled away from their children by the demands of labor is unknown. Muñoz story then is a provocation that urges us to think about how ethical ramifications directly linked to contemporary global processes of trade and the local reaches of the law that contour la herida abierta as we know it. We can confirm that,

California’s expanding farm economy is fueled by a healthy and growing worldwide appetite for fresh fruits and vegetables and is integrated by its ability to supply markets year-round because of a benign climate a reliable irrigation infrastructure, and an effective corporate structure.\(^\text{43}\)

Immigrant and migrant laborers have always contributed valuably to the world economy and have yet to secure appropriate provisioning for their persons. This work exposes the

disciplinary power of the state and its ability to control the fate of people vis a vis the law. It reveals the contours of global power and its unquenchable requirement and reliance upon streams of mobile human labor. Fictively imagining mobile, differentiated and hybrid identities without decoupling such identities from the hard economic inequalities, which accompany neoliberal economic processes is a revelatory project. Too often discourses of fragmentation, hybridity, and difference obscure the economy’s capacity to subvert identity to neoliberal imperatives. The economic marginalization seen within the illuminating snap shots of the human conditions Muñoz narrates enables people to think about the consequences of making it criminal to live as an undocumented immigrant or migrant laborer in this country. He grants readers an opportunity to explore unexamined territories of despair in order to examine the dilemmas therein.

TOWARD A NEW CURANDERISMO

The final short story in the collection is titled, “The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue.” It can be understood as the endpoint of the larger collection, or as the final destination on a community map given that each story is about one community. It is clear that Muñoz posits a hopeful call for healing even for what seems like wounds that are irreparable via Curanderismo. The main character of the story is Emilio. He and his father work at a paper plant, and one day an accident at their workplace leaves Emilio wounded. His twenty-one year old body is crushed under “1280 pounds of paper”\textsuperscript{44} the day a pallet of paper he had carelessly wrapped and was moving with a forklift came tumbling down upon him. Disabled, embarrassed, and ashamed Emilio lives from that day forward adjusting to his new infant-

\textsuperscript{44} Manuel Muñoz, The Faith Healer of Olive Avenue (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2007), 216.
like dependency on his father. Muñoz represents disability, urging readers to rethink the abled body, to question the ideological construction of normalcy and to contemplate the complexity of impairment. This opens up larger discussions about how Chicana/o families challenge the ideal of the “perfect body” through questions of the raced body, the queer body, and/or the gendered body. In a desperate attempt at “correcting” his son Emilio’s physical condition, father and son visit a Curandera as their last resort. Like countless Chicana/o writers, Muñoz’s story gestures towards the importance of seeking out and returning to alternative non-Western community sanctioned sites for healing our respected wounds. In this instance, traditional sources of healing from within the Chicana/o cultural frameworks have primacy and remain our final hope. Wheelchair bound, depressed and hopeless Emilio seeks out a Curandera. In encoding the familiar trope of the Curandera into his final story in this collection, Muñoz solidifies his work as a representative of the Chicana/o literary tradition.

Many people question the effectiveness of Curanderismo. Emilio is no different and is initially skeptical about the Curandera, and questions his father’s logic for suggesting he seek one. In a moment, that merits lengthy quotation Muñoz writes that Emilio:

would have dismissed the idea, too, had he not remembered seeing what he had seen: The black bile his father had thrown up for weeks when the witch woman cured him of his alcoholism: an egg swept over the body of a cousin in deep fever, then cracked bloody red into a glass of water; the months of calm, just before his parents divorce, when the curandera ordered his father to strip to the bed of the quilt made by is mother-in
law for their anniversary. He believed in these moments as much as he
did in the fate that had toppled the boxes of paper to put him where he
was; nothing could explain them but nothing could negate them either.45

The trope of the Curandera in Mexican American folklore and literature provides a powerful reminder that we must hold on to the ways we heal as a culture even when our heridas have been transposed and proliferate, and even when they have been deemed irreparable. In this network of wounding and healing, this figure functions as an embodied repository of holistic healing knowledge. Like Anzaldúa’s reclaiming of Aztec deities in “Entering the Serpent,” Manuel Muñoz’s, invocation of the Curandera as a possibility of hope and healing for the community surrounding Olive Avenue suggests that Chicana/o writers continue to pose a call for healing via a cultural mechanism that we must re-member. Muñoz ends his predominantly irresolute collection of stories with a Curandera as a means by which he can assert, that healing albeit a complicated process, remains pursuable and perhaps through processes of cultural re-membering healing is possible.

The complex means by which, and enduring need to negotiate the wounds caused by difference and exclusion both within and outside Chicana/o communities remains. In fact, Muñoz post-Borderlands work both underscores Anzalduás herida and points to the places this wound has moved. In the world outside of the text, Muñoz’s own negotiation with exclusion shapes his life as a contemporary Chicana/o writer. In fact, in an interview with Antonio Cerna from Homo-neurotic.com, Muñoz reveals whether or not he considers himself a gay writer. Muñoz’s responses is as follows:

45 Ibid., 228.
I’ve had conversations with other writers of color about this, and it’s a tough situations to be in. Do we fight for inclusion by upping the ante via writing, producing the best work we can and defying the literature to ignore us? Do we submit to anthologies and broaden the scope of what’s considered a queer writer in this country? I’ve turned down offers to submit to anthologies for that very reason: I’m incredibly conflicted with the narrow range that queer lit has written itself into, and I refuse to be a token. But it requires a great deal of courage to be a writer who demands these barriers be broken down… But writers of color—queer or not—have always faced this kind of exclusion, and we’ve trained ourselves to be better readers and writers for it. We read across the spectrums, across the genres, across the literary forms, and throughout the ages, looking for connections wherever we can, because “home” isn’t what its promised to be… I think that’s why those writers of color who achieve a certain level of prestige command so much attention— they keep reminding us that the narrow scopes imposed on them are not any kind of boundaries at all. They write beyond them. And in doing so, they place their respective literatures into the uncomfortable, but necessary positions of Answering to their initial exclusions: witness Baldwin, Anzaldúa, and Lorde.\(^46\)

To understand the contemporary manifestation of the trope of *la herida abierta* and the perpetual invocation of the Curandera figure is to understand what Muñoz means to read and

write “beyond the limits.” His work extends the work of Anzaldúa by asking the archive to “[answer] to its initial exclusions.” In this sense, the Curandera can be anyone who can better read new and old sites of wounding. Just as Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, calls for a healing premised on facing and deconstructing the racist and hetero-sexist legacies of exclusion faced by Mestizas, Muñoz’s writing extends this call and in doing so re-maps the contours of *la herida abierta* and recalibrating the literary network of wounding and healing as we know it.

This network exposes the need for an ongoing process of healing that resists foreclosure. It requires an ongoing process of identifying wounds both new and old. We are then, summoned by this network of writers to engage in a continuous “suturing” of our wounds and by extension, of our archive, to engage in an ongoing re-reading of characters, and/or entire texts. Written works from writers of Mexican origin emerging out of historical contexts pre-Movement (pre-1960’s) and Chicana/o narratives to come mirroring the trans-historical pull of our troubled history: “lo pasado me estira pa’ tras you lo presente pa’ delante.” These texts require re-readings no matter if doing so destabilizes our understanding of the archive and of ourselves. Chela Sandoval poignantly argues that reading power is one of the “technologies that embody and circumscribe identities necessary for recognizing power and changing its conditions on behalf of the equalizing power between socially and psychically different subjects.” Anzaldúa and Muñoz are but two authors who grant primacy towards grappling with the politics of difference, negotiating intersectionality, and endorsing the act of reading into and writing their way out of admittedly uncomfortable

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sites of intra-communal wounding and exclusion. In doing so, “they write beyond” societal limitations and push their readership towards a new Curanderismo.
My job as an artist is to bear witness to what haunts us, to step back and attempt to see the pattern in these events (personal and societal), and how we can repair el daño (the damage) by using the imagination and its visions. I believe in the transformative power and medicine of art.¹

--Gloria Anzaldúa, *Let us be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauqui imperative-la sombra y el sueño*

Imagination, a function of the soul, has the capacity to extend us beyond the confines of our skin, situation, and condition so we can choose our responses. It enables us to re-imagine our lives, rewrite the self, and create guiding myths for our times.²

--Gloria Anzaldúa, *((Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces*

In his classical 1904 medical essay titled, “Aequanimitas” Sir William Osler, one of the founding professors of The Johns Hopkins Hospital, in Baltimore, Maryland asserts that, “The practice of medicine is an art.” More than a century later, a figurative Curandera in her own right, Gloria Anzaldúa calls us to think of the transformative power and, “medicine of art” and in doing so alters Osler’s assertion by speaking back to Western medicine. By shifting the indefinite article, “an” to the preposition “of” Anzaldúa complicates Osler’s assertion by disarticulating medicinal healing from a scientifically sanctioned nexus of


biomedical practices and instead presupposes a reversal: art is medicine. She makes it a point to highlight that one of the qualities of art itself is its medicinal attribute and contemplates art’s capacity to heal. Interestingly, the opening epigraphs aptly anticipate and describe the conceptual territory traveled by post-Movement Chicana feminist writers at the turn of the new century by articulating the notion that Chicana literary productions are therapeutic, palliative, and reparative. In addition, they each suggest, that in the very act of uncovering and representing the hidden relations animating the Chicana/o experience, including their metaphysical and ontological significance vis a vis artistic production, an opening appears that allows for the possibility of radical transformation--for the possibility of spiritual r(evolution).³ Provocatively, the epigraphs refuse to omit the impact and role of the spirit/soul. Hence, they presume a subject that refuses to be “split” by social ontological realism. On the one hand, in the first epigraph, Anzaldúa invokes the realm of the spirit when calling into question both the ethereal power of the “imagination,” and its “visions,” and the ways our histories and past-lived experiences “haunt” us. On the other hand, in the second epigraph she comments on the metaphysical impact our lived realities have on our very souls, and more importantly how this can propel many of us to creatively imagine a type of healing that takes us “beyond the confines of our skin.”

As Detrás de Cada Letra: Trauma and Healing in Chicana/o Literature demonstrates, a preoccupation with ancient ritual, more specifically with redefining the rituals central to Curanderismo, coupled with an ardent commitment to the politics of spirit in the name of healing remains a steadfast impulse within Chicana/o literary production. To illustrate this point further, and underscore just how early Anzaldúa in particular engaged the

cross-section of art-as-medicine, it is important to re-state that as early as Anzaldúa’s 1987 *Borderlands*, the power and logic of Curanderismo was already on her mind. In this chapter I assert that the scope of post-Movement Chicana/o works has widened enough to critically and creatively foreground concepts such as relationality, and interconnectedness, as a way to insist upon the transformative spiritual and societal power generated by enacting an inclusionary politics fueled by radical compassion. Tapping into this power requires that one recognize the larger forces that structure patterns of disease, distress, and trauma. This art-as-medicine responds to the legacies of colonialism and the violence caused by neoliberal “reforms” by deconstructing the chimera of freedom and well-being espoused by deregulated free-trade. It is in the latter half of the post-1990’s Chicana/o archive, guided by the work of Anzaldúa, where a poetics historically shaped by struggle and tradition, begins to dilate its focus beyond a politics centered squarely on oppositionality, identity, and materiality. This is to say the foci of Chicana feminist writing emerging in the late 1990’s within the latter half of the archive does not abandon previous concerns, but rather reaches *beyond* the preoccupations of earlier eras in an effort to engage the concept of spiritual activism. In AnaLouise Keating’s words the term spiritual activism is nothing short of, a visionary experientially-based epistemology and ethics, a way of life and a call to action. At the epistemological level, spiritual activism posits a metaphysics of interconnectedness and employs relational modes of thinking. At the ethical level, spiritual activism includes specific actions designed to challenge individual and systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of social injustice. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change,
spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation. This shift in focus forges the possibility for producing new creative and critical pathways useful for (re)conceptualizing how to heal one’s self and/or heal one’s community. The creation of these pathways, draws from and refashions the logic of Curanderismo in order to propose art-as-medicine a de-colonial strategy for dealing with the trauma coloniality introduced, a trauma whose symptoms and ramifications continue to evolve through the practice of neoliberalization. By neoliberalism I am specifically referring to the philosophy and economic practice that asserts the ideology of free-trade and the belief that an autonomous self-regulating market will produce the common good, and lead to collective prosperity.

In the trajectory of her written works, Gloria Anzaldúa is inspired to write about the communal and personal wounds she witnessed and experienced firsthand. By weaving linguistically complex and generically hybrid texts that directly address the lacunae, gaps, and labels that have inter-sectionally “split” her and her community in and through white supremacist cisheteropatriarchy, she achieved landmark status within Chicana/o Studies. Because of her theorizations of the borderlands, one cannot overstate the impact and importance of her written works in shaping the Chicana/o literary archive in general and Chicana feminist thought in particular. This study understands Borderlands as her most far-reaching and crucial text because the decolonial struggles requiring art–as–medicine for the purpose of healing are linked to the experiences Anzaldúa theorized by virtue of being colonial legacies. Such colonial legacies increasingly take the shape of neoliberal capitalism.

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For this reason David Carrasco, Robert Lint Sagarena, Barbara Harlow, Renato Rosaldo and Walter Mignolo credit Anzaldúa for achieving a theoretical shift or, “interpretive breakthrough,” by developing a hybrid thinking from the in-between-space of the U.S./Mexico border.  

Throughout her life, she continuously described the concrete effects of inequality on the lives and lands of Chicanas/os residing in the U.S. including but not limited to the psychological effects of being between two cultures, the devastation of losing ancestral lands, and the anguish of being labeled a queer outsider. She did so by pointing to the geopolitical and philosophical constructions that determine the way we organize our world, constructions that she argues act as the headspring out of which societal inequalities originate. Her writing unpacks the ways particular societal arrangements governed by race, class, gender, sexuality, language, nationality, and discourse work to directly construct reality, and her work as a Chicana feminist sets out to trace and locate when and how said arrangements emerged. Moreover, her body of writing also describes how relations of domination and subordination extended such complex processes were historically and geographically. For instance in Borderlands, she returns to the sixteenth century, linking the moment “Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico,”6 to the “1800’s when Anglos migrated illegally into Texas, which was then part of Mexico7” and reminds us that that those legacies of dispossession have an influence on us today. Anzaldúa contends that “150 years of racism in Chicano barrios in the Southwest” place particular bodies at risk for “enferme[da]es de los nervios, y de alta

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6 Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 27

7 Ibid., 28.
presión.”

Those relations, colonial in origin, underpin and sustain the pernicious ways we organize and engage in our world and cause us illness. Because of the pervasiveness of colonial conditions in the present day, Anzaldúa sought to theorize the need for and the method by which Chicanas/os could engage in spiritual activism. The logic of Anzaldúa’s spiritual activism is the logic of Curanderismo.

Anzaldúa first presented her unique theoretical model for understanding the U.S./Mexico relations in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), as a way to map out the violent dynamics of the U.S. frontera and link them to processes that had been taking place since the arrival of the Spanish. Her theoretic framework dovetails with the earliest critiques of neoliberalism that are centered on pointing out Mexico’s dependence on the U.S. market and the role of young women of Mexican origin in *maquilladora* work. Anzaldúa writes,

*La crisis, Los gringos* had not stopped at the border. By the end of the nineteenth century, powerful landowners in Mexico, in partnership with U.S. colonizing companies, had dispossessed millions of Indians of their lands.

Currently, Mexico and her eighty million citizens are almost completely dependant on the U.S. market. The Mexican government and wealthy growers are in partnership with such American conglomerates as American Motors, IT&T, and Du Pont…

By pointing out these transnational economic practices and neoliberal economic upheavals, she causally links the specific types of trauma and wounding experienced by Mexicans and

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8 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 34.
9 Ibid., 32.
10 Ibid.
people of Mexican origin, on both sides of the border to larger global political/economic forces and begins building a metanarrative which describes the effects of neoliberal displacement and economic dependence. This is to say, her conceptual framework first presented in *Borderlands*, is a lens that enables us to re-read, unpack, and deconstruct the ways particular narrative claims that operate in tandem with neoliberal projects work to socially divide, internally separate, and specifically wound not only Chicanas/os in the borderlands but all people around the globe. In addition, she calls attention to the ways, “whites in power want us people of color to barricade ourselves behind our separate tribal walls so they can pick us off one at a time with their hidden weapons; so they can whitewash and distort history. [This] Ignorance splits people.”

She, amongst others investigating the geopolitics of knowledge throughout the Americas such as Walter D. Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, Anibél Quijano, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and María Lugones, distinctly affirm across disciplinary lines that these geopolitical divides (racial, national, epistemological, and economic etc.) are not neutral but are constructed, and interwoven into the very concepts that govern our experience of daily life. If in fact, as María Lugones argues, “modernity organized the world ontologically in terms of atomic, homogenous, separable, categories” then there remains a dire need for decolonial transformative logic(s) to shift the way we engage in the world. As such, Chicana literature aestheticizes new emancipatory logics, taking Chicana feminist work in new directions.

Anzaldúa amongst others contends that these separations that “split us” which are an inherent effect of social ontological dualism, are catastrophic in myriad ways. She notes that,

11 Ibid., 108.
13 Ibid.
“In trying to become ‘objective,’ Western culture made ‘objects’ of things and people…[and] This dichotomy is the root of all violence. Not only was the brain split into two functions but so was reality”.14 In a radically hopeful response concerning the wounds we inherit because of such divides, Anzaldúa contrapuntally affirms the power of our connectedness. She asserts that, “The survival of the human species depends on each one of us connecting to our vecinos (neighbors) whether they live across the street, across national borders, or across oceans.15 Similarly, the late Elena Avila who worked as a practicing Curandera throughout the Southwest, echoes Anzaldúa in her characterization of the soul and follows her push for an alternative logic. She asserts:

In my tradition, we do not believe that the soul is somewhere out in space, ephemeral and holy. To us, it is very earthy, concrete, embodied. This is very different from the picture offered by Western Christianity. At some point in our history, spirituality and medicine went their separate ways and the soul went with one camp and the body with the other. I believe that it is time to reconcile this split. Curanderismo is a medicine that brings all parts of the human being into the healing question.16

For these reasons, the processes of staging, imagining, and thinking through the possibility of a non-oppositional realistic politics of hope indispensable for planetary citizenship continues to take place in Chicana literary representations.17 Beginning with an examination of one of Anzaldúa’s early poems, the chapter then turns to a novel by Helena Maria Viramontes, and finally to a short story titled “Duermete.” This analysis across texts is part of an effort to both mark the shift in trajectory between twentieth and twenty-first century Chicana feminist

14 Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 59.
writers and to tease out the distinctiveness of a written work that has emerged out of the post-Movement period in light of the post-oppositional decolonial threshold theories that Anzaldúa’s work openly agitated for.

(RE)MEMBERING OUR ROOTS: NEW CURANDERISMO

During my parents’ generation, the fires of racism burned over the ground of our culture, creating shame, denial of our heritage and customs, and the pressure to assimilate. But now out of the scorched earth new plants are growing from the roots of those that had burned, Like precious seeds that went into hiding, curanderismo is being reborn within me and within a new generation of young women to whom I am now teaching this medicine.18

--Elena Avila, Woman who Glows in the Dark

Gloria Anzaldúa’s life and legacy as an artist and theorist mirrors the radical mission and incredible hope Elena Avila contends is “growing” out of the “scorched earth.” Furthermore, her life and legacy aligns with the very shift towards healing I argue is taking place in the latter half of the Chicana/o archive. The more recent post-Borderlands works, shape the contours of what we come to understand as the post-Movement archive. These works articulate a politics of sensitivity signified by a re-orientation towards a distinct set of ideals, namely, the power of building alliances, the need for investing in coalitional politics, and the commitment to espousing a clear planetary call for each of us to become the healer of our own wounds.19 This call is vital given that systemic social marginalization inflicts pain and leaves people at risk for what James Quesada, Laurie K. Hart, and Philippe Bourgois,

18 Elena Avila, Woman Who Glows, 322.
call “structural vulnerability.” Artists and scholars of the post-Movement period have followed suit. The creative work of ire’ne lara silva limns the contours of these new pathways and opens up the discursive space for readers to continue to think of art, healing, and transformation in tandem, as do the critical theorizations of Suzanne Bost, Irene Lara, Amala Levine, María Lugones and AnaLouise Keating. More specifically, AnaLouise Keating has made it clear that this of course in and of itself is a radical act given that, “When we talk of spirit worlds, soul, transformation, interconnectedness, the sacred, and so forth we risk accusations of essentialism, escapism, or other forms of apolitical naïve thinking.” In other words, one therefore runs the risk of crossing yet another set of highly regulated borders. And yet, writers and critics of the Chicana/o canon continue to invest in critically gesturing towards the decolonial healing function found in embracing an alternative to the philosophical Western mindset, and to the critique of rationalist epistemology through the power of border crossing and Curanderismo.

I begin with and return to Anzaldúa to map out the origin of and assert that there is a new unique focus on transformation circulating within post-Movement Chicana/o letters. This push to build bridges by linking people who have been “split apart” has not emerged out of a vacuum. In fact, Anzaldúa has been theorizing these dynamics for quite some time. Hence, her well-known original exploration of the herida abierta in her acclaimed work, Borderlands provides not only a recalcitrant poetic meditation on what it means to cross highly regulated borders, and normative boundaries; it also can be understood as the place where Anzaldúa first opened up the albeit painful possibility of moving beyond

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oppositionality towards transformation through the wound itself. To illustrate this further, in the landmark *Borderlands* Anzaldúa boldly asserts that, “Knowing” is painful after “it” happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before.” Her numerous calls for a bridging, or “suturing” of the mind/body split undergirding Cartesian Dualism premises this radical transformation. Time, and time again she calls attention to the body and how it is psychologically and physically (ontologically), affected by epistemic processes and how this very body must then move into a new space (ethics), where the pain of “knowing” propels change and transformative action. For this reason, it becomes imperative to repeatedly return to her original theorizations of the *herida abierta* in *Borderlands* in order to better understand the long-term theoretical, and thematic impulses of U.S. writers of Mexican origin writing after Anzaldúa as well as the ontological, epistemological, and ethical currents of Anzaldúa’s body of writing.

What is evident is the ways in which the concept of art-as-medicine informed her writing from the earliest beginnings and continued to shape her theoretical contributions until the very end. For example, in *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa includes a poem titled, “La Curandera” in which the speaker of the poem undergoes total transformation from wounded to healer. Here, Anzaldúa presents a speaker residing in the U.S. borderlands desperately in need of physical healing. Suffering with an un-named illness that had, “turned [her] leg white,” the speaker is frantic, immobile, and in need of a cure. Anzaldúa’s refusal to delimit and define the nature of the pathology in question exemplifies a wholesale refusal to subscribe to Western medicine’s constructions of illness. It invites us, instead, to read the illness at the heart of this poem as stemming from forced assimilation, and/or from larger forces within

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and outside her community that cause her great pain, processes Anzaldúa takes up in the book more broadly. By framing assimilation as illness, she is able to track its frightening capacity to confine, constrict, and debilitate in a way that harkens back to Américo Paredes’ discussion of Guálinton explored in chapter three. In any case, this poem reflects how the Chicana/o cultural body negotiates injustice and exclusion given that Anzaldúa defines trauma and illness as the direct effects of societal ills. Through the counsel of her trusted sobrino and members of the community the ailing speaker of the poem seeks out help.

Her community decides that her help is in Mexico, and this is significant for two reasons. One is the idea that treatment and therefore recovery must come from the other side of the border is a clear holdover from the principles of the Chicana/o Movement whereby a return to Mexico is imagined as the only edenic site where an authentic recovery of culture (here read as health and well-being) can ensue. Take for instance the Chicana/o movement’s call for the return of the territories ceded through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo for the creation of the territory known as Aztlan, or the literal journey back to Mexico that Chicana/o protagonists often figure into their written works. Unsurprisingly, the speaker finds herself in a transnational struggle to heal wherein the only way to authentically heal can be found in a return to Mexico, a return dependant upon an impossible (figurative and physical) border crossing for the ailing Chicana in question. Secondly, the prospect of healing coming only from the other side of the border stages a dynamic concern for the border crosser(s) regardless of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. The border-crossing becomes a matter of life and death and by extension a concern for the vitality of the community itself.

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24 See Ana Castillo’s *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, Sandra Cisneros’ *Woman Hollering Creek*, and María Amparo Escandón’s *Gonzalez Daughter Trucking Co.: A Road Novel with Literary License*. 
Unable to cross the border herself, we are told that, “Juan Dávila crossed the border/to bring the healer” to the U.S. side of the frontera to her.\textsuperscript{25} Juan Dávila, who is the only named person in the poem, appears to be just another member of the community however, he is hugely significant and rivals the importance of the Curandera figure that the community seeks. While the Curandera is the only person deemed equipped with the knowledge and ability to heal the speaker of the poem who is in dire need, one cannot overlook Juan Dávila’s importance as a pivotal communal figure. Here, Anzaldúa directly invokes\textsuperscript{26} and simultaneously pays homage to the Chilean artist in the world outside of the text, Juan Davila who is widely known for confounding any notion of the normative body in his artwork.\textsuperscript{27} In specifically naming him, Anzaldúa foregrounds the critical role the border artist plays in healing communities.\textsuperscript{28} A border crosser in his own right, the real Juan Davila is a Latin American artist residing in Australia noted for his ability to expose, “ancient antagonisms and power struggles, not in terms of secure and separate identities but in terms of cross-breedings, cross-infections, and mixings, touching on intimate taboos and repressions.”\textsuperscript{29} Accordingly, in this poem, the ailing speaker, and Juan Dávila are both \textit{entremundos} (between worlds) as border-crosses in the space between life and death, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Gloria Anzaldúa, \textit{Borderlands}, 176.
\item \textsuperscript{26} In one of her later essays Anzaldúa expressed her particular fondness with Juan Davila’s oil painting titled, \textit{Wuthering Heights} which depicts Juanito Laguna, a half-caste, mixed breed transvestite with an injured left leg. See her essay, “Border Arte,” in \textit{The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader}, edited by AnaLouise Keating (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 184.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Guy Brett, \textit{Transcontinental: An Investigation of Reality Nine Latin American Artists}, (New York: Verso, 1990), 38.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Many of Juan Davila’s paintings “concern themselves with a power struggle. They can be seen as a translation of the persistent inequalities of the world and the histories of colonialism into the era of the ‘global market of images’, drawing battle-lines in the complexity and confusion of transnational communications” Guy Bret, \textit{Transcontinental: An Investigation of reality: Nine Latin American Artists} (New York: Verso, 1990), 107.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
both agree to defer to communal ways of knowing by seeking recourse for a deadly ailment outside of the logic of Western Biomedicine. This demonstrates that “La Curandera,” is one of the earliest places Anzaldúa invites us to read the border artist as Curandera/o.

Unfortunately, however, in the world of the poem, instead of finding the Curandera, when Juan Dávila arrives in Mexico he finds that the healer he sought was dead. Here, Anzaldúa portentously characterizes the peril, despair, and death experienced in the borderlands in the neoliberal moment. In this moment, traditional healers and traditional answers are at risk. This is a time when structural adjustment programs put Mexico in a position where it even had to begin importing its corn.\(^\text{30}\)

To make matters even worse, the illness that had once only afflicted the speaker of the poem begins to spread. In this work, communal fear fuels the illness’ epidemiologic ability to spread. It is then that the speaker of the poem’s sobrino who now believes he himself is also sick-dies. Here, Anzaldúa writes: “It doesn’t matter if one is sick or not/ what matters is that one thinks so.”\(^\text{31}\) In fact, the illness, and the fear of the illness itself has taken hold of the community at large. Operating from the assumption that much like a helix, the mind, body, and spirit are constitutive and intertwined the illness of one individual has the potential to affect the entire community because relations amongst people are interdependent. In one scene, Anzaldúa effectively makes plain the always already imbricated ways in which the mind/body/soul are forever constitutively intertwined—even in matters of wounding,


\(^{31}\) Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 176.
illness, and/or healing and insists that border artists become healers to ensure the vitality of their communities by practicing art-as-medicine.

The Chilean artist, Juan Davila’s painting titled, “Wuthering Heights” whom Anzaldúa obliquely conjures in her poem, “La Curandera,” (see Figure 1) centrally stages the character Juanito Laguna. Argentinean figurative artist, Antonio Berni, a key figure in the Latin American Nuevo Realismo Movement, developed the Juanito Laguna character, as part of post-1950’s critique of industrialization and poverty. In this composition, Juan Davila redeploys the image of Juanito Laguna. In doing so, Davila replaces Emily Bronte’s central character Catherine, from her 1847 novel “Wuthering Heights,” with an exotic transvestite. In a “shockingly carnal” re-working of Berni’s character and displacement of Bronte’s character in a Balthus inspired painting Juan Davilla uses Juanito to enact the “return of the outcast.”32 Much like the speaker of Anzaldúa’s poem, Juanito Laguna’s leg appears swollen, infirmed, white, and splinted. Anzaldúa openly admired Juan Davila’s art precisely because she considered him a paradigmatic border artist and thought highly of his ability to make use of the debased, hybrid and fragmentary to challenge the exotification of Latin America.

Surrounded and haunted by illness, the speaker of Anzaldúa’s poem survives because of the steadfast and compassionate prayer of the visionary Juan Dávila who intercedes on her behalf and brings her back from the brink of death. Here, Anzaldúa gives primacy to the holistic ways in which healing comes about at the hands of the artist. She does this not only by going against the notion that the mind and body are split but by pointing to the ways (intra/inter/transnational) relationships between people within a given community have the power to arbitrate the wellness or illness of a given community. In doing this, Anzaldúa poetically inscribes the complexity of illness and healing and takes note of the simultaneous way in which flesh and bone interplay with spirit, mind, and soul. In fact, it is the fervent
prayer from a fellow border crosser—a common ritual in the realm of the spirit—that awakens the speaker’s healing spirit guides who then, and only then, return to say: “We will teach you…but first you must gather herbs.” The lesson here is one need only return to the roots of Curanderismo in order to restore and refashion a new relationship to communal healing. Re-connecting to cultural knowledge of healing does not require a physical return to Mexico.

At the heart of art-as-medicine Anzaldúa summons xochitl and cicuatl. In Chicana/o culture and experience, flower or flor (xochitl) goes hand in hand with song or canto (cicuatl). Flor y canto together refers to a type of ancient Aztec poetry. Through a specific recuperation of the relationship to her cultural roots, and by extension her relationship to healing herbs through the knowledge of the art of Curanderismo, and the help of a border artist, the once ailing woman is able to cross into a new transformative threshold. Only through her initiation into the knowledge of Curanderismo is she able to become the healer of her socially inflected wound(s) here read as illness. In the final three stanzas of “La Curandera,” Anzaldúa writes,

Juan Dávila and I went into the fields.

“No this way,” Juan Dávila told me.

I smiled and followed him.

We found nothing but weeds.

“Curandera, you knew

there were no yerbitas here”

33 Ibid., 178.
34 María Herrera-Sobek, Celebrating Latino Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Cultural Traditions, (Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2012) 496.
“Oh, there’s a few,” I said.

“Look behind that big weed.”

Juan Dávila bent down,

Saw a tiny romero plant.

When he reached out to pick it

I said, “No leave it its too small.”

“The weeds are choking it,” he said,

“and its got no leaves.”

“Help it,” I told him.

“I’ll go get the hoe, “ he said.

“No, there’s no time, the plant will die.

She needs room,” I said.

The weeds began to move back.

The romero began to grow.

The weeds moved further back.

“No, pendejos, let’s kill her,” said a big ugly quelite.

“No, she’s so pretty,” the others said

holding him back.

The tiny romero grew and grew,

Told them, “You’re pretty too.”

The weeds became long graceful grasses,
They bowed down to the *romero*.

Herbs of all kinds

Poked their heads out of the earth

Covered the fields.

I’ve been a *curandera*

Since that day

And Juan Dávila has been my apprentice.

The fate of a tiny rosemary plant (*romero*), the fate of the wild spinach (*quelite*) and

the fate of the, “Herbs of all kinds,” that Anzaldúa mentions, is bound up with the fate of the

Curandera and her apprentice (the border artist) and therefore bound with the fate of the

community. Survival here is a *grassroots* communal endeavor. A cursory untrained look at

the tiny plants shows that they can easily be confused, misunderstood, misclassified or

dismissed as nothing more than weeds. However, in spite of Juan Dávila’s initial misreading

of the herbs in question, his contribution as a border crosser, solidifies his potential

therapeutic power to heal. The speaker of the poem’s capacity to mitigate the loss within her

own community is non-existent before Juan Dávila’s prayer, and her power as healer is

unavailable to her without their collaborative cultivation of the plants and herbs. Their power

to heal comes from their inter-subjective collaboration and their ability to recognize that the

tiny romero plant merely needed space to grow.

The animus between the plants in the second to last stanza, “Lets kill her pendejo”

shifts into high regard and appreciation, “No, she’s so pretty.” This brings the plants back in

balance, nourishes the romero plant, and initiates transformation. The romero plant, known as
the herb of remembrance signals here that the ways of healing and knowing that circulated prior to colonization have not been totally lost because of colonization, or the violence and fragmentation associated with this moment of late capital: all may be recuperated and revitalized through cultural memory. In fact, border artists act as cultural Curanderas by re-membering a variety of relations that were almost lost but that people transformed and preserved during the colonial process. In this poem what springs out of the earth are more than just weeds, they are living breathing, speaking elements with the metaphoric and medicinal power to restore and transform us all. As María Lugones reminds us,

The civilizing transformation justified the colonization of memory, and thus of people’s senses of self, of intersubjective relation, of their relation to the spirit world, to land, to the very fabric of their conception of reality, identity, and social ecological, and cosmological organization.35

Therefore, planetary connections, those interdependent relationships between all living things, which govern all living things, are paramount in this poem. The poem describes the workings of life itself metaphorically through the relationships between the people (border patrol, the sick, the healer, the community) and their relationship to all non-human living things through the romero and the quelite. Here, the plants not only signify where the power of Curanderismo is physically rooted, they simultaneously gesture towards the layered ecological, cosmological and planetary dimensions of social power at play shaping the vitality and lives of all people.

Encroaching upon and determining the personified and gendered romero plants’ capacity to survive are not only the weeds, but also Juan Dávila’s eye. Both the weeds and

Juan Dávila at times imperil the romero plant, and this represents the complex tension that characterizes our tenuous relationship between our selves as people, and our relationship as people to all other living things. Anzaldúa’s “La Curandera,” invites us to interrogate the crucial importance of plants, to the fate of all living things on the planet and to draw attention to the primacy of our interconnectedness. In addition, her poem cleverly encodes a threat to the Chicana (communal) body as a threat to the healing arts of Curanderismo and to plant life itself and she does so by pointing to the forces within and outside the community that produce this threat.

Interestingly, it is the role of the wounded, and the responsibility of an ill Chicana and compassionate artist turned apprentice, to speak up and uncover the hidden relations that block us from recognizing the powerful relationships between all living things. In the absence of a Curandera who can repair el daño the spirit guides have returned to transform the wounded into the very healer she initially sought. Grounded on the assumption that we are physically, spiritually, and ontologically permeable and able to transform, the speaker of the poem shifts from wounded to healer. Because the Curandera she sought was dead, she initiated a radical act of spiritual transformation and through Curanderismo she becomes a healer herself. Most importantly, this poem is useful for theoretically marking the ontological permeability of identity and for signaling that no transformation ends in a type of fixity. The shift from wounded to healer is a transformative process that is impermanent and cyclical. This power makes the power to heal available to all people and recodes individual wounding as a possibility for communal healing and as a threshold for communal transformation. Chicana feminists are developing what this transformation can look like within their narratives.
SEEDS OF TRANSFORMATION: POST-MOViMENT CHICANA WRiTING

It is my hope that the luminous science of curanderismo will live as long as the earth lives, and will continue to grind our pain into seeds that sleep through the winter of our sorrow while we patiently wait for new seedlings to appear--tender shoots, tiny-fisted leaves, so green with youth so old with love.36

--Elena Avila, Woman Who Glows in the Dark

To understand the uniqueness of a post-Movement author such as ire’ne lara silva and how her writing marks a shift in the archive it is first useful to look to a Movement writer whose work beautifully captured the complexities of Chicana/o experience in the California valley. What is important to make note of is the kind of transformation Viramontes’ main character undergoes. Barely in the wake of the Chicana/o Movement, Helena Maria Viramontes’ novel, Under the Feet of Jesus (1996) narrates the story of a thirteen year old girl named Estrella and her farm worker family in a clever Chicana feminist re-working of Tomás Rivera’s 1971, No se los trago La Tierra. Throughout the novel, Viramontes imagines a family unable to transcend the economic deprivation and “stink of despair” characterizing their lives as migrant farm workers in the U.S.37 Much like other works within the Mexican American corpus that set out to portray the under-represented realities of migrant laborer life Viramontes lyrically captures the inescapable economic misery of agrarian poverty.38 Her beautifully written novel shows the (often limited) ways farm workers are able to exercise agency in the face of overlapping institutions of oppression,

36 Elena Avila, Woman Who Glows, 292.
38 According to the National Farm Work Ministry, averaging less than $8000, farm workers annual wages are among the lowest in the country.
which make them vulnerable, including but not limited to the gendered and racialized dimensions of migrant servitude. In this novel, economic hardships arbitrate every single aspect of the family’s life. In fact Viramontes notes, “It was always a question of work, and work depended on the harvest, the car running, their health, the conditions of the road, how long the money held out, and the weather which meant they could depend on nothing.”\(^{39}\)

Written post-\textit{Borderlands, Under the Feet of Jesus}, represents an early attempt at aesthetically imagining a Chicana’s personal transformation at this complex time in U.S. history. This novel is not about the territorilization of the border in 1848, nor is it about the struggles of the Civil Rights era, it is about the continued oppression experienced at the cross section of environmental and economic exploitation during the late 1960’s. Moreover, it is about understanding subsistence and survival within migratory circuits of farm labor as trauma. Notably, while Viramontes captures farm life in the U.S. around the Movement era she orchestrates a narrative in which Estrella symbolically undergoes personal transformation, unlike her mother Petra who remains “shackled by varicose veins” to the very fruit fields that author her misery and burden her with prolonged standing and arduous labor.\(^{40}\) Viramontes published this work within a few years of the Mexican Peso crises, and on the heels of NAFTA at a time marked by the displacement and migrations of thousands of Mexican peasants and farmers.\(^{41}\) At the time, the long-term negative impact of U.S./Mexican

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 4.
\(^{40}\) Ibid., 9.
economic reform was largely unknown to citizens on either side of the border.\textsuperscript{42} Therefore, this novel also represents the unfolding negative health consequences caused by globalization. Unable to access education, safe housing, health care or rights as workers Viramontes’ characters must come up with ways to circumvent their dismal living conditions and economic limitations. Interestingly, Viramontes highlights the importance of Curanderismo by including a complete \textit{limpia} scene in this novel, but instead of being a vehicle for complete transformation, it functions as a desperate strategy to stave off death. Estrella’s mother who performs the limpia is unable to halt the effects of chemical pesticide poisoning. Incapacitated by illness, Estrella’s love interest, Alejo, who had fallen ill after being sprayed by a by-plane crop duster suddenly:

\begin{quote}
felt a cool object and, opened his eyes to see Petra rubbing a hen’s egg on his bare stomach while she muttered prayers to herself. He struggled to turn his head, watch her crack the same egg in two, then put it in a saucer, watched her study the yellow yolk, after which she placed the egg and saucer behind his head, and left it there and then he closed his eyes.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

Viramontes makes it a point to show the function of Curanderismo in this particular family but such communal ways of healing are ultimately no match for the hazardous chemicals farm owners repeatedly exposed Alejo to. This limpia ritual is ultimately unable to effect any lasting change or transformation for Alejo and out of desperation the family looks to a rural clinic for emergency care as a last recourse to help Alejo having been intoxicated at a pisca.\textsuperscript{44}

The clinic denies Alejo care because he is unable to cover the costs of treatment. In this

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{42} Gilbert G. González, \textit{Labor Versus Empire: Race, Gender, and Migration} (New York: Routledge, 2004), 260.\\%
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 98.\\%
\textsuperscript{44} The picking or harvesting of fruit.
\end{flushright}
moment, an enraged Estrella recognizes the role of the Mexican cultural body’s relationship to labor, and her labor’s role in sustaining relationships of economic power. Viramontes writes:

She remembered the tar pits. Energy money, the fossilized bones of energy matter. How bones made oil and oil made gasoline. The oil was made from their bones and it was their bones that kept the nurses car from not halting on the highway, kept her on the way to Daisyfield to pickup the boys at six. It was their bones that kept them moving on the long dotted line on the map. Their bones. Why couldn’t the nurse see that? The nurse owed them as much as they owed her. 

In this moment, Viramontes’ character lashes out on the nurse practitioner in oppositional violence. She is both angry and recognizes her own body’s vulnerability, given that,

The vulnerability of Latino migrants is exacerbated by their interactions as economically disenfranchised laborers in a society that regards them as criminals and devalues their individual and cultural worth. This devaluation is a routinized, lived experience shared by Latinos throughout the US that is not confined to those lacking legal status.

For this reason, she crashes a crowbar onto the nurse’s desk and demands the return of the nine dollars and seven cents they had offered as payment in return for health care services and so the novel ends in a less than promising place for Alejo. Alejo’s illness is unresolved. The novel ends with him seeking urgent care in a different hospital after the original clinic he

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went to turned him away. In contrast, at the end of the novel, Viramontes’ Estrella undergoes a circumscribed transformation. For Estrella, the barn is a forbidden place because of its weak building structure. In one of the opening scenes, her stepfather Perfecto verbally reprimands Estrella for entering the barn and prohibits her from doing so again. At the novel’s climactic end, Estrella undergoes a symbolic transformation by defying Perfecto. She not only enters the barn, but climbs to the top of its forbidden structure and bursts through its ceiling, thereby symbolically accessing her own strength, power, and self-determination. This scene is her symbolic rite of passage and marks her entry into womanhood.

This novel signals a moment in Chicana literary realism which represents the role of Curanderismo in a given community however it cannot contend with the caustic truths shaping migrant labor life and peasant economies. Social realism registers Estrella’s transformation. This means that readers see her as still bound to her dire economic conditions by the end of the novel. She has symbolically found a sense of agency. However, her solid reality is un-connected to this moment of empowerment. One can assume that she climbs down from the apex of the barn and returns to her community still constrained to the harsh reality of the field albeit this reality includes a sea of communal relations. Entangled in a matrix of power, her gendered body undergoes a transformation that cannot fully alter her despair, and this codes *Under the Feet of Jesus* as part of a Chicana realist literary aesthetic. Therefore, at this time a post-*Borderlands* work could imagine a resilient Chicana feminist mestiza, but could not imagine her outside of, or unfettered to the fields.

Nonetheless, Viramontes, like Anzaldúa before her, clearly understands how the imagination can move us beyond the limits of our lived realities. In an earlier moment in *Under the Feet of Jesus*, framed by the innocence, desperation, and hunger of children,
Viramontes captures the graphic reality of urban poverty. Before Estrella and her family became farm laborers, they lived in abject poverty in the city. In a scene at the beginning of the novel, Estrella and her family live in an apartment they cannot afford as her mother Petra struggles to pay bills and put food on the table. It is here that Viramontes subtly suggests that the artist can quite possibly take one beyond the confines of one’s skin without fully breaking with the conventions of social realism writ large. She depicts Estrella who struggled to placate her hungry wailing siblings, and snap her mother out of a deep depression by, “trying to feed [her siblings] with noise, pounding her feet and drumming her hand and dancing loca to no music at all, dancing loca with the full of empty Quaker man.”

Lyrically capturing Estrella’s sheer desperation Viramontes write that there was:

Nothing in the cabinet except the thick smell of Raid and dead Roaches and sprinkled salt on withered sunflower contact paper and the box of Quaker oatmeal. Estrella grabbed the chubby pink cheeks Quaker man, the red and white and blue cylinder package and shook it violently and its music was empty. The twins started to cry and for a moment Estrella’s eyes narrowed until Petra saw her headlock the Quaker man’s paperboard head like a hollow drum and the twins sniffed their runny noses.

By 2002, Anzaldúa was clearly at work with the kinds of problems represented by Viramontes. In short, asking herself: where do you go? What do you do when the body refuses to heal? When there is no way to heal the illnesses caused by exploitation, systematic racism, and poverty? When the trauma is so deep and is everywhere? It is in one of her final 2002 publications that Anzaldúa’s use of the logic of Curanderismo as a method to make

48 Ibid., 18-19.
sense of her societal experience. Her reliance on the logic of Curanderismo is made plain in and through her description of her case of susto. *Susto,* understood as a spiritual, physical, and psychological illness indexed and recognized only through the framework of Curanderismo initiates her critical essay titled, “Let Us Be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauqui imperative-la sombra y el sueño.” Here she takes up the national wounding of 9/11, as an opportunity to connect her wounding with the wounds of others throughout the nation and the world. She specifically theorizes an injury that is wide in scale and has the capacity to recruit the attention of a wider audience. It is inarguable that the logic of Curanderismo informs this attempt to theoretically suture and address our national wound(s) because she specifically links national trauma, with individual disintegration, and with *susto.* Interestingly, she does this by invoking Aztec mythology and linking her response to national terror with an Aztec origin story.\(^{49}\) While she insists on detailing the spiritual and physical sense of painful fragmentation, she felt resulted from watching the media coverage of the twin tower attack; she does not end there. Instead, she writes: “We are all wounded but we can connect through the wound that has alienated us from others. When the scar becomes a cicatriz, the scar can become a bridge linking people who have been split apart.”\(^{50}\)

Here, Anzaldúa uses the language of Curanderismo to describe what was then still a fresh *herida abierta,* which was national in scale. Interestingly, she writes, 

\(^{49}\) By referencing Coyolxauqui, Anzaldúa underscores the transformative creative potential animated by wounding since Coyolxauqui is dismembered by her brother Huítlópochtli in defense of their mother Coatlicue whereby they are transformed into the sun, the moon, and the stars.

Algo me agarró y me sacudió, frightening la sombra (soul) out of my body. I fell into pieces into that pitch–black brooding place. Each violent image of the towers collapsing, transmitted live all over the world then repeated a thousand times on tv, sucked the breath out of me, each image etched on my mind’s eye. Wounded, I fell into shock, cold and clammy. The moment fragmented me, dissociating me from myself. Arresting every vital organ within me.  

A logic that recognizes the effects of injustice as trauma and illness shapes the very way she describes her personal response to the fall of the twin towers and the devastation of 9/11. She specifically theorizes the shock of 9/11 by carefully, and rather vulnerably recounting the physical, psychological, and spiritual symptomology of susto. Here she directly describes how her experience of the media coverage of the event totally fragmented her into “pieces,” making her ill. In this critical essay, the issue of the real vs the surreal is important. Understood through the logic of Curanderismo, Anzaldúa’s description goes beyond merely depicting a sense of the marvelously real or the amplified reality characteristic of the fantastic; she makes clear the relationship between societal wounding, national trauma, and individual dis(ease) by linking the fall of the twin towers to her susto and fragmentation. In addition, she subtly cautions that the cause of her susto has the capacity to be re-transmitted, “live all over the world” via telecommunication and made manifest into a larger national epidemic. Yet, this critical essay in which Anzaldúa speaks of the damage done to her spirit

51 Ibid., 303.
does not curtail a discussion of the U.S.’s role of being “the bullies of the planet” and the fact that, for men and “women of color home and homeland have not been safe places.”

Like Anzaldúa’s final writings, written texts emerging in the latter half of the post-
Borderlands Chicana archive, gesture towards the experiences of trauma, wounding, and suffering that shape Chicana/o identity and experience. Similarly, these works do not stop at lamentation, nor do they function merely as a means of representation by solely mapping out the contours of said wounding. Neither do such works subscribe to hegemonic understandings of trauma, pain, and illness. Instead, they represent pain and healing guided by an Anzaldúan legacy that conceptually engages and reformulates Curandersismo. While testimony remains vital, these texts go beyond testimony in order to return to the precepts inherent in Curanderismo, namely, the balance, integration, and acknowledgement of the spirit as therapeutic. Numerous works aestheticize the function and/or cultural importance of Curanderismo as the single most radical palliative process of decolonial healing and transformation that makes up the Chicana/o canon. Simply, there are unique post-Movement written works that resoundingly announce that the Curandera remains vital, she is in all of us, she is accessible to all of us, and that the transformation via spiritual activism of nos/otras, our contexts, and our communities is the only way to holistically heal.

In contrast, eighteen years after Viramontes’ novel, ire’ne lara silva’s (2013) collection of short stories titled, Flesh to Bone responds to Gloria Anzaldúa’s mandate that we become the healers of the wound by offering nine short stories, which reach across spiritual, linguistic, and generic thresholds in the name of healing and transformation. In

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52 Ibid., 308.
theorizing the significance of Anzaldúa’s archive AnaLouise Keating describes the transformative power of “threshold” theorizations:

Threshold theories start elsewhere—with the presupposition that we are all intimately, inextricably linked with all human and nonhuman existence. Each individual being is interrelated with all that exists-on multiple levels and in multiple ways, ranging from economics and ecology to language, social systems and energy. By thus positing our radical interconnectedness, threshold theories contain but exceed the exclusionary ontological frameworks, the principle of negative difference, and the either/or thinking found in oppositional consciousness and other Enlightenment based worldviews. 53

Threshold theories are useful for understanding the written works of ire’ne lara silva because they help to conceptually map what Keating calls, “poet-shaman aesthetics a synergistic combination of artistry, healing, and transformation grounded in relation, and indigenous-inflected world views. 54 ire’ne lara silva’s collection of short stories is a representative example of poet-shaman aesthetics emerging within contemporary Chicana feminist writing. Her collection expresses the very threshold theorizations that contemporary Chicana feminist writers are engaging, theorizations that function as art-as-medicine for the field.

In one particular story titled “Duermete,” lara silva presents the story of a borderlands woman who has taken on the name Teré after starting her life over in a new city, with a new

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name. Teré is a middle aged home health care nurse who at the start of the narrative is ostensibly presented by lara silva as a healer who actively services patients within a predominantly Mexican American community in the south Texas valley. As lara silva describes Teré’s work routine, bedside manner, and her intimate interactions with her patients in detail, readers learn that in actuality and in a clever reversal Teré herself is precisely the person who is in need of healing. In fact, as the story unfolds lara silva reveals that the quasi-divine knowledge over all matters concerning wellness and illness does not automatically belong to Teré by default because she is a certified nurse. Her biomedical expertise does nothing to halt the symptomology of trauma she experiences on a daily basis. Understood on a continuum with Viramontes’ Estrella, Teré embodies precisely whom Estrella wished she could have become, namely one who escapes the labor of the fruit fields and becomes an educated independent Chicana mestiza. The 18-year gap between Viramontes’ novel and lara silva’s narrative is the space of a generation. And yet, improved material conditions and access to education does nothing to safeguard Teré from experiencing trauma. Teré suffers with insomnia resulting from the trauma of domestic violence at the hands of her ex-husband. Because of her inability to sleep, Teré is a nurse that is herself off balance. Her vision blurs, her hands fail her, and she is depicted as alienated from her own body routinely waking in the middle of a re-occurring nightmare were she belatedly returns via flashback to the frightening moments when her husband abused her. lara silva notes that, “she looked haunted”\(^{55}\) and “there was no magic pill no medical equipment that could help her sleep.”\(^{56}\) Teré, who at the beginning of the story functions by the logic of a Western mind-set, suffers belatedly from the experience of patriarchy, physical violence

\(^{55}\) ire’ne lara silva, flesh to bone (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2013), 64.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 70.
and emotional abuse. Trauma in lara silva’s representation results from the realization that those who we love have the capacity to hurt us. However, it is through her interconnectedness, compassion, and sensitivity to her community and her patients and their reciprocal openness to her that she ultimately transforms and is able to heal from the trauma of her husband’s abuse by the end of the story.

lara silva depicts Teré as a person directly shaped by her wounding. Her wounding has forced her to take on an entirely new home outside of Edinburg, a new name to remain hidden from her assailant, and a new profession. Unlike many other health care professionals, lara silva notes that, “Not long ago she’d been in the hands of unfeeling doctors and calloused nurses and vowed she’d never treat anyone that way.” Indeed, Teré is a unique caregiver because she allows the divide between physician and patient to collapse, and responds to her patients with tenderness and compassion each time they engage one another. She ultimately breaks free from the proscriptions of Western medicine. Her wounding has indeed built a therapeutic bridge through which she can better connect with her patients. In turn, her patients respond by listening with raw openness, which “Like other forms of spiritual activism, listening with raw openness begins with the belief in our interrelatedness, with the willingness to posit and seek commonalities-commonalities defined not as sameness but possible points of connection.” It is listening with raw openness that bridges the generational, gendered, physiological, psychological, and spiritual distance between Teré and each one of her patients.

57 Ibid., 56.
One patient in particular, Doña Marta, Teré’s diabetic disabled and visually impaired client is the catalyst for Teré’s transformation and her home is a threshold space that Teré must cross into in order to activate her own healing. Because Diabetes disproportionately affects Mexican people, Doña Marta here symbolizes the Mexican cultural body. This is why she notes,

The first time she’d seen Doña Marta’s house, she recognized it in her bones though it was nothing like her grandmother’s houses, or her mother’s house. There were flowers blooming everywhere, so many shades of green laid over each other that it seemed a tiny paradise. In time she’d come to learn the names: *laureles* here, bouganvilleas there, two dark-leafed *mora* trees, *chile pequins* outside the kitchen window, red and yellow roses along the sidewalk, purple sage along the chain link fence tumbling vines of yellow trumpets along the windows, wild and pale morning glories bursting from anywhere. 

Doña Marta’s house is an edenic botanically powerful space that represents the power of Curanderismo. It opens up, and activates a deep longing within Teré and brings forth a set of memories whose origin she attempts to trace through her maternal lineage. However, she is unable to recall her connection to this memory because the trauma she has experienced has frightened her soul from her body, fracturing her sense of self. Teré is dealing with a clear case of susto. More specifically, Doña Marta’s house is a realm whose physical periphery activates a longing to categorize and understand the hidden knowledge of the power of each one of the plants and herbs in Doña Marta’s garden. Doña Marta’s understanding of Curanderismo and its vitality is far more developed than Teré’s. Lara Silva confounds the

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60 Ibid.
healer/patient intersubjective relationship as a means to radically de-link and transform how we understand healer and healing altogether. lara silva’s depiction of Doña Marta’s concern and worry over the health of her plants and garden is revealing because she does not refer nor express concern about the medical conditions that one would assume would be the primary cause for worry for any ailing geriatric patient. For instance, when Tere greets her, “Como ha estado? I am glad to see you out of bed, Doña Marta responds with, “Y mis matitas–are the laureles shiny and green? Do I still have roses by the fence?”61 lara silva notes, that, Teré’s “first notes on Doña Marta had been simple: seventy-five years old, a stroke the year before, diabetic, her left foot recently amputated, advanced diabetic retinopathy had left her almost blind.”62 This demonstrates that Doña Marta appears to be more concerned with the health of her plants than with her own illnesses and treatments.

Therefore, Doña Marta defies logic as a complex character that Teré does not readily understand. For example, inquiring about her medical history, in one revealing scene, Teré questions Doña Marta about the time doctors originally diagnosed her with Diabetes. Doña Marta responds with, “Mis comadres said it came from so many sustos-a bad car accident, the sick children, my two husbands dying the way they did.”63 What is interesting about this scene is that Doña Marta disarticulates her understanding of her own illness with definitions conferred through Western Biomedicine, and instead defers to the understanding of her illness given by the explanations of the women within her community. She understands her Diabetes as the result of the losses she had experienced throughout her life64 namely, her

61 Ibid., 60.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 63.
64 Michael Montoya, Making the Mexican Diabetic: Race, Science, and the Genetics of Inequality (Oakland: University of California Press, 2011), 89. This is very similar to recent
ongoing struggles with susto. All of this in a clinical setting could warrant reproach and correction from a health care professional, but Teré seeks instead to engage Doña Marta on her terms and in doing so allows herself to be led by Doña Marta’s wisdom and understanding.

Accordingly, Teré slowly begins to make sense of Doña Marta’s wisdom and her uncanny ability to see. Doña Marta who is visually impaired is able to see not through her physical eyes in the empirical sense, but through other means. In fact, in spite of her retinopathy Doña Marta is able to see that Teré has been up all night in crises. She says, “Pos Teré I can see it on your face. You had one of your dreams again. Tell me what happened. Teré smiled a small smile. You know me too well, Doña Marta.”65 Through this narrative, lara silva questions rational empiricism by delinking true knowledge from measurable evidence and/or objective Truth. Doña Marta is able to see and know Teré without relying on her “sightless eyes.”66 Indeed, she intuitively senses Teré’s pain. Doña Marta knows about Teré’s nights spent, “…taking hot baths because she couldn’t sleep. These nights remembering the bruises and the blood. [Teré’s] whole body pulsed dark blue with tears. [Teré] could barely stand to live inside her body sometimes.”67 Doña Marta, concerned for Teré’s future tells her, “you’re hurting yourself, keeping all your wounds open.”68 This is particularly important because Doña Marta locates Teré’s trauma and her ability to heal projects, which attempt to study the ecosocial linking of racism biology and health by examining the role of “social hardship toxic exposure verbal and physical threats, unhealthy consumer messages and substandard medical care…” and its impact on health.

66 ibid., 67.
67 ibid., 72.
68 ibid., 68.
within Teré’s body in one sentence. Doña Marta not only recognized her trauma, she enables Teré to do so also and reminds her of her own agency. As Suzane Bost notes,

Pain, illness and disability are assumed to represent corporeal failure because they challenge our standards of how bodies should work, look, and feel. Yet these very same qualities usually assumed to be negative also have positive (theoretical and political) implications. Illness links individuals with others (including caregivers and those with shared suffering)…

Doña Marta understands that life itself extends a calling to become healers to all of us. This calling comes with acknowledging the fact that we can all experience wounding. By connecting with Teré, Doña Marta activates Tere’s capacity to holistically heal.

Following that intimate exchange between Doña Marta and Teré, lara silva departs from the conventions of literary realism and through her prose enacts a poet-shaman aesthetic. This unique aesthetic is guided by a relational metaphysics [that] includes an ethics of interconnectedness and dynamic theories of language… If, as Anzaldúa suggests, we are radically interrelated with all existence, then anything we write, say, or do,-no matter how insignificant it seems- exceeds us and holds the potential to affect human and non-human worlds.

Indeed, Doña Marta’s words and teachings do just that for Teré. lara silva notes that a day later, Teré wakes suddenly with a sense of urgency and races to Doña Teré’s house only to see that Doña Marta had fallen outside of her house in an effort to care for her garden. She

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70 Ibid., 63.
arrives to see, “The old woman was lying on the ground, her hip lodged against porch steps, her hands still clenching weeds.”71 Weak and moments away from dying, Doña Teré imparts one final lesson as she describes her ostensibly dead garden. Doña notes, “Even this garden is not dead. There are still seeds, mi’ja and strong roots” and only after making this declaration, she dies in Teré’s arms.72

This is when Teré crosses a radical threshold and ire’ne lara silva departs from Chicana literary realism. Guided by a dream Teré had days earlier Teré knows that she must become the healer of her own wounds and knows just how to do so. Spiritually inclined, she follows a ritual presented to her in her dreams. She knew that she must collect Doña Marta’s amputated leg bones and take Doña Marta’s bones and dead body to the ocean for a final ocean-side ritual. This ritual is unlike any other healing practice she performed as a home health care nurse. lara silva writes,

The body was light in her arms. In the silence of cicadas and crickets and branches swaying, Tere carried the body away from the house, away from asphalt, away from the city streets and city lights, carrying the body towards the sound of the ocean. The sun hadn’t risen there was only silence and stillness. Time melted away.73

The “branches swaying” above the body and the movement away from “asphalt” and the built form of the city, into a realm marked by the dissolution of time here suggest a reconnection to a primal spiritually charged moment before trauma. This movement away from time and space as we know it vis a vis healing ritual signals to the reader that a limpia

71 Ibid., 71.
72 Ibid., 72.
73 Ibid., 73.
ritual is already underway. Once she arrives at the ocean with Doña Marta’s lifeless body, and amputated bones under the light of the moon, “The flesh fell away, relieved of the need to cling to the bone. Calluses fell away, scars fell away, and the varicose veins fell away. All burdens fell away.”74 The “calluses,” “scars,” and “varicose veins,” are all markers that indexed her gendered labor. Together, each marking on her flesh testifies to her body’s vulnerability and resiliency and in a final limpiay ritual Teré appears to have ritually cleansed the markings away. Doña Marta has physically shed the boundaries of her flesh and has gone *beyond the confines of her skin*. What remains in place of her marked flesh, are pictographic glyphs written on Doña Marta’s bones. lara silva notes,

> there were marks, soft interweaving circles, lines and patterns gleaming brightly on the pale bones. Glyphs covered every inch, bearing witness to the old woman’s life. Pictographs that left noting unsaid; years of work and struggle and illness etching deep diagonal lines; longing, grief, and loss spiraling around and around each bone; bruises and joys bursting like blooms…Even when the flesh that had borne so much fell away, the bones remembered.75

Teré is able to read the inscriptions that societal and personal experiences have patterned onto Doña Teré’s bones. By witnessing the glyphic writing Doña Teré’s bones “remembered” Teré is finally set free from her own alienation, and the physical and psychological limitations imposed on her person. She heals from the trauma of domestic violence by picking up the, “thorns from the huisache” and performing a ritual cleaning on Doña Marta and thereby integrates both herself and Doña Marta back into perfect balance.

74 Ibid., 73.
75 Ibid.
This transformative ritual performed after Doña Marta’s unexpected departure from the physical world breaks our common sense logic of healing and of healers. Healing Doña Marta in turn heals Teré. In this moment, lara silva also allows Teré to see that the same luminescent writing she saw on Doña Marta’s bones was written inside her as well. This writing is a non-alphabetic script, a writing that reveals the primacy of our interconnectedness and crosses Teré and Doña Marta into another epistemic register. Teré looked down at her own flesh and describes the following:

Her own spirals and glyphs shining outward from the bone. Her own scars transformed into something else. Wonderingly, she traced each line, each shadow with her fingers. Her skin felt the same, smooth and warm. It seemed as if her body should feel alien-or hurt. But it didn’t hurt. And now, with her bones glowing through her flesh, she felt more alive inside her body than she had ever felt. This body was wholly hers, with its memories and its scars and its surviving. Her body had survived, healed, grown strong again. She had survived, healed, grown strong again. She stood straight and walked to the bed.76

Teré’s encounter with Doña Marta’s body was spiritually healing and transformative. Because Doña Marta died clenching some of her plants, it is unclear who actually began the limpi ritual. All the same, lara silva’s narrative healing comes about through a compassionate exchange. It is their inter-subjective relations, their willingness to listen to each other’s stories with raw openness, and their mutual concern for one another that enables Teré to re-member how to fashion healing for herself and wholeness for Doña Marta.

76 ire’ne lara silva, flesh to bone (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2013), 75.
Remedios: Countering the Susto of Neoliberal Trauma

There are many creative ways to view illness and health, just as there are many ways to heal or manage disease. Too often in Western medicine, medical treatments are shrouded in scientific jargon and mystery. How can we take responsibility for our health if our healers hide behind medical language, pedestals, or barriers that keep us from understanding our illness? My hope is that healers and health practitioners begin to accept their responsibility to educate people, helping them to discover their own inner healing and medicine. All human beings have medicine inside of us—we have the ability to cure ourselves—and every person’s illness is unique.

--Elena Avila, Woman who Glows in the Dark

The present global neoliberal economy breeds illness. The extreme poverty, and structural inequality now recognized as the hallmarks of globalization make the World Health Organization’s assertion that 450 million people globally already have a mental health issue unsurprising. For this reason it is important now more than ever to think closely about the way Curanderismo continues to be aestheticized in Chicana/o literature, especially the new ways in which Chicana/o writers insist upon fashioning stories that aid us in our decolonial processes of self healing. Anzaldúa reminds us that, Because we use metaphors as well as hierbitas or curing stones to effect changes, we follow in the tradition of the shaman. Like the shaman we transmit information from our consciousness to the physical body of another. If we are lucky we create like the shaman images that induce altered states of consciousness conducive to self healing…. From our own and our people’s experiences, we will try to create images and metaphors that will give us a
handle on the numinous, a handle on the faculty for self-healing, one that may cure the depressed spirit, the frightened soul.  

Transformation will continue to remain at the forefront of Chicana feminist theory, and at the forefront of the narratives, we call our own. Inflected by the diversity of Chicana/o experience, these stories matter. They matter now more than ever because the U.S. economy is an increasingly globalizing privatized trade and therefore globalizing susto. Here, our understanding of illness and of healing must shift to recognize the ways larger forces make us structurally vulnerable to illness and trauma. The quasi-divine status, which is by default granted to the market in the era of globalization, threatens all life on our planet. In this age, corporate interests rule and too often the opening up of borders takes place only as a means of locating spaces and bodies available for exploitation. The expansion of deregulated trade, the push for privatization and the mythic narrative that “free competition” fosters liberty has serious global consequences for us all. An economic climate where the U.S. trades the “public-good” and “communal mindedness” for “individual freedom,” and where social Darwinism and laissez faire capitalism passes off as democracy is not sustainable. Post-Movement Chicana narratives teach us that one’s spiritual health is inseparably tied to our physical well-being and therefore we must strive to achieve balance even as we navigate a world and culture that is increasingly fragmented and alienating. Above all else, these narratives remind us that we have always had the capacity to heal ourselves, and an ability to help to heal one another. Chicana/o letters have the potential to take us beyond the confines of our skin through art-as-medicine and in new ways that can inform the ethics and politics needed for planetary citizenship in the era of neoliberalism.

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