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Spanish Honors

“In Between The Virgin and The Whore”: Decentering The Cultural Paradigms Of The Virgin of
Guadalupe And La Malinche In Four Writers

There are several oppressive cultural paradigms in Mexican culture that try to subject women. These cultural formulations are forged through historical events, in this case the colonization of Mexico. The two of the most important feminine archetypes in Mexico are “The Virgin of Guadalupe” and “La Malinche”. Both effigies of femininity are fundamentally anchored in catholicism and colonization. The Spanish conquest of the Americas and its violent colonization is due to the expansion of Catholicism, thus in Mexico, colonialism and religion are intimately intertwined. The Virgin of Guadalupe icon is born out of the catholic church and it is profoundly rooted in colonialism. On the other hand, La Malinche represents the indigenous woman Malitzin that was sold as a slave during the conquest. The two paradigms work in a separate but coordinated way to create oppressive boundaries for Mexican and Chicana women. These feminine representations moralize what is considered as inadequate attitudes from Mexican and Chicana women. They have appeared in literature as the representation of feminine expectation. Literature is a tool with the ability to reach audiences, in the case of women, and it has the possibility of empowering. The importance of decentering these cultural guidelines is born from a growing need for women in Mexico and the United States to achieve autonomy. Writers Elena Garro, Rosario Castellanos, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua have decentered the oppressive cultural representations of “La Malinche” and “The Virgin of Guadalupe” and

henceforth created new understanding on the feminine experience for Mexican and Chicana women.

In Mexican culture the feminine representation par excellence is the Virgin of Guadalupe. Also known as Our Lady of Guadalupe or the Virgin Mary, she is a Marian apparition from the Catholic church, also considered as the mother of Mexico. According to Mexican tradition, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego, an Aztec “Indian” converted to a Christian, on two separate occasions. The first apparition occurs on December 9th 1531, where the Virgin asks Juan Diego to go to Bishop Juan de Zumarraga to build a temple on the same place where she appears. Bishop Zumarraga is skeptical and asks for proof. On December 12, The Virgin appears to Juan Diego a second time and orders him to collect Castille roses. Juan Diego picks the roses and places them in his “tilma” [cape], a garment used by Aztec men. He takes them to the Virgin and she sends him to the Bishop. Juan Diego opens his cape in front of the bishop and when the red roses fall from it, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is perfectly preserved in the cloth, erasing the Bishop’s doubt. The repeated catholic miracle of the red roses historically represents God’s presence. As a result of the Guadalupan apparition, the temple was built on the Tepeyac Hill, that today is part of Mexico City’s suburbs. Since then, due to a need of the colonizer to create national consciousness and identity, the image of Guadalupe turned into the heart of the Mexican catholic church and nation.

The *always virgin* of Guadalupe turns into a symbol of femininity and maternity in Mexico. The Virgin is a representation of a unidimensional feminine figure, the pure, free of sin, mother and nurturing woman. She is the personification of self-sacrifice, the denial of self-existence, martyrdom, altruism and submission. This is a symbol that all Mexican women should aspire to be and comply. However, to reach these standards is basically impossible for

women. The paradigm finds its roots in the ecclesiastic system, that is inherently patriarchal and colonial. Besides, this archetype will never be in favor of women since the colonial religious and patriarchal system has never done this. The Virgin of Guadalupe as a cultural template is convenient for the dominant patriarchal society. This cultural prototype, anchored in a *venerated* figure, keeps women subdued and as a result, women suffer spiritual and sexual damage.

According to these imposed patterns, the submissive Mexican woman should not be a sexual and autonomous being. The good, pure and “virgin” woman only understands and experiences sex as a requirement for reproduction in a heterosexual marriage. Those religious women will only talk about sex with their priests, referring to it as intercourse and “I serviced the church” (Yeager 11; translated). As a result, feminine sexuality is a religious and cultural tool for human reproduction and at the same time it is taboo. This objectification of women is done through oppression and concealment of feminine desire and agency. The Virgin of Guadalupe turns into the unattainable symbol of femininity. The colonial patriarchy is afraid of the feminine and, in turn, of women, so it imposes its “celestial” standards upon them. Another aspect of femininity is, its association to “mother nature” and therefore its association with life, reproduction, and at the same time with the indomitable or unruly. Images of women converge between docility (the Virgin) and wild (Mother Nature). For the patriarchy it is necessary to maintain the feminine, women, and nature within certain limits, because if they are set free they will “inevitably destroy the machista culture and the value system that is based on masculine power and requires the control of women” (Schneider 25). If Mexican patriarchy allows for women and the feminine to be autonomous, it would be unbalanced and lose power. The oppression systems work to hide weaknesses and protect gained privilege, therefore patriarchy obfuscates and limits the power of femininity and its prevalence to avoid losing power.

Another feminine representation in Mexican culture is the historical character La Malinche, Malinalli or Doña Marina, who was the daughter of an Aztec chief, and was sold as a slave to Hernán Cortes. She was used as an interpreter and translator for Cortes, which gave her the title of the first translator in the history of Mexico. To have been sold as a slave meant that she was forced to become Cortes's lover and eventually bear his child. Malintzin becomes the mother of Martín, known as the first mestizo in Mexico. This is where Doña Marina becomes the mother of mestizos, those of "mixed" races, mainly indigenous and Spanish. Apart from having the title of the first interpreter and translator in Mexico, and mother to mestizos, Malintzin is also known for being the traitor to the Mexican people. According to patriarchal history and culture in Mexico, Tenochtitlan's conquest was a consequence of the linguistic abilities of Malintzin. The blame of bastardization or mestizos in Mexico lies completely on Malintzin. In a way, Malintzin has to be compared to the biblical Eve in relation to the fall of the Mexican man and the original sin in Mexico. In addition, the Malintzin is the Mexican "original sin" that stole Mexico its indigenous roots. The only thing left is an uprooted country from its history. In *"El Laberinto De La Soledad"*, poet, Nobel laureate and diplomat, Octavio Paz denounces the Mexican people as "Sons of La Chingada". In these violent words from Paz the verb "chingar" notes violence, going outside of itself and penetrating unto others by force. In the violent words of Paz, "[t]he verb [chingar] notes violence, to come out of oneself and penetrate the other by force. As well as to injure, rip, violate —bodies, souls, objects—, destroy. When something breaks, we say 'se chingó' [it is fucked]" (32; translated). Paz also asks the question: What is La chingada? To which he responds "[t]he Chingada is the *open mother, raped or mocked by force*. The 'son of la Chingada' is the spawn of rape, the rapture or mockery. . . every woman, even that who gives herself willingly, is torn, chingada [fucked] by the man. In a sense, we are all, only by the fact of

being born from a woman, sons of la Chingada, sons of Eve” (33; emphasis added; translated).

The antiquated analysis by Paz promotes a binary opposite, La Malinche, to the representation of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

For Paz and many Mexicans, Malintzin represents “La Chingada” because she was culturally “chingada” [fucked], that is, she was culturally hated because she betrayed her people. Hated for being sold and selling out the indigenous people and culture. Malintzin is called the nation’s traitor, “La Chingada” “The one that sold herself” and at the same time the one who gives birth to the Mexican nation. She was “*chingada*” by conquistadores, meaning that she is literally raped and through this violent act and the fact that she is a woman, she gives “birth” to a nation that is “*chingada*”. The uprooted Mexicans are the children of La Malinche and thus “The children of La Chingada”. The “daughters of the Mexican nation” will be known as selling themselves and “chingadas”. In Paz’s words “every woman. . . is torn, chingada [fucked]. . .” (33; translated). This text from Paz is one of many texts that reflect the machista and misogynistic attitudes that condemn Mexican women merely for being born and existing. Just by the fact of being born a woman, she is automatically physically and mentally “chingada”. The inevitable cultural paradigm of Malintzin becomes the one that every woman has to avoid, even when they are cursed at the moment of their birth.

As a result of these historical re-interpretations of the feminine, these archetypes were normalized as cultural guidelines to control and oppress Mexican women. Both symbols of femininity are rooted in the inescapable pillars of religion and colonization. The reputation of a woman in society depends on how well she can follow or stay away from these feminine models. Even if every Mexican woman complies with her duties and avoids the “vices of the body” simultaneously, she is still being oppressed. The patriarchal tyranny exercises its power through

the virginal and the sexual. The Virgin of Guadalupe as the virginal abnegated mother is a tool of oppression that controls women through a pure spirit and sexual restriction. The reputation of the Mexican woman and her position in society is determined by how well she can keep up with this expectation of virginal femininity, be obedient and be a good wife and mother. In short, the denial of feminine sexuality. The denial of the feminine sexuality is the base of the suffocating Mexican feminine image. On the opposite side, the image of La Malinche subdues women through the image of sex that is sinful and destructive, and therefore would take them to “La chingada” (to be fucked or condemned). It is the bad woman, the whore, the one that enjoys sex, who is an unfit mother and wife, on the other hand, the good woman, pure and virgin, only experiences heteronormative sex after marriage, without desire or pleasure. It is so that Mexican women show their loyalty to their people, always the loyal body servants of men.

The cultural paradigms of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Malintzin appear in Mexican women’s literature, as is the need to decenter and question them. One of the first examples of this decentering, is the novel *Recuerdos Del Porvenir* [*Recollections Of Things To Come*] by the famous Mexican writer Elena Garro. Published in 1963, only ten years after Mexican women were able to vote, Garro found herself in an extremely hostile literary environment for Mexican women. The novel takes place during the Cristero War, post Mexican revolution, and narrates the violent occupation of a small town called Ixtepec. The story focuses on the characters Julia Andrade and Isabel Moncada and their relationship with the violent General Francisco Rosas. General Rosas, is the military man representing the fight of the government against the Cristero revolution and the church. The general takes control of these two women, same as the townspeople. In this male setting, the author represents an extensive oppression against women. The novel is divided into two parts, the first part tells the story of Julia and the second, the story

of Isabel. In the first section, General Rosas takes the unreachable, stoic, and beautiful Julia as his lover and prisoner. The general takes over the body of his “querida”, but fails to dominate her and, as do the other women that are forced to live with the army, they emasculate the military men. All the “whores” challenge the military machismo and thus make it unstable. During her captivity at Ixtepec, most of the town hates Julia, due to the violent retaliations on the town from the general every time he has an outburst or romantic snub from Julia. The people of Ixtepec immediately blame Julia, proclaiming that she should submit to his whims. Thus, the town suffers the consequences of the woman’s insolence. According to history, legends, and myth, women are inherently corrupt and therefore, corrupt men and the nation. Historical epistemology of the Malinche/sold women where society attacks the victim and not the victimizer, is represented in Julia’s character. The woman, in this case Julia, is always to blame and is responsible for all the town’s and the national society’s unfortune. Ixtepec, an allegory of the Mexican republic, demands women to be a participant of their own violent oppression for the common good.

In the second part is the transformation of a good woman into a “lost woman”. Isabel Moncada is the representation of the catholic woman in Mexico. She is a “well behaved”, upper class family girl, and considered a good woman. However, Isabel ends up falling in love with General Rosas. After Julia’s escape, Isabel becomes the general’s next lover, blinded by her love for him. Isabel and her family represent the decadent Mexican oligarchy rooted in the violent and archaic government of Porfirio Diaz in XIX century Mexico. While General Rosas represents the fierce and chaotic new government established after the revolution. After Isabel left with him, her brothers were murdered. At the beginning of the novel, Isabel represents the cultural paradigm of the Virgin of Guadalupe that becomes the “sold woman”. The moment Isabel

abandons her family and town and leaves with the general, who represents the new oppressive Mexican government, she becomes a traitor to the nation. Just like Malintzin betrayed the indigenous people, Isabel betrayed Ixtepec and left with the enemy. To leave with the enemy implies having a sexual relationship with the general and thus, Isabel stops representing the Virgin of Guadalupe. It is as such that women become responsible for the *fate* of the nation. The feminine resistance acts in the novel are subtle and represent the situation of women in Mexico. *Los Recuerdos Del Porvenir* is part of the Latin American literary movement “magical realism”. This literary movement from the mid 20th century is known due to its magical elements in the story, with which it analyzes reality. In this sense, the magical becomes common and daily. Cristina Ruiz Serrano, a literature professor, analyzes patriarchal paradigms in magical realism in Garro’s novel. She notes that “[f]rom a feminist perspective, the analysis created reveals that the inclusion of these feminine stereotypes and archetypes make it possible to question the transgressive nature of the mode” (865; translated). Garro represents Mexican women as “feminine stereotypes and archetypes” through magical realism, which allows us to question if these stereotypes are unusual or in reality they are something daily and common. Garro represents the oppression structures of women in Mexico as tradition, silence, religion, misogyny, machismo, objectification, and patriarchy, and allows us to analyze them and thus question them. What Garro is doing through the novel is imposing the idea that you cannot possess women. The women in the novel can be stolen but still they resist. For example, Julia is also the image of the “femme fatale”. She is an absolutely irresistible woman, of which she is aware and uses in her favor. However, she refuses to comply with this role of “femme fatale” with the general. Her indifference is her resistance. The general can possess her body but not her. On the other hand, Isabel’s decision of leaving with the general at the end turns her into stone.

The fact that it was *her decision* to give herself to the general, becomes an act of resistance to what is expected, the traditional. Even though she paid for her decision, the importance here is that she took it, nobody stole her unwillingly. In this way, she showed feminine agency. Garro shows the structural systems that oppress women in a shaded way and how women subtly question the system. Ixtepec town, the omniscient narrator, represents the national state and masculinity. *Los Recuerdos del Porvenir*, offers a subtle feminine perspective in spite of having a national narrative.

The decentering of the feminine archetypes is also present in the work of Rosario Castellanos. She is considered one of the most prominent writers in Mexico, since her work influenced Mexican feminist studies. She dedicated her literary life to writing on topics of cultural oppression based on gender. In her short story “Lección de cocina” [Cooking Lesson], Castellanos descenders androcentrism and gives life to the feminine voice in literature within the roles of gender assigned to women, as well as domestic work. Through a monologue that takes place while a piece of meat is being cooked, the traditional role of a newlywed woman is presented, cooking for her husband and wondering about cooking knowledge that women inherently must have. While reading the cookbook on how to cook meat, without being able to figure out some of the instructions, the narrator says “[it] supposes an intuition that, according to my sex, I must possess but do not possess, a sense without which I was born that would allow me to notice the precise moment when the meat is about to be done” (Lección de cocina; translated). The narrator questions the traditional stereotype of the “housewife”, that can cook and serve the man, as if this were something all women acquire at birth. Castellanos deals with feminine identity and the aspects that make it up. Each step while cooking is related to the body and at the same time with certain oppressive situations in which she has found herself. Looking at the color

of the meat before cooking “red, as if it were about to bleed out”, she remembers and associates the color to a sunburn that she and her husband suffered during their trip to the beach (Lección de cocina; translated). Related to the burnt skin, Castellanos writes that:

He could give himself the luxury of ‘behaving as who he is’ and lay face down so his sore skin wouldn’t be touched. *But me, selfless little Mexican woman* that was born that was born like the dove for the nest, smiled like Cuauhtémoc as he said in torture ‘my bed is not made of roses and he was silent again’. Laying face up not only did I support my own weight but also his on top of me. The classic posture to make love. And I moaned, of tearing, of pleasure. The classic moan. Myths, myths. (Lección de cocina; emphasis added; translated)

By calling herself a selfless Mexican woman she makes a direct reference to the Virgin of Guadalupe and the expectation of compliance and abnegation that exist for women. When using the diminutive, Castellanos is putting the feminine infantilizing paradigm in evidence. In Mexican culture, it is very common to use diminutives to mock or scorn. She then takes us to the description of the painful and boringly repetitive sexual act with her husband. The act is done in the ‘classic position to make love’, but at the same time she compares herself with Cuahutémoc in agony when he said “my bed is not made of roses and kept quiet again”. The little Mexican woman keeps quiet before the colonizing act that tears at her body and the nation at once. While mentioning this violent penetration, Castellanos refers to the paradigm of the rape of la Malinche. The violent description of the sexual act, full of classical moans “. . . of tearing, of pleasure...”, she desmitifies the romantic and orgasmic sexual act related to marriage. This

image presents to us a utilitarian loving act fixed on masculine pleasure and thus the woman is no more than a tool for masculine pleasure. When saying ‘myths, myths’ Castellanos is denouncing these paradigms, including feminine pleasure, just as that, a myth.

Moreover, Castellanos is shaking the feminine stereotypes within Mexican society and literature through irony. She writes “What advice do you give me for today’s food, experienced housewife, inspiration for all the present and absent mothers, voice of tradition, the well-known secret of the supermarkets?” (Lección de cocina; translated) Amongst these ironic lines she leaves codified and subtle messages that denounce feminine unconformity and a need to question. Castellanos is making a coded call to all Mexican women to decenter the cultural paradigms and the patriarchal system. Through irony she shows how absurd the representation and expectations of women are in society. The young woman from the story finds herself in a difficult position around her identity as a married woman, since Mexican cultural paradigms dictate that women are not autonomous beings. While the monologue progresses, the narrator seems to not be able to hide this unconformity anymore, of denying her autonomous identity. Between the lines she shows her resentment and unconformity, she actively fights against these paradigms and constantly questions them. What Castellanos is doing through the monologue is providing tools, questions and arguments to decenter the cultural paradigms and at the same time the patriarchal system. At the end of the story, she writes “And yet...” which tells us that she leaves women's identity in their own hands, nobody can minimize or limit them. Even though this phrase can be interpreted in a negative way and that the situation in which the narrator is in has no way out, as a reader it can be interpreted in a different way. From a personal perspective, my reading of Castellanos interprets the fact that she leaves it in an ellipsis, means that it is in the hands of the reader.

The cultural paradigms of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Malinche have gone beyond the borders of Mexico and the United States. The Mexican migratory movements have brought with them these tools of oppression and control that are still being used against women, in this case Chicanas. Even though Mexican cultural inheritance is very important to Mexican-American communities, there is an attempt by Chicana feminists to reinterpret these oppressing archetypes. The descentering of these cultural stencils has been prevalent in the Chicano feminist theory as well as literature. A perfect example is Chicana writer, feminist activist, poet, essayist and playwright Cherrié Moraga. In her essay “Long Line Of Vendidas” that is included in the book *Loving In The War Years*, Moraga deals with intersections of “cultural identity” of Chicanas and sexuality. Moraga explains in the essay how all Chicanas have endured the weight of the Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe stereotypes. In the title of her essay, Moraga uses the phrase “Long Line Of Vendidas” to refer to all chicanas, including her predecessors. The word ‘vendida’ [sold or sell-out] is a reclaiming act through Malintzin. La Malinche is reinterpreted as a source of feminist supportive strength. In her essay, Moraga reclaims her body and her mother’s, along with a “long line of vendidas” of Mexican and Chicana women from patriarchal oppression. This recovery of the feminine includes the images of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Malintzin. The same as Mexicans, every Chicana should comply and avoid both cultural paradigms simultaneously. Moraga writes, “[an] obedient sister/daughter/lover. . . is the committed heterosexual, the socially accepted Chicana . . . sex remains the bottom line on which she proves her commitment to her race” (105). Moraga uses the word “obedient” to make evident what is expected of Chicanas within the limits of the Virgin paradigm. The same as Mexicans, the heteronormative post-marriage sex is the way in which Chicanas would show their loyalty to their people. Additionally, Moraga decenters the Virgin

paradigm emphasizing the importance of motherhood and matriarchy in Chicano culture. It is through maternity and matriarchy that Chicanas will reclaim their bodies. Moraga describes the subtle but significant presence of women in the home, “[t]he men watched the women— my aunts and mother moving with grace and speed of girls who were cooking before they could barely see over the top of the stove” (91). This collective presence of women and maternal figures that were in charge of nurturing the family was in part, the essence of the Chicana identity for Moraga. To empower and affirm the feminine presence, centered in the mother, the oppressive paradigm would transform into solidarity and love among Chicanas and at the same time, facilitate the recovery of their bodies.

Another important aspect in her essay, is how Moraga explains how she was called a “traitor” and “sell-out” for being a lesbian. In the eyes of the patriarchy, Moraga’s lesbianism was treason because she would never be with a man and would not fulfill the expectation of the virginal heterosexual mother. In Chicano and Mexican culture, lesbianism was used as an oppression tool against women. Through the eyes of the patriarchy, being lesbian meant women were denying their feminine responsibility of the Virgin of Guadalupe because they would not marry a man, have sex with him and have his children. Lesbian women were considered Malinches, traitors to their people. However, Moraga uses her lesbianism as a tool of body and mind liberation for Chicana women. By reclaiming her body and sexuality, Moraga said that through platonic and romantic love, women, Chicanas and herself, she reposses her Chicana cultural identity. Part of her claim was deeply rooted in her mother, her education and struggle to identify as half white and half Mexican. In spite of her struggles, she realized that “[if] I were to build my womanhood on this self-evident truth, it is the love of the Chicana, the love of myself as a Chicana I had to embrace. . . . To be a woman fully necessitated my claiming the race of my

mother” (94). Feminine sexuality is part of the racial, political and personal identity of Chicana women. Moraga writes: “. . .our sexuality is not merely a physical response or drive, but holds a crucial relationship to our entire spiritual capacity. . . Simply put, if the spirit and sex have been linked in our oppression, then they must also be linked in. . . our liberation” (132). Patriarchy has used the spirit (the Virgin) and sex (Malintzin) and the “whole spiritual capacity” of Chicanas to oppress them. Spirituality is about discovering who “we” really are and sexuality is part of that. To reclaim her body, Moraga argues that she is not only recovering her body, but also the bodies of every Chicana that preceded her starting from The Virgin and Malintzin.

Just as Moraga reinterpreted the Virgin and Malintzin stereotype, the Chicana and feminine culture academic Gloria Anzaldúa, offered a new understanding of these patriarchal stereotypes. In her most recognized book, *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa deals with the experience of Chicanas and their intersections of gender, identity, sexuality, race and colonialism. In her chapter “Entering Into The Serpent”, Anzaldúa talks about the snake symbolism, how it is used in religion and mythology, and how this has affected her life. Throughout the chapter, Anzaldúa invokes the indigenous names of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Coatloxopeuh or Coatlicue, which mean snake or those who use a snake skirt. The author also mentions the other indigenous name for the Virgin of Guadalupe that is Tonantsin or Tonantzin, given to her by the Totonacas. After the conquest, the Spanish and the church monopolized the indigenous deities and they *spanish-ized* them to control and reinterpret indigenous people as subjects to the crown. As Tonantzin becomes Guadalupe, the Spanish “. . .desexed Guadalupe, taking Coatloxopeuh, the serpent/sexuality out of her. They [turned] Virgen de Guadalupe/Virgen María into chaste virgins and Tlazolteotl/ Coatlicue/la Chingada [/la Malinche] into putas [whores]. . . They went even further; they made all Indian deities and

practices the work of the devil. Thus Tonantsin became Guadalupe, the chaste protective mother, the defender of the Mexican people” (Anzaldúa 27-28). According to Anzaldúa, Chicano culture identifies with the indigenous mother and distances itself from the Spanish father. However, the key is not to deny completely the “spanish-ization” of Tonatzin or denying Guadalupe but to accept their indigenous roots. By accepting these roots, one could liberate not only Tonantsin/Guadalupe but also all Chicana and indigenous women affected by colonialism. In addition, Anzaldúa invokes symbolism through the snake with the intention of *resexualizing* Tonantsin/Guadalupe. Anzaldúa writes how “[t]he Olmecs associated womanhood with the Serpent's mouth, which was guarded by rows of dangerous teeth, a sort of vagina dentate. . .the most sacred place on earth, a place of refuge, the creative womb from which all things were born and to which all things returned” (34). Women and their sex are at the same time a refuge and the center of all creation in the world. Women are the symbol of “dark sexual drive, the chthonic (underworld), the feminine, the serpentine movement of sexuality of creativity, the basis of all energy and life” (35). When Anzaldúa invokes Coatlicue or Tonantzin and Guadalupe, she tries to give her back everything that was ripped from her, her sexual being and thus her autonomy. Spirit and sexuality are mixed and the complete hybrid identity of women is allowed.

When the term ‘borderlands’ is analyzed, it refers to the geographical area between the border of the United States and Mexico, and how the people that live there debate between two cultures. By being “neither from here nor there”, they create a “third space”, a hybrid race. Anzaldúa refers to this as the birth of a new conscience, a mestiza conscience, a “cross pollination” of identities, races, ideologies and cultures. Through this process a space is created for dispute and resistance to patriarchal hegemony. Anzaldúa develops the theory of “mestizaje” in *Borderlands* and defines it as the explanation of social borders. For Anzaldúa, mestizaje is a

transformation, where all cultures and nations are flexible, and recognize all ethnic and racial combinations. Mestizaje has become a theory through which Mexicans and Mexican-Americans rationalize their history and identity, especially within the United States. In other writings, Anzaldúa talks about the term “Nepantla”. In Chicano literature, art and anthropology Nepantla represents a concept of the interstice, “the in-between-ness”. Nepantla is a nahuatl word that means “in the middle” or “central”. To live between cultures, Mexican, Chicana and indigenous. Or conversely, to live between genders, to be lesbian. A painful experience, where the sense of self has suffered a rupture, a personal state of “invisibility and transition”. The same way that the geographical border is a restless place of transition and movement, the identity of the Chicana woman goes through the same dynamics. Anzaldúa notes that

[l]iving between cultures results in ‘seeing’ double, first from the perspective of one culture, then from the perspective of another. Seeing from two or more perspectives simultaneously renders those cultures transparent. Removed from that culture’s center you glimpse the sea in which you’ve been immersed but to which you were oblivious, no longer seeing the world the way you were enculturated to see it (cited in Keating 8).

Nepantla is a time where people experience a loss of control, and as a result, they suffer anxiety and confusion. Chicana women find themselves in a state of living in the interstice. Their cultural identity has suffered a rupture and thus has forced them to create a new identity, a “hybrid” identity. The way in which an interpretation and reclaiming of Malinche and the Virgin can happen is through creating hybrid spaces. By the simple fact of being Chicanas and lesbians,

two traditional pillars were destroyed in the Mexican patriarchy and the stigma has been removed.

These four authors remind us, and continue to do so, of the need to question the systems of power and that as women we can create “hybrid spaces”. A progression and animation can be seen from these four writers. We begin with Elena Garro with subtleties and silence as resistance. We follow with Rosario Castellanos who uses irony and questioning. We finish with Cherrié Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa who offer us new re-interpretations and sisterhood as resistance. These four authors provide us with different tools to decenter the oppressive paradigms and patriarchy. Elena Garro and Rosario Castellanos have achieved world recognition, and have decentered the cultural paradigms of Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe through Mexican literature. One of them, through the stylistic subtleties of magical realism and the other with total candor of an ironic monologue, that descenters Mexican patriarchal heteronormativity. They question gender roles and provide an alternative narrative. The simple fact that there are writers taking on these topics, is a decentering act in itself. These theories were able to reach more women, not just Mexican women. In the north of Mexico, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrié Moraga expands the thoughts of these Mexican writers across borders. These Chicana authors offer a revolutionary alternative to love and acceptance amongst women. The reclaiming of all these women and their bodies destroys their patriarchal meaning. Even though it may seem that this decentering is confined to literature and to those women that have access to it, the achievements of this renown authors have come to be a part of feminist theories as well as common knowledge. These writings not only question these antiquated paradigms but try to dissolve the patriarchal system completely.

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