

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Chicana/o Spirituality: An Expression of Identity

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in

Chicana and Chicano Studies

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May 2013

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Abstract

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This study explores spirituality as a tool of empowerment, self-determination and decolonization within selected Chicana/o writings and art. The study affirms that spirituality can serve as a conduit to creating a decolonized culture and offers a way to move forward beyond mainstream Western ideology. This is done by analyzing how Chicana/o artists and writers, *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya (1972); *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa (1988); the visual art, *Our Lady* by Alma Lopez (1999), and *Reinvented Icon for this Time and Place* by Cesar Martinez (1991) reflect spirituality in their work. Most importantly, they use their art as a way to respond to institutional efforts to marginalize Chicana/o spirituality and culture. The study of spirituality is a lifetime project that requires additional research in order to deal with all its complexities, contradictions, and possibilities. I do not attempt to claim that spirituality is a universal way to understand the world, but I dare to say that many people in the world understand that it is a good way to heal the open wounds in the community. Chicana/os have used many tools to help heal historical trauma and to

develop *conocimiento* (knowledge). Our spiritual knowledge (*conocimiento*) helps us change those binaries that do not work for the community like, female/male, white/brown, body/mind, and other “culturas que traicionan.” As an educational researcher, I find spirituality can be regarded as a tool that encourages self-determination and rejects any imposed limitations.

Chapter One: Introduction

Latinos are the largest “minority” population in the United States. Although Chicana/os are usually classified as a single ethnic group by academics, Latinos are very diverse because they come from distinct cultural, socioeconomic, political orientations and races. Language (Spanish) and religion (Christianity) have been the two identifiers that commonly transcend many of the distinctions of culture, nationality, sexuality, class and immigration status. In this work, spirituality, rather than religion, is used as a potent unifier of the community to start a new paradigm because of the potential of spirituality to transcend most of the divisions of the Chicana/o community.

As an act of survival, Chicana/o spirituality has been seen as a tool for discovery, protection and emancipation. For religious studies scholar David Carrasco, spirituality is “a movement to liberate themselves from Anglo (Western) stereotypes, political oppression, poverty, unequal opportunity, and spiritual doubt” (1990, p.166). During the Spanish conquest of Latin America, religion was used with violence as a starting point to overpower groups of indigenous people and to transfer the Spanish culture. The use of religion by force by the Spanish was greatly successful as indigenous America had a history of thousands of years of practicing religion in their daily lives. This prompted indigenous people of Mesoamerica to adapt to the new religion to create a new way to keep their traditions and histories alive. They did this by mixing indigenous cultural and religious processes and commingling them with Western cultural and religious processes.

In result, the indigenous of Mesoamerica, created a new paradigm, which is known as Mexican Catholicism.

Over generations and through the mixing process of different beliefs, Chicana/o spirituality influenced our identities and culture. Often Chicana/o spirituality is a rejection of dominant religious expectations and a distinct way of envisioning a new reality by the community. This study explores spirituality as a tool of empowerment, self-determination and decolonization within the work of selected Chicana/o artists and writers. In this work, I explore Chicana/o writings and art to serve as a conduit to create decolonized culture and offer a way to move forward beyond mainstream western ideology.

I postulate that spirituality is a common link within the Chicana/o community. Additionally, artists and writers are constant contributors to spirituality by creating, within their work, processes in which spirituality is the main component. I hypothesize that this type of spirituality expressed by the artists in this study, can be used by the community and becomes what scholars name as “popular religiosity.” Mario T Garcia (2008) explains popular religiosity by emphasizing two essential factors which are, “first, spirituality is guided by the people themselves and not by the clerics or the institutional church and Chicana/os practice a type of spirituality not officially recognized by the institutional church” (p. 251). This “lived religion¹” is a way for the community to make decisions, react to problems in their daily life and to protect cultural knowledge all under the guidance of how they perceive the divine.

¹ How people actually live their religious experience in their lived daily life.

Additionally, for Chicanos spirituality is a way to answer institutional incursions towards inculturation² and is a part of our history and culture. Furthermore, non-religious Chicana/os had practiced at times the same rituals and ceremonies outside the institutional churches as those Chicana/os within the Church. For example, a ritual that is practiced among the religious and non-religious is the celebration of the Day of the Dead and the creation of altars with ancestors in place of saints. For Chicana/os adaptation to Mexican Catholicism, which is a hybrid religion, represents an affirmation of one's identity, history and culture.

This study is strictly based on two forms of art: written sources and visual art. The selected works include *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya (1972); *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa (1988); the visual art, *Our Lady* by Alma Lopez (1999), and *Reinvented Icon for this Time and Place* by Cesar Martinez (1991). I want to investigate the use of spirituality within their work as a decolonizing tool. In these cases, decolonization will mean a restructuring of ideologies and consciousness to create a new set of beliefs, traditions, and strategies that will help to heal the communities and develop a new state of consciousness and personal awareness that improves and advances the community. I am also using the word *Chicana/o* in different sections of this thesis to replace the words like *Latina/o*, *Hispanic*, or any ethnic signifier like Mexican, Mexican-American, and Salvadorian...etc. I'm using *Chicana/o* as a "cultural modifier" (Moraga,2011, p.13) because *Chicana/o* is a reclaimed word that we have used to name ourselves and to remind us that we are indigenous people. *Chicana/o* brings us to the

² In Christianity inculturation is the way church teachings are forced or adapted to non-Christian cultures which influence those cultures on the evolution of Christian teachings. This is a term that is generally used by Roman Catholics.

original pre-Hispanic roots of our land. It is not an academic title given to us and it is not a name given to us by the government to group us. Chicana/os have selected a name to remind us that our culture and values are (at least in part) indigenous. The Chicana/o academics have updated Chicana/o to mean a person with social conscience, historical consciousness, ethnic pride, and political awareness. Like Moraga (2011), I am expanding the definition to include those with pre-Hispanic roots. Furthermore, my own understanding, and use of the term includes a political and spiritual dimension. One of the reasons to use Chicana/o is to recognize that some in the community “have formed a movement to liberate themselves from Western stereotypes, political oppression, poverty, unequal opportunity, and spiritual doubt” (Carrasco, 1982, p. 166). As I use Chicana/o, I understand that some others prefer other monikers and respecting their preference, I will use the preferred name by the artist when I mention their work. I place myself as an insider to Chicana/o spirituality, but I recognize that my opinions are not representative of the whole community. I also locate myself as part of the academia and as an academic I write this work within a *mujerista* theology lens, which favors lived experiences, social justice and community.

This study refers to the term “spirituality” as an unstructured, unfiltered understanding of the divine. The definition of religion will be dogmatically endorsed practices, and beliefs approved by official religious organizations. By using spirituality, one of our community unifiers, I want to create a connection to the whole community and not to a religious institution. Also, spirituality does not answer to a specific religion, but it does, as does religion, have an awareness of the transcendent or sacred source of life. Spirituality can also refer to pre-Hispanic religious beliefs and can include traditions and

practices from other cultures. The main idea in using spirituality is because, it is one of the potential unifiers for the Chicana/o community and one of the most influential instruments for arranging human behavior. For Chicana/os, I recognize that religion has played a pivotal role in the formation of our own history and has at times been a relevant tool for change, both negative and positive.

Spirituality as mentioned before does not have the rules and regulation of the institutional church. For example, our Catholicism, Mexican Catholicism, is judged as folk Catholicism³. By using these standards, the Catholic Church has denied the Chicana/o a place in the mainstream and by so, they move the community's religiosity to the margins. This is important because if the community rituals and ceremonies become part of church culture then it permeates into the Church structure and changes the structure to represent the community.

Chicana/os have been able to include spirituality in the way we live our daily life and have created processes that are utilized in the formation of cultural expressions. It is also noted in this thesis that secularization of the world continues, including the Latina/o community. However, the Chicana/o spiritual consciousness still plays an important role in our daily life and development, regardless if the person is religious or non-religious.

Chicanos that consider themselves non-religious many still share some characteristics of Mexican spirituality. For example, many maintain loyalty to religious rituals and icons. The most famous religious symbol that has transcended religion is "La Virgen de Guadalupe." Guadalupe has become part of our social world and it is a symbol

³ Folk Catholicism is considered as an ethnic expression of Catholicism and sometimes contradicting official Church teachings.

of our culture. Guadalupe is a symbol of our indigenismo, which gives us the opportunity to identify with our indigenous roots, as well as, show our ancestral ties to the land. Chicana/os see Guadalupe as part of the fabric that makes up the community. La Virgen de Guadalupe has transcended religion and the Catholic Church and has transformed into being a part of the Chicano family.

The Pew Research Center in its 2015 report “America’s Changing Religious Landscape” shows that “Latinos are highly religious, and that spirituality is a powerful motivator for the Latino community” (Wormald). This study highlights how Chicana/os use spirituality to help them survive culturally as it increases the probability of creating positive cultural experiences, allowing Chicana/os to change their own religious environment, which can translate into a more positive overall environment. For Mexicans or Mexican Americans, the religion of choice has been historically Catholicism, but this has rapidly changed in the last twelve years. Many reasons can be given and will be explored in future chapters, but a growing number of Chicana/os consider themselves spiritual, rather than religious (Wormald). The primary role of Catholicism as a conduit to spirituality has declined and some Chicana/os have changed their affiliation to other Christian religions and many more have stopped attending church altogether. Still, Chicana/os consider themselves spiritual even if they do not belong to an organized religion (Wormald, 2015).

The suggestion is that finding our voice may mean listening and reclaiming our distinctive spirituality. I want to explore spirituality as a base to bring concepts and ideas to the study as a viable source of disrupting coloniality. I want to see if there is a parallel between the artist’s work and spirituality? Second, I want to see if they create tools or

concepts that will help Chicana/os decolonize and my goal is to see if those tools/concepts can help the community at large?

Spirituality is defined here as an authentic awareness of self, in relationship to others, the global community, the universe and the Sacred Source of Life and Death based on values of respect, social justice, reciprocity, compassion, and gratitude. This simple definition was given by my mentor Lara Medina in a conversation we had in regard to a paper that Dr. Medina had written and presented at a NACCS conference.

The main points of the definition are:

1. Knowledge of oneself—one's gifts and one's challenges
2. Co-creation or a relationship with communities (others)
3. A relationship with sacred sources of life and death "the Great Mystery" or Creator

In the above definition, "the universe" refers to the plants, animals and the cosmic forces, which are considered sacred in our Indigenous epistemology. The "universe" is everything that exists outside the human realm. I contend that for Chicana/os, spirituality is our connection with the earth, our pre-Hispanic history, our ancestors, the mixture of pre-Hispanic religion with Christianity. Spirituality is explained by The Handbook of Religion and Health as:

Spirituality is distinguished from all other things—humanism, values, morals, and mental health—by its connection to that which is sacred, the transcendent. The transcendent is that which is outside of the self, and yet also within the self—and Spirituality is intimately connected to the supernatural, the mystical, and to organized religion, although also extends beyond organized religion (and begins

before it). Spirituality includes both a search for the transcendent and the discovery of the transcendent and so involves traveling along the path that leads from non-consideration to questioning to either staunch nonbelief or belief, and if belief, then ultimately to devotion and finally, surrender. Thus, our definition of spirituality is very similar to religion and there is clearly overlap. (Koenig, 2012, p. 18)

Thus, I am using spirituality as a tool to help Chicana/os return to a non-Western world view that understands all life as sacred. At the same time, Chicana/os create processes which help create their distinct identity and culture.

Therefore, this work investigates how far and deep spirituality has played a role in the Chicana/o experience. For example, the Day of the Dead is a tradition that is popular within the community, but it is outside the mainstream Catholic experience. This ritual is a sacred pre-Columbian familial observance that celebrates, and at the same time, thanks the ancestors for the blessings of the harvest and the blessings of their new knowledge gained during the year. As the divide between the physical and spiritual world dissolves, the spirits can return and share the offerings with the family. The practice acknowledges the ancestors, the natural world, the family and all under a spiritual base and away from religious overseers. We need to accept that Western religion was imposed on the majority of our people, but the utilization of indigenous ideas, philosophy, folklore and imagery are still mixed within the popular Western religiosity of Chicana/os. Chicana/o spirituality has been transformed with the mixing of pre-Hispanic spirituality and

Western religiosity. The result of mixing spiritualities or mestizaje⁴ is a transformation in the community as Chicana/os practice a living spirituality.

Chapter 2, explores the roots of Chicana/o Indigenous spirituality through an overview of the Olmec, Maya and Mexica culture and the relationship to the domestication of corn and other edible plants. The organizing of new communities and the beginning of a cosmovision, “which means the ways in which Mesoamericans combined their cosmological notions relating to time and space into a structured and systematic worldview” will also receive focus (Carrasco, 1982, p. xvii). Chapter 2 also discusses European colonization from 1521-1821 and the imposition of Christianity. The indigenous modes of resisting assimilation into Spanish Christianity included, the use of syncretism as the complex process by which rituals, beliefs, and symbols from different religions were combined to create a new spirituality. It explores the Spanish lack of understanding for the Indigenous worldview and their dismissal of the beliefs by the conquering priests. Chapter 3 covers Mexican Catholics in U.S. Southwest from 1848-1960. I provide the introduction through the fundamental issue of the annexation, by conquest of the Southwest. Also, the subjugation of the indigenous way of life and the attacks on the Mexican Catholic way of life. Chapter 4 discusses significant work by Chicana/o writers in the subject of spirituality. Chapter 5 brings the analysis of our writers and artists including: *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya; *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa; and images “*Our Lady*” by Alma Lopez, and “*Reinvented Icon for this Time and Place*” by Cesar Martinez. The final

⁴ The process through which two totally different peoples mix biologically and culturally so that a new people begin to emerge. (Elizondo V., 2000,17)

section of this work addresses, with more specificity, my ideas about Chicana/o spirituality as a tool of decolonization.

Chapter Two: Indigenous Mesoamerica

One of the challenges about studying Mesoamerican religions is the massive amount of misinformation from our current academic sources, which are predominantly written by Western white males whose work is both exclusive and considered legitimate within the mainstream academy. In contrast, studies from scholars of color (see Delgado and Villalpando 2002 “An Apartheid of Knowledge in Academia: The Struggle Over the “legitimate” Knowledge of Faculty of Color), are suspect and considered less academic. Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2002) point out that “Too frequently, an epistemology based on the social history and culture portrays people of color as deficient and judges the scholarship produced by scholars of color as biased and non-rigorous” (p.169). However, Chicana/o academics have important information in the form of lived history, which includes the knowledge in Chicana/os personal religions. Personal religions include rituals and ceremonies, which are a way to bridge the gap from religions in pre-Hispanic times to Chicana/os’ spirituality today. As spirituality is incorporated in the academic discourse, we need to remember that our personal knowledge is essential for guidance as we are creating or/and recreating some of our histories. However, personal knowledge is tricky to substantiate, and we need to consider that Latina/o history has been systematically erased. As colonized people, cultural standards were imposed on the community while their culture and religious way of life was systematically destroyed.

This study presents an overview of the history of three indigenous communities of Mesoamerica. I am creating a map to point to the significance of religion as a foundation to help construct the community. The use of the Olmec, Maya and Mexica are important as they are considered among the most important communities to develop out of

Mesoamerica. I use a chronological order which allows the reader to see how later groups built on the knowledge of previous civilizations. I will also emphasize the innovative moments and major contributions from the three groups.

Geographically, Mesoamerica is privileged as it sits in a central location in the continent. It covers the southern two-thirds of Mexico and significant portions of Central America. In this extensive region, human populations developed intensive agriculture, which served as the basis for the rise of urban civilization. Most early noted civilizations developed due to plant and animal domestication, and Mesoamerica was not different. For Mesoamerican people, the agrarian foundation was key to the development of the civilization. Religious Studies scholar, David Carrasco, confirms that the development of an agricultural system, which included maize, beans, squashes, cotton and chili peppers, was the beginning of a spiritual development and the creation of religious life in Mesoamerica around 6500-1500 BCE.

Professor of Mexican American and Raza Studies, Dr. Roberto Rodriguez, accentuates that it was the introduction of maize that allowed the people to become more sedentary. It is from this period that the earliest settlements with ceremonial centers and burial mounds have been discovered. They started to change from a more nomadic people, who survived by hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering and some cultivating, to a sedentary community, where they started to develop a more complex culture, including ritual, ceremonies, and myths. For example, for the Olmec, corn shaped their daily life. For indigenous people, corn was both a staple of their diet and was also submerged in ritual and spirituality, since it was believed that corn was a gift from the Gods. Carrasco credits the Olmec as one of the first cultures that began to form permanent ceremonial

centers containing impressive monumental ceremonial architecture, including: “pyramids,” palaces, tombs, and spacious outdoor ritual precincts.

The Olmec

Carrasco points out that the first great civilization, The Olmec -which was situated between 1800 BCE 300 BCE- is a mystery to most historians. The Olmec were called the “rubber people” or “the people from the land of the rubber trees” by the Mexica. Due to scarcity of archaeological work in the Olmec settlement, the information about their origins is almost unknown. Historians, including Rodriguez, recognize the mounds or pyramids as religious ceremonial centers and/or spiritual centers, but there was a conscious decision by the Spanish-after the conquest-to deny the mounds as religious ceremonials centers. This created a “bias that continues to keep the public in the dark about the pre-Columbian history of this continent” (Rodriguez, 2014, p. 63).

The site of this great civilization was on the eastern coast of Mesoamerica in the area now called Veracruz and Tabasco and some of the settlements of the Olmec spread into western and southern Mesoamerica. What is known is that, for the Olmec, spirituality, culture, and history mirrored the domestication of plant life, including their central staple, corn. The entire style of life of this hierarchical society was organized by the worldview emphasizing the fundamentals of agriculture. Carrasco describes how agriculture was fundamental in the early history of Mesoamerica. He writes:

The most creative cultural event in the pre-urban history of Mesoamerica was the control of food energy contained in plants. The domestication of agriculture was fundamental to the eventual rise of permanent villages, ceremonial centers, and

social differentiation developed slowly between 6500 BCE and 2000 BCE.

(Carrasco, 1982, p. 28)

Rodriguez (2014) also acknowledges that even though the Olmec were not the first people to develop their culture based on maiz[e], they are the first of the known cultures that built great cities and relied on large-scale maiz[e] production. For the Olmec, the emerging of urban centers did not supplant or banish more ancient cultures (Rodriguez, p. 63), but it was an addition to the fabric of the emerging culture. Carrasco considers that the most notable design of Olmec culture was the way in which the earth was reshaped as a means of religious manifestation along with the work in basalt. Carrasco found art and architecture from the Olmec civilization that had religious ideas and symbols and were not only for religious activities, but rather tied up with daily work, trade, social order and warfare. Other facets from the Olmec period that show the spirituality of the Olmec include, the tradition of stone carving (for example, the colossal basalt heads), rock painting and religious imagery that could be interpreted. Carrasco explains:

The Olmec media for art and symbolic expression were jade, basalt, clay and the earth itself in the forms of caves, hills, and artificial volcanoes such as was used at La Venta to represent an earth pyramid. Each of these media was transformed to represent the realities of social hierarchy and religious imagination. Caves became the setting for cave paintings and rituals of mythic events while cliffs became the places of carvings of human-animal-spirit relations. The ceremonial centers were assemblages of sacred spaces made of redesigned earthly materials arranged on and within the earth (Carrasco, 1982, p. 34).

The Olmec was the first great civilization in Mesoamerica and an inspiration to the indigenous groups that followed, including the Maya and Mexica. The Olmec style was the precursor to the Maya and to many of the Maya expressions. For example, Carrasco (1982) points out that the city of Iztapa, in Guatemala, which contained over seventy-five pyramid mounds and a large number of stone stelae, was a major transition point between the Olmec style and the Maya achievements (Carrasco, p. 37).

Classic Maya

According to Carrasco, the Classic Period, for the Maya, was between 200 CE and 900 CE. For Carrasco, the Maya were responsible in the maturation of many processes, including the proliferation of ritual and ceremonies, solar calendrical systems, sizable agricultural bureaucracies, and the emergence in several areas of intense, even brutal, competition between powerful ceremonial centers. Some of the rituals associated with the Mayans, including the practicing of human sacrifice, have never been fully explored. New theories are questioning the validity of mass human sacrifice carried out by Mesoamerican groups, but never been questioned until now. Dr. Peter Hassler, an ethnologist at the University of Zurich, and author of "Human Sacrifice Among the Aztecs? A Critical Study," published recently in Switzerland:

After careful and systematic study of the sources, I find no sign of evidence of institutionalized mass human sacrifice among the Aztecs. The phenomenon to be studied, therefore, may not be these supposed sacrifices but the deeply rooted belief that they occurred.

Furthermore, auto-sacrifice, or bloodletting, by rulers, priests and nobles were common in Mesoamerica.

The Mayas domain was in southern Mexico and northern Central America including Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. These areas include an array of geographies that were able to support a rich diversity of wildlife and plants. Again, agriculture plays an important role in the formative period. This period was characterized by the gradual rise of complex ceremonial centers and the appearance of monumental architecture. Also developed during this period were hieroglyphic writing and calendrics, the introduction of social stratification, short and long-distance trade routes, and the first outlines of political statehood.

Carrasco (1982) agrees that one of the most creative religious achievements of the Classical Maya was a long count calendar. Although this calendric system had earlier origins based on intense astronomical observations, it was the Maya who elaborated the cosmological conviction that human life would be most favorable if it mirrored the mathematically expressible cycle of a heavens (p. 38). Maya civilization worked out a remarkable system of cosmology and mathematics. They also introduced the concept of zero; but the first evidence of zero, as a number, dates further back to the Olmec. The Maya excelled in their use of mathematics especially as it pertained to astronomy and the workings of their calendar.

The astronomical observations of the Maya were quite accurate, denoting the movements of the planets, particularly Venus, the sun and moon. From these excellent astronomical notations, the Maya constructed and perfected the Mesoamerican calendar, which included both the sacred ritual 260-day calendar and the 365-day solar calendar and the Long Count Calendar that is part of the solar calendar. The Long Count Calendar began on August 11, 3114 B.C. and entered its next cycle on December 21, 2012

(Carrasco, 1982, p. 39). Other major Mayan achievements were glyph writing, extravagantly ornamented ceremonial centers, a heightened conception of the royal person, a complex mythology of the underworld and an understanding of cosmic generation.

The Mayan culture shared many traits with other Mesoamerican cultures and learned from other civilizations like the Olmec, and the Zapotec. However, the Maya created distinctive attributes, symbols and traditions. Many aspects of Maya traditions were very refined or perfected forms of art and architecture, but the Maya people also created unique contributions; like the complex calendar system, which is unique among Mesoamerican cultures.

Due to extensive trading networks, all Mesoamerican cultures influenced the others. For example, the Long Count calendar was developed during the formative period, maybe Olmec, but flourished in the classic Maya period. Maya civilization depended on maize (corn) and the Maya maize Deity was of central importance. The Maya religion centers on the cyclical nature of time, from birth to death and rebirth. Maya rituals follow both terrestrial and celestial cycles, which Maya formed into a way of living daily life.

Religion was a central and vital component of Mayan life. A Maya city can be recognized, according to experts including Carrasco, from the stepped pyramids, huge plazas and expansive palaces built for kings and nobles. One highly spiritual ritual, common to many Mesoamerican cultures, was the sacred ball game. The ball courts were built close to temples. Carved stone monuments called stelae are found all over the Mayan areas. Stelae were carved in bas-relief to celebrate the life and deeds of Maya

rulers and nobles and can still be seen today. With the invention of the corbelled arch, Maya builders created light and airy rooms that lent their temples and palaces a decided gracefulness.

Writing System

The Maya fully developed a complex writing system that represented their spoken language. Maya script relied on over a thousand glyphs or symbols, which could represent either a syllable or a word. The books were made of bark paper and folded like an accordion. There are several codices/amoxltli, or painted books on fig tree bark/amatl paper, such as the Madrid Codex, which is the longest of the existing Maya Hieroglyphic manuscripts containing over 250 separate almanacs. In these almanacs, there is an inclusion of calendrical data with pictures and glyphs texts that show information about the sacred calendar. The *Madrid Codex*, denotes quite specifically daily life like planting, hunting, and or tending crops. It also refers to specific activities, deities, offerings, and ritual and astronomical events. It's also important to note that ceremonial centers have their own religious patterns and glyphs, which denote rituals and ceremonies.

The Mexica

This brief historical overview ends with a look at the Aztec cosmovision. The story of the Aztecs has been for most people somewhat familiar. Carrasco reminds us that the Aztecs, or Mexica, traveled from their northern homeland of Aztlan in around 1110 BCE, but these dates, and locations of Aztlan are highly debated. The Aztec empire was dated between 1425 CE to 1521 CE when Tenochtitlan fell to the invading

Europeans under Cuauhtémoc's rule at Tlatelolco (Carrasco, 1990, p. xxiv). The myth of the Mexica/Aztecs' rise to dominance is an inspirational one and is one of the most extraordinary stories in world history. They were an unknown group of people who came into the Valley of Mexico during the 12th and 13th century A.D. and advanced to become the greatest power in the Americas by the time the Spaniards arrived in the 16th century. Tenochtitlan, the Aztec capital, developed into the epicenter of the world, as is told in their mythology of foundation, and warfare was intimately tied to their cosmovision and ritual traditions.

Carrasco conveys that the Aztec cosmology had several distinctive qualities, including the fact that the cosmic setting was a dynamic, unstable, destructive one distinguished by sharp alternations between order and disorder, cosmic life, and cosmic death. The Aztec's cosmic order was marked on both the celestial and terrestrial levels by combat, sacrifice, and rebellion, as well as by harmony, cooperation, and stability. Aztec warfare was intimately tied to this cosmovision and ritual traditions (Carrasco, 1990, p. 47).

For the Mexica, there was an underlying cultural belief that ongoing sacrifice sustained the Universe. To be sacrificed was the highest form of death and victims were honored posthumously as reflections of the gods. In Mesoamerican religions, the human body was considered a sacred "center." In Mesoamerican religion, there were three life forces which were manifested in the human body. These life forces created the human self and were the link to the Gods (Chevalier, 2003, p.47) the liver, 2003, p. 47). These three energy centers must be kept in a state of balance. Carrasco explains that for the Mexica the head was filled with tonalli, an animating force that provided vigor and the

energy for growth and development. Chevalier and Sanchez Bain explain that the “tonalli was situated in the head, probably in the brain, and was responsible for each person’s vital power and light energy transmitted through eyes and sight” (Chevalier, p. 47). The heart received deposits of teyolia (what gives life on the earthly plane), which provided emotion, memory, and knowledge to the human. For the Mexica, the heart, and more specifically, the blood was life giving to the Gods (Viesca Treviño). The liver, *ihiyotl*, provided human with bravery, desire, greed, hatred, love and happiness (Chevalier, 2003, p. 47) and “it could exercise excessive attraction and excite the body” (Chevalier, 2003, p. 86). Additionally, the Mexica believed that the body was a mirror to the cosmos and a balanced must be maintained in order to have a good life. In the Mesoamerican worldview/cosmovision there also existed three levels the celestial, earthly, and underworld planes, that informed the Mexica method of living.

Carrasco reminds us that the Aztecs had ceremonial centers or ecological complexes. The centers were able to produce food (agriculture), but they also had technological potential. These centers featured art, trading networks and a complex system able to control the flow of people and the movement of people. The complex had a “ceremonial precinct, often with monumental architecture that served as the ritual theater” (Carrasco, 1990, p. 20). However, the most important fact about the ceremonial centers was that they served as a “pivot of the universe, acting as a magnet” for all of the knowledge, goods, and services needed by the city (Carrasco, 1990, p. 21).

My review of all three groups in this study, Olmec, Maya, and Mexica, indicates that they all achieved great accomplishments, and though separate civilizations, they had a similar worldview and cosmology with aspects of culture and religion that mirrored

each other. This idea of showing the similarities is too broad and complicated but I would like to offer a small example and make a point that all three include a strong and complex spirituality. Even with stylistic differences, Mesoamerican people, have practiced a similar spirituality with elements of continuity. Their religions followed a cyclical nature of time that included both terrestrial and celestial cycles. As part of the way to worship, they built religious centers that included monumental ceremonial platforms and played games, such as the ball game; a game that was a religious expression. The game was invented sometime in the Pre-classical Period (2500-100 BCE), most likely by the Olmec, and became central to most of the Mesoamerican groups. Eventually, the game was even played in North America and the Caribbean.

All three empires contributed to the creation of great cities that were designed to study astronomy, develop complex calendars that rival modern day calendars and complex math systems. They all had a writing system of hieroglyphics that informed rituals and ceremonies. The architecture, monuments and tombs were part of the spirituality and constructed for their ceremonies and rituals. Those ceremonies and rituals transcended the temples and developed into new rituals and ceremonies practiced at home and helped the community with their daily life (Carrasco, 1990, p. 22). For example, although some scholars believe that ceremonial human sacrifice was part of an elaborate social and religious rite reserved for the elite, and others believe that the claim of human sacrifice was an attempt to undermine and discredit the Mesoamerica nations (Rodríguez, 2014, p. 47). The blood rituals, transcended all pre-Columbian cultures and all practiced various forms of ritual sacrifice. In addition, all three groups had self-

inflicted ritual varieties, such as bloodletting that could be practiced by people in all classes.

For most Mesoamerican groups, religion was always evolving as Carrasco (1990) explains, “These ritual and mythic traditions were not mere repetitions of ancient ways. New rituals and mythic stories were produced to respond to ecological, social, and economic changes and crises” (p. 22). We need to remember that all three cultures, Olmec, Maya and Mexica, had represented their world by the use of art. Their art was used as part of spirituality and had a masterful realism. In their art, the most common representation was the natural universe and depictions/reflections of their culture. For example, Maiz is one of the most fundamental pieces for art in all three groups. The representation of maiz is part of their daily life, as well as a representation of their spirituality.

In summary, when the Spaniards arrived, the peoples of Mesoamerica had complex writing systems that helped to record their histories, particularly in regard to spirituality. There is a misconception that Indigenous peoples were illiterate, and it is incorrectly assumed that they did not have a written language and that there is not enough information to be able to tell the history of Mesoamerica. Rodríguez explains that despite the vast information, the view widely persists that they were illiterate and unable to record, like the people of Europe, their stories, beliefs, and histories. Thus, much of what we know about Indigenous people, before 1492 and the colonial period, is determined by the writings of Spanish friars (2014, p. 29). In reality, indigenous Mesoamericans had transmitted their history in several ways including an intensive oral tradition, art, architecture and pictographs recorded in the sacred books; for example, the amoxtl

(painted on amatl/fig tree bark paper) or screen fold manuscripts. The remains of these sources shed light on the rich spiritual philosophy of the ancient Mesoamericans.

European Colonization 1521-1821

With the fall of the Mexica empire in 1521, the Spaniards moved forward to create a new master narrative.⁵ Since the new world depended heavily on religion and spirituality, the Catholic Church was a better choice to subjugate Mesoamerica and attempt to break their spirit. The Spanish could see the importance of spirituality for the Mexica as it was marked in the construction of the cities, the lifestyle of the Mesoamerican people that revolved around rituals and prayers, and more importantly in how they treasured their daily experiences and ceremonies as a part of their spirituality (Rodriguez, 1990, p. 27).

How to Define People: Rules of Conquest

How people interpret and write history has always been permeated with personal and cultural biases. Since the Spanish conquest/invasion of the Mexica, the history of Indigenous Americans has been reinterpreted and misinterpreted by others rather than by the Indigenous American communities that the history belongs to and it is always told to the detriment of the communities. Indigenous American history has always been told from the perspective of the subjugator (Rodríguez, 2014, p. 72). However military conquest is not the end game for a conquering nation that is trying to form an empire. After the initial military conquest, the indigenous population was the next target. Indigenous Mesoamerican people were attacked, and the first line of violence was perpetuated by the

⁵ The story that the Spanish crown had created for the new world in order to justify the total destruction of the Mesoamerican people.

Catholic Church and disseminated by Christian missionaries who arrived with Cortez after the defeat of Tenochtitlan.

Roberto Rodríguez (1990), in his book *Our Sacred Maize Is Our Mother*, recounts that in “1524, a group of twelve friars were responsible for the initial project of conquering the Mesoamerican minds” (p. 30). The project of mass conversion of the indigenous people started with those friars approaching the elders with the excuse that they were trying to learn their ways of life. However, the goal was not to understand their cosmology, but to find a way to destroy their knowledge. A comprehensive documentation of the friars’ interactions with the elders was recorded by friar Bernardino de Sahagun in 1564. The recordings basically indicated the inability (or refusal) of the priests to recognize the Indigenous worldview and their dismissal of Indigenous beliefs, even if they were based on much older and experienced traditions. They refused to see the Mexica understanding of life or their belief in a supreme deity/creator because their goal was to erase those traditions and replace them with their own (Rodríguez, 2014, p. 30).

By analyzing Sahagun’s writings, Rodriguez follows those original friars and their “massive and totalizing reframing project of a spiritual erasure” (2014, p. 31). The main goal for the Spanish church was to reframe the cosmovision of the new world and create a new vision that would obstruct the survival of the pre-Columbian knowledge and spirituality. The “reframing project” would impose a Christian vision upon the continent where the subjugators would act as the transmitter of the “true” knowledge and the saviors of the new world (Rodríguez, 2014, p. 31-32).

Carrasco says that the Church was aided by the myth of “the most influential and

degrading fantasy” (1990, p. 27) of an inferior human that was a cannibal, sexually immoral, ungovernable, between beast and human and misdirected by pagan gods. On the opposite end, if they were not wild humans, then the Indians were noble and pure in their hearts, but still savages in need of rescue. The Europeans used this to justify oppression, violence, genocide, and the eradication of Indian spiritual philosophy. The point was to force the people to become Christian and obey the Spaniards. We can point to this time of imposed colonization as the beginning, for the peoples of Mesoamerica, of ideas and racial prejudices that affect us today. The Western worldview still uses those invented biases in naming and interpreting Native American life and culture (Carrasco, 1990, p. 8). The Europeans invented a new human being or a being less than human, so they could have the fantasy of an attractive land devoid of civilization that needed to be conquered and occupied. In other words, the Church had to recreate the whole history of Mesoamerica. They had to erase many thousands of years of history before they could really take over. The plan was for total destruction of the past in order to create a new narrative and society.

Indigenous temples needed to be destroyed and replaced with Catholic Churches, monasteries, and convents. By replacing the religious temples, the Spanish wanted to create a new image of dominance and superiority. For the Spanish, the new images not only replaced the old, but also created an illusion of a superior race. The conquest forced Indigenous peoples into the margins a space where they did not belong. They made the indigenous people feel like “foreigner[s] in their own land” a phrase coined by Juan Seguin (1856) a problem that still persists today in the USA.

For the Spanish, there was an extreme necessity to shape the culture of the new

world. The first step was to change the indigenous urban centers. Those centers had to be changed in order to be controlled. For example, the “Colegio de Tlatelolco” (“College of Tlatelolco”), which was designed for the children of the native elite, was built at the site of the Aztec/Mexica *calmecac* (school of higher learning). For the Mexica, the *calmecac* prepared the sons of nobles in the duties of ruling, including how to be priest and chiefs. In the new school, the Spanish controlled the education and the site where they were educated. The indigenous schools, the *calmecac*, were transformed to teach Christianity to the native elite. The Spanish friars used the existing “*media*” for the mass conversion. The teachings were highly visible and took advantage of all the symbols of the new world. Every point was made to show that Christianity was superior to the old-world order (Sanchez Walsh, 2004, p. 37).

The control of people also included the human body. Under the indigenous cosmovision, “the human body was considered the nexus and unifying structure of the universe” (Carrasco, 1990, p. 21). For the Spanish, the emphasis changed from a holistic body and soul approach, treating both body and soul as part of Mesoamerican spirituality, to a world where the main goal was to save the soul by sacrificing the body. As Rodriguez (2014) reminds us:

The attempt by Spanish priests to convert the indigenous people of the continent en masse started with an effort to destroy pre-Columbian knowledge while at the same time making use of the very same *media* that Mesoamerican peoples had been utilizing to perform their agriculturally based ceremonies. Prior to the arrival of Europeans in Mesoamerica, *danza*, ritual dancing, was part of an integrated system, which also included music, poetry, and song, that was used to

communicate the culture, including creation, origin, and migration stories and historical events. The primary functions of these public rituals and ceremonies, which were connected to the uniform calendars, was to ritually govern people's' births, lives and deaths. Instructions were recorded on the amoxtlis or codices, which communicated culture, preserved memory, and helped to unify the many diverse populations. Added to these media were the huehuetlatolli or the ancient word, a guide for moral instruction. These elements together represented what Carey describes as “ritualized communications,” in which the emphasis is not simply on communicating a message but on representing “shared beliefs.” (p. 37)

Syncretism:” The War Over Images”

In examining the tools used for mass conversion, syncretism was the most useful. The Spanish used Indigenous imagery to create a false narrative for the purpose of mass conversion. Carrasco defines syncretism as the complex process by which rituals, beliefs, and symbols from different religions are combined to create a new meaning. Syncretism is most clearly represented in ritual performances that enable people to locate themselves within the new world of meaning. For Rodriguez (2014), the principle example of syncretic communication is the mutual attempt to link Christianity with the ancient spirituality of the continent, including the idea relayed in the Testarian Codices that Jesus ate tortillas with his disciples at the Last Supper. However, the ultimate symbol in the war over imagery is the apparition of the Virgin de Guadalupe. The image of Tonantzin and/or Guadalupe is the perfect icon to show the struggle over images. Guadalupe represents the Spanish forcing the Christian Mary into the Mesoamerican cosmology, and the impression that Christianity was created for the new world. The

indigenous Goddess Tonantzin was appropriated by the Spanish to become instead Guadalupe, the mother of Christ. Chicana scholar Broyles-Gonzalez wrote that Tonantzin/Guadalupe represented a monumental struggle beyond imagery:

The peoples that were being subjected to mass-conversions had to relate to the images, and in that sense, the images of the Virgen de Guadalupe—a brown virgin—was the quintessential or crown jewel of images. (Rodríguez, 2014, p. 38)

La Otra Conquista or The Other Conquest

Rodríguez explains that the challenge was that syncretism was (and is) a “two-way street, creating a space for Indigenous peoples, oftentimes in the very place of Christian instruction (churches and monasteries)” (2014, p. 38). The church was aware of the problem, but it was tolerated because of the fear that if the Indigenous world was totally rejected, then the Indigenous people would reject Christianity. However, the priests and friars were always ready to brutally stop any rebellion. For Serge Gruzinski, the Virgin of Guadalupe also functions as the ultimate justification for la Otra Conquista. He interprets the use of her image as the exploitation of Indigenous prior knowledge. Regardless of the original purpose, after many years, the image itself transformed into prior knowledge becoming, on the surface, the counter story of the continent (Gruzinski, 1993, p.69). Rodríguez agrees:

Guadalupe is the counter story. She is alien, and yet she is also native: Tonantzin. Maiz is Quetzalcoatl and, in her tilma imagery, Guadalupe triumphs over the serpent. Yet Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, is also the morning star that appears in the east and may be Saint Thomas. And the triumphant Guadalupe/Tonantzin is brown. Maiz is not rejected but instead utilized as the

Holy Eucharist. And thus, the story and counter-story are fused. The original story and frame resides inside the counter-story and the counter-frame. This is a deep story-an *historia profunda*. (2014, p. 39)

And thus, in Guadalupe, the beginning of mestizaje and spiritual mestizaje was possible. Virgilio Elizondo, in his book *The Future is Mestizo Life Where Cultures Meet*, explains:

Mexican mestizaje, although painful and negative at many moments of the process, can today play a positive role because of its religious symbolism provides the synthesis of two apparently irreconcilable religions: Spanish Catholicism and the Native American religions. The Indigenous people of the Americas found the European religion incomprehensible, while the Catholic missionaries found the native religions abominable. Yet in the brown Lady of Guadalupe, a new synthesis was achieved that was acceptable to both. I am convinced that were it not for the Lady of Guadalupe, there would be no Mexico today. There would simply be New Spain and the descendants of the native peoples, co-existing but never merging into one people. Had there been no religious mestizaje, the barriers between the two groups would still be insurmountable.

Mexican culture and Mexican Catholicism were born in the brown Virgin of Guadalupe. Mexican Catholicism cannot be adequately understood through the theological categories of Western Europe, for its indigenous substratum permeates every fiber of the Mexican Church. Yet it is mere syncretism. It is profoundly Christian, although its modes of expression have not always been recognized as

legitimate by outsiders (V. Elizondo, 2000, p. 107).

Gloria Anzaldúa recognizes the in-between space that Chicana/os inhabit at the present time. We can create a new existence by observing the past and creating a new reality. For Anzaldúa, there is a space between, religions, cultures and nations and Chicanos inhabit this space. She explains:

Nepantla is the space in-between, the locus and sign of transition. In nepantla, we realize that realities clash, authority figures of the various groups demand contradictory commitments, and we and other[s] have failed living up to idealize goals. We're caught in remolinos (vortexes), each with different, often contradictory forms of cognition, perspectives, worldviews, and beliefs systems—all occupying the transitional nepantla space. (1988, p. 17)

Western scholars have long been aware of the misinterpretation and duplicity but have decided to ignore it. Therefore, it is useful for the indigenous scholars to approach the study of Chicana/o spirituality from the continuous patterns of disinformation and religious destruction.

Chapter Three: Mexican Catholics in U.S. Southwest

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which brought an end to the Mexican American War of 1846–1848, started a new attack on the indigenous way of life as well as religious subjugation of the Mexican American Catholics. The signing of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the U.S. annexation of half of Mexico signaled the beginning of decades of persistent, pervasive prejudice and discrimination against people of Mexican origin that reside in the United States. As a survival technique from the Spanish conquest, Mexican people continued to blend their Mesoamerican religion with Christianity. And because of this history, Mexican people's beliefs were targeted as deficient by the American Catholic Church. The new American or Mexican Americans had a new confrontation with Western European Catholicism in (mainly French and later Irish Catholicism) the U.S., and American Protestantism.

Under the treaty, Mexicans in the now Southwestern part of the U.S., became U.S. citizens with a new culture and loyalties facing them. In the new nation, Mexican Americans had to create new tools of empowerment and reuse old tools to survive. In this chapter, I talk about popular Catholicism as it refers to Mexican religiosity, syncretism as a tool of empowerment, and how the new Mexican American survived the religious and social change.

The term “popular Catholicism” signifies here the understanding and practice of Catholicism found among the general population, or the lived religion as different from what is officially sanctioned or encouraged by the Roman Catholic Church. The Mexican American Catholicism that the American churches, both Catholic and Protestant, discovered as it began its control over the former Mexican Provinces of the Southwest

was, and to a great extent still is, popular Catholicism. Sanchez Walsh (2004) explains that popular Catholicism “focuses on a rich devotional life of prayer to saints (both official and unofficial), the use of material objects to aid in prayer (candles, holy water, statues, and rosaries), and a special devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe” (pgs.12-13).

The clash between the Mexican American community and the new dominant Euro-American culture was monumental and this fact forced the U.S. Catholic Church to confront the Mexican way of being Catholic. Sanchez Walsh conveys that “The clash between popular and institutional Catholicism bred suspicions among church leaders, who viewed such display as misguided at best and ‘pagan’ at worst” (p.13). For the Mexican American, the attacks created a new chapter in their religious experience; as the Catholic Church sided with the dominant culture, the Mexican community adapted by turning more to their faith and bringing all the signs, symbols and practices of popular Catholicism to their new reality.

This form of reaction by the native community was not new, as they had practiced this type of religious adaptation, or syncretism during the Spanish colonization. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla clarifies, “Syncretism has been used to refer to popular Catholicism’s mixture of Christian elements with those diverse, but basically Mesoamerican, origins” (1996, p.136). The new policies of the church, which considered Mexican Catholicism deficient, included pressure to assimilate Mexicans into the white American mainstream, correct any perceived abnormalities and assign non-Spanish speaking priests to Spanish speaking congregations.

In “The Mexican American Religious Experience” Arlene Sanchez Walsh gives some examples of the pressure that Mexican American Catholics faced under the Euro-American Catholic Church:

New Mexico bishops Jean Baptiste Lamy (1814-1888) order[ed] that retablos (folk art depicting saints) be taken down from the churches. Lamy replaced the retablos with blond, French statues. Lamy also sought to limit the influence of the Penitentes (lay leader and clergy who gained notoriety because of various unorthodox practices), and he ordered priests to celebrate the Fourth of July (19). Bishop Tadeo Amat, a Catalan from Barcelona, Spain, arrived in Los Angeles in 1856 with the bones of the Roman Saint Vibiana and renamed her the Mexican patroness of his archdiocese, replacing the Mexican patroness, Nuestra Senora del Refugio. Amat rejected the plaza area of downtown where Mexicans lived in favor of a grand cathedral, west of the plaza (15).

Also, in Los Angeles, historian Michael Engh (1992) believes that the actions taken by Bishop Tadeo Amat, furthered the spiritual and physical isolation of Mexicans who lived on the east side and south of the city center, away from the Cathedral of St. Vibiana (p. 55). This action of the church had a negative impact on the social status of the Mexican American community. As Sanchez Walsh explains “Mexican American[s] were treated as inferiors by the church, and their spirituality was viewed as suspect because Mexicans practiced popular forms of Catholicism” (16).

The Mexican-American community responded receding into their local community, their family and their devotions including the ever-present Guadalupe. But this response by the Mexican community was not welcomed by the conquering nation.

As in any nation built by conquest, those seen as foreigners needed to assimilate as soon as possible and prove their loyalty. The U.S. decided to do the same that Spain had done in the Americas, destroying indigenous cultures to be able to bring those that did not conform to the fold. Additionally, Bishop Amat pledged to make “every effort” to see ritual conformity everywhere. Gilberto Hinojosa (1994) explains that for Bishop Amat the “Mexican Catholics were ‘failures’ because of their perceived unorthodox practices; their betterment lay in becoming good American[s]” (p. 23).

In spite of the Church promoting Americanization among Mexicans and attempting an entire cultural transformation, consecutive waves of Mexican immigrants preserved many of the old religious traditions (Sanchez Walsh 17). The first large scale wave of refugees was during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), when more than one million Mexicans fled across the border and brought with them their Catholic faith. As one of their first tasks, the new communities started to look for churches to practice their faith and allowed them to continue their traditions as many of the Mexican immigrants brought existing Mexican devotions with them. For example, societies devoted to the Virgin of Guadalupe were relocated by devotees who wanted to preserve the same traditions and fervor with which the Virgin is venerated in Mexico. For the Mexican American, there was another even more significant piece of history that affected the religious identity community in the early twentieth century, which was the Cristero Rebellion (1926-1929) (Meyer, 1976 p. 30).

Jean A. Meyer (1976) describes the Cristero Rebellion as “efforts by the Mexican government in the 1920s to suppress the power of the Catholic Church” (p. 30). And as Catholic priests escaped Mexico and arrived in the U.S., many started to set up missions

among immigrant communities both along the border and as far away as Detroit and Chicago (Sanchez Walsh 17). Finally, the Mexican American community had religious representatives with the same culture and language to advocate for them. However, cultural hostilities, perceived class differences and racism relegated the Mexican priests and American community to a second-class status. The Catholic Church mirrored the racial hierarchies and social relations of the broader society. As before, Mexicans turned to their faith for comfort. Those in the community that were forced out of their churches turned to their home altars and saints to practice their faith and to heal spiritual wounds etched by the abuses of the Church. The Church had betrayed the community, but the community did not abandon the church; they adapted to the new regime. Popular Catholicism was reinforced and recreated to help protect the community.

Mexican American Catholics 1940-1960

Up to this time, as a result of being rejected by the institutional church during the early twentieth century, Mexican Americans often times made their homes a place where they could worship. The church had been unsympathetic to the Mexican plight, and the community responded by abandoning the Church but not their faith. To accommodate the Mexican spirituality, the Church would need to change.

Throughout the twentieth century, the relationship between the Catholic Church and Mexican Americans evolved. Of particular interest is the rise to prominence of progressive bishops who began to take a holistic approach in ministering to the Mexican American community. Robert Lucey (1891-1977), archbishop of San Antonio, stands out as an early advocate for reform. In 1945, in San Antonio, Lucey founded the Bishops Committee for the Spanish Speaking, which

investigated ways to better service the Mexican American. The church reacted to the problems that the community was facing but also made moves to neutralize the Protestant infiltration. Bishop John J Cantwell sent more priests to examine the plight of Mexicans who were being evangelized by Protestants. Cantwell sent more priests so that parishioners could go to confession with a Spanish speaker (Sanchez Walsh p.18-19).

Archbishop Cantwell was noted for being particularly sensitive to the needs of the Mexican American Catholics in the archdiocese, and he created fifty Mexican American churches and missions. Cantwell was a major supporter of the Mexican Cristero movement, particularly in the early 1930s after their defeat in armed conflict with the secularist Mexican government. Many exiled Mexican clerics were given refuge in the Los Angeles diocese during that era.

The evolution happened a little too late for many. The Mexican American community started to be more independent of the church and on many occasions, the community started to avoid the church as they did not feel comfortable. Arlene Sanchez Walsh writes that historian David A. Badillo noted in his writing *Mexican American Parish Communities*, not all was well with Mexican immigrants. In the Midwest, Kansas for example, parishes were segregated; therefore, parishioners often did not return to church and instead made their homes places where they could worship and sustain their faith. Again, the Mexican community returned to worship at home among their home altar, retablos, and family (Sanchez Walsh, 2004, p. 19).

The leadership of the Catholic Church needed to admit that they felt short of their task to provide spiritual guidance to the Mexican people. But many Mexican Americans

still did not abandon the church. For example, Yolanda Tarango, a Chicana nun, explained that “religion is central in the lives of Hispanic Women. It is precisely their religion, their deep sense of an existential interconnection between themselves and the divine, that provided the “mood and motivations” for their struggle for survival” (p.65). For the Mexican Catholics, religion is the acknowledgement of daily occurrences including proclamations of praise, giving thanks to God, sprinkling holy water on objects for protection of evil, blessing family members, etc. The ritual of daily life is a part of the daily life of the community even if it is considered profane by the church. A daily life full of ritual and prayers is part of Mexican culture since even before the syncretism of Indigenous spirituality with Spanish Catholicism. Mexican Americans could not forget over nine thousand years of spiritual formation and leaving the church was an impossibility despite its exclusionary practices.

Religion in the Chicana/o Movement

The Civil Rights Movement is one of the defining events in American history, giving a revitalizing example of Americans fighting for the ideals of justice and equality. The 1960s and 1970s were a cultural reawakening for Chicana/os. Lara Medina explains that “since the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, when the United States annexed one-half of Mexico’s territory, Mexican Americans were disenfranchised from their land and from economic, social, and political power” (2004, p. 30). Each generation had learned strategies to deal with the conquest from their families but as Medina mentions “each generation responded with distinct strategies of resistance that enabled cultural survival” (p. 30). And the Chicana/o had a new strategy under the guise of nationalism. For Chicana/os, cultural nationalism was developed to achieve a psychological necessity and political aspiration to destroy the pervasive political, cultural, and emotional barriers manufactured by U.S. white supremacy. The movement also “helped promote political unity across diverse regions, social classes, and political subjectivities” (Martinez, 2015 p. 523). There was an effort to unify “all those in the community” under the umbrella of Chicano nationalism.

But national unity for the Chicana/o community was a lofty goal as Chicana/os had different regional and gender priorities. For example, organizations like El movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (Mecha) in California promoted access to higher education in public universities, the teaching of cultura (culture), and Chicano historia (history), but Centro de Acción Social Autónomo (CASA) also in California was an organization designed to aid its members in obtaining legal and social services. Others like Reies Lopez Tijerina (La Alianza) led a struggle in the 1960-70 to restore

New Mexican land grants to the descendants of their Mexican owners. In Colorado the crusade for Justice sought education for youth in autonomous schools.

Regardless of the goals of the Chicana/o communities, Chicana/os were experiencing a rebirth of Chicana/o culture that included music, theater, and other arts. Most of these creative expressions were grounded in an understanding of the rebirth as a spiritual struggle as well as political. The Chicana/o Movement encouraged the community to engage the body, mind and spirit in a holistic approach to life. There was a thirst for the indigenous spirituality that was erased but that the Chicana/o body remembered. As Trinidad Galván writes:

if we truly come to understand spirituality as the essence that moves us, that makes us whole, that gives us strength, then essentially spirituality give us a purpose. As people who have longed to *saciar esa hambre por siglos, ahora acudimos al seno de nuestra fuerza para combatir la opresión, el coraje, y el vacío* (quench that centuries-long hunger, we now appeal to the source of our strength in order to battle the oppression, anger, and emptiness). I do not stand alone in my perception that what has strengthened us for centuries can continue to be the source of our struggles, teachings, and our learning. (Galván, 2006 p. 173)

Michelle González explains that for Latina/os “our spirituality is not a detached, other worldly experience of the sacred. Rather, Latina/o spirituality is rooted in the everyday lives and ritual of the Latina/o community” (1989, p. xv). González describes an intersection between the mundane and the sacred mixed to create a unique experience for the Mexican American community. Similarly, Luis D. Leon describes in his book *The Political Spirituality of Cesar Chavez* how Chavez uses the same concept of creating

a religious experience while working in the mundane world of politics:

Crossing religious borders, Cesar Chavez scripted a political spirituality and a spiritual mestizaje that transmuted La Causa into a religious movement, this is what I call religious politics. He proffered spiritual tropes as political address—a rhetorical strategy for mass conversion and social change—garnering public sympathy and support through devotional labor. Chavez’s religiosity informed his practice and his mestizaje informed his knowledge. (2004, p. 12)

For Leon, the Chicana/o movement gave the Chicana/o community the space, courage and knowledge to move beyond the status quo. But in academia, the surge turned secular and away from spiritual knowledge (p.12). For example, the nationalists in the Chicana/o movement wanted to ignore Christian religions as a contributing factor to the Chicana/o experience, but at the same time, they highlighted the spirituality of pre-Hispanic nations like the Mexica and Maya. Richard E Martínez in his book, *Padres, The National Chicano Priest Movement*, notes that:

a review of the major works on the Chicano Movement reveals the expected: people struggling for political rights, better education, land and labor rights. It is rare to find any mention of the Catholic Church, which is rather striking given that more than 90 percent of the Mexican American are Christian. (2005, p.5)

And this departure from Catholicism created a division of those in academia and the grassroots people in the community.

The Nationalist Movement and Academia

Historian Michael Soldatenko explains that since the beginning of the Chicano Movement, two main trains of thought were central in academia. The Nationalist Movement and the Indigenista Movement. The nationalist movement following “El Plan de Aztlan” was going to help the community not only to articulate an indigenous heritage and identity but also to act politically (2009, p.31). On the other hand, the Indigenista Movement wanted to go back to the Chicana/os indigenous roots and reject all colonization, which created difficulties with those nationalists that wanted to belong to the established institutions. And institutional resistance was harder to bridge than Chicana/o activists had hoped. As an example, the resolution of the Third World Strike in Berkeley, which lead to the development of an Ethnic Studies program and subsequently to a compromise, shifted the goal from community transformation programs to academic self-preservation in the Ethnic Studies programs developed by the universities. The creation of a new type of Chicana/o institution was out of reach and Soldatenko discovered that instead of creating autonomous institutional departments within the academy, Chicana/o studies programs became practitioners of traditional university administrative procedure (p. 32). Chicana/o faculty discovered that in order to belong to the institutions of higher learning, they also had to adjust to its rules and methods and adapt the resistance.

In addition, scholars like Michael Soldatenko, Ronald Lopez and Darryl Enos believed that El Plan activists were confused and never articulated how intellectual productions were going to be addressed and that they “felt satisfied with institutional

control. Their vision of Chicana/o Studies did not challenge academic epistemology, it did not offer any break with the traditional practice of knowledge” (Soldatenko 33).

El Plan developed into more of the same. Soldatenko explained that “Although El Plan depicted students-to-student, student-to-faculty, and/or administrator, and student-to-community relations, it was, at best, vague when it came to the production and distribution of knowledge. And most important the plan had little to no spiritual community knowledge” (p. 33).

The early activist did not address the problem of Chicana/os “lived religiosity” expecting to move to secularism and into society at large. In addition, the Nationalist Movement was largely patriarchal, and women struggled for their space and identity. Soldatenko explains this point: “El Movimiento” (The Movement) was about men, the leaders were men, it was defined by men, and the rhetorical practices and intellectual perspectives were masculinist. This movement silenced the voices of women and their participation was submerged” (p. 132). This practice affected the whole community by denying the women’s perspectives and knowledge. Additionally, it was also assumed that in the Latino community, women are the bearer and transmitters of culture, traditions, spirituality and religion (Blackwell, 2012 p. 93); (Medina, 2004 p. 2). For many in the Nationalist Movement that was the price that they had to pay to be able to say that they were assimilated into the mainstream. While those in the Nationalist Movement overlooked the contributions of women, but at the same time, it used (and are using) religious symbols (a woman) like La Virgen de Guadalupe to depict strength, valor, morality and religiosity.

It was the Poet Alurista (Alberto Baltazar Urista Heredia) that at the Chicano Youth Conference in Denver produced in 1968 “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlan” and “promoted the concept of ethnic nationalism and self-determination” (Soldatenko 33). Alurista created a space for Chicana/os to have a spiritual life. Likewise, Luis Valdez in “Pensamientos Serpentinicos” recognized the need of the Chicana/o to return to their spiritual roots, which was not being provided by the organized religions. Additionally, Valdez, using a neo-Mayan philosophy, saw spirituality “the love for God” as the catalyst for a better life and personal growth. Valdez noted that the way we make our heaven/hell and the path to liberation is within ourselves. In the poem “Pensamiento Serpentino,” Valdez declares:

You make your own hell or heaven
Como lo quieres
And if you feel oppressed
Pues LIBERATE!
Because all you have to do
Is start fighting for your own
Liberation and you become FREE
LIBRE
Como los rayos del sol
(Valdez 183)

Meanwhile, Chicana writers began to analyze the central icons of Mexican Catholic religious life and reminded the community that some religious icons have transcended the church and have a positive role for Chicana/os; for example, Gloria Anzaldúa retold the importance of Guadalupe: “La Virgen de Guadalupe took upon herself the psychological and physical devastation of the conquered and oppressed “indio” (indigenous person), she is our spiritual, political and psychological symbol. As a symbol of hope and faith, she sustains and insures our survival” (Anzaldúa, 1987 p. 52). Finally, it was Rodolfo (Corky) Gonzales, one of the fathers of “El Movimiento,” who

introduced the need to bring our more spiritual self into the mix. We had lost the economic battle, but we had survived, and it was in part, because of our spiritual strength. In “I’m Joaquín,” Gonzáles not only describes the lack of focus that the Chicana/o was experiencing but also the feeling of being lost and confused, trying to survive in “white America” society where our culture and spirituality have always been suspect. In the poem “I am Joaquín,” Gonzáles describes and encapsulates the underlying feeling of the community:

I Am Joaquín

By Rodolfo Corky Gonzáles

Yo soy Joaquin

Perdido en un mundo de confusión:

I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion,

Caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,

Confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes,

Suppressed by manipulation and destroyed by modern society.

My fathers have lost the economic battle

And won the struggle of cultural survival

And now! I must choose between the paradox of

Victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger,

Or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis,

Sterilization of the soul and a full stomach,

Yes, I have come a long way to nowhere,

Unwillingly dragged by that monstrous, technical,

Industrial giant called Progress and Anglo success...

I look at myself

I watch my brothers.

I shed tears of sorrow. I sow seeds of hate.

I withdraw to the safety within the circle of life—

MY OWN PEOPLE

Chicana/os had been organizing since the beginning of the Chicana/o Movement to end discrimination by advocating for Chicana/o national identity and political subjectivity. But the Chicano Movement failed to include the entire Chicana/o community and those in the margins started to challenge the Nationalist Movement. The

strongest challenge to cultural nationalism came from Chicana feminists and would eventually emphasize a decolonizes spirituality.

Women Past and Present

Chicana/os historically have been made to feel that our culture, spirituality, and knowledge are not valid. But Chicana/o leaders like Gonzales and Valdez describe the devotion, beliefs, and reliance of our community on sacred and ancestral knowledge that have ensured our “sobrevivencia” (survival). Since the Chicano Movement started, the Chicana/o community has struggled to become unified. The Chicano community is still struggling with gender, sexual orientations, class, race, and spiritual awareness.

We struggle to acknowledge that there is a privilege and social imposition of hetero-patriarchy. In her book *Chicana Power*, Maylei Blackwell recounts the beginning of the Chicano movement and the role that women played in the movement. Chicano cultural nationalism was a movement that permitted only men to have the power positions and it is resistant to the position of women. Women were simultaneously the bearers of tradition, culture and family a fact which was ignored by the Chicano Movement. Secondly, the Chicano nationalist movement engendered constructions of idealized femininity largely by conflating a conservative cultural construct of “tradition” with a particular version of family. “La familia (the family) functioned as an allegory of Raza and a structuring metaphor for the Chicano movement as a whole” (2012, p. 93). For Chicana/os family has been crucial for the survival of the community, but the nationalist’s movement was based on the “premise the nation needed every man, woman and child-in that order” (p. 93).

Women’s roles within the Chicano movement were restricted by these exclusions that were rigidly framed around the patriarchal, heterosexual family (also known as hetero-patriarchy) as the organizing principle” (Blackwell 93). Cultural nationalism was formed

and reinforced with the ideology of the classical family unit where patriarchy was central and as part of the tradition of Mexican/Chicana/o culture (Soldatenko 93). This left women who wanted to help in the movement in trouble and submerged in a deep struggle for their space and identity.

The Chicana/o movement was not as advantageous as expected. The movement made our own people victims of our own greed. Cultural nationalism and its need to make patriarchy work had made some in the community unfit for leadership in our own movement. And as before, our history is written by a few in the community. The nationalist movement mirrored the society at large.

Headed by Chicana writers like Anzaldúa, Moraga, and Delgado, the Chicanas moved beyond the nationalist movement and created a new voice in the community. Anzaldúa, Moraga and other Chicana leaders revisited and reframed ancient indigenous practices to create a new epistemology and others redesigned and reframed organized religion to form a new religious theology. Chicana/os, new spiritual practices developed from the perspective of a marginalized section of our community (women, queer men and women). Chicanas started to do transformative work and this work started with the self. Chicanas recognized spiritual needs and desires and started creating a better understanding of our community. They tried to be all-inclusive, avoiding conflicts that sever the community and separate us from others along racial, class, gender, sexual, national, or other socially constructed lines. By confronting the self, they found themselves on a spiritual journey of healing, health, and human evolution. With the spirit and spirituality at the forefront, Chicanas began to illuminate the way to social change, gender equality and the ability to live in harmony.

Religion and Statistics

According to the Hispanic Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan think tank that focuses on issues, attitudes and trends, the religious landscape in the U.S. is changing. The share of U.S. adults who say they believe in God, while still remarkably high by comparison with other advanced industrial countries, has declined modestly, from approximately 92% to 89%, since Pew Research Center conducted its first Landscape Study in 2007 (Smith). The share of Americans who say they are “absolutely certain” God exists has dropped more sharply, from 71% in 2007 to 63% in 2014. This is the same percentages that say they pray every day, attend religious services regularly and consider religion to be very important in their lives (Smith). The fall in traditional religious beliefs and practices coincides with changes in the religious composition of the U.S. public. A growing share of Americans are religiously unaffiliated, including some who self-identify as atheists or agnostics as well as many who describe their religion as “nothing in particular.” Altogether, the religiously unaffiliated (also called the “nones”) now account for 23% of the adult population, up from 16% in 2007 (Smith). But there is more to the story: the “nones” as a group is not uniformly nonreligious. Most of them say they believe in God, and about a third say religion is at least somewhat important in their lives (Smith).

Latina/o Community Religious Outlook

According to a study done by the Pew Research Center in 2014 and a second study on the religious landscape in the U.S. in 2015, most Latinos in the United States continue to be religious and a large number belong to the Roman Catholic Church. But

the membership to the Catholic Church is declining, while the numbers of Latinos that have moved to Protestant churches or are unaffiliated is rising.

Indeed, nearly one-in-four Hispanic adults (24%) are now former Catholics, according to the 2015, nationwide survey of more than 5,000 Hispanics by the Pew Research Center. Together, these trends suggest that some religious polarization is taking place in the Hispanic community, with the shrinking majority of Hispanic Catholics holding the middle ground between two growing groups (evangelical Protestants and the unaffiliated) that are at opposite ends of the U.S. religious spectrum (Funk). Yet the study also shows that Hispanics continue to identify with Catholicism in larger numbers than other racial and ethnic groups. However, the Catholic share of the Hispanic population has declined dramatically in recent years, from 58% in the 2007 Religious Landscape Study to 48% today (Smith). The study shows that about 77 percent of Hispanics are or self-identify as Christian, around 3 percent identify as religious but non-Christian and 20 percent not religious or “nones”.

Catholics Switching to Other Religions

The numbers show that almost 9 out of 10 Latinos believe in some type of higher power or have a sense of spirituality. But for U S Latinos, faith has a new face, and that face is less Catholic. The Latino stereotype is Catholic but that is changing. But the Pew study’s findings came as no surprise to those who actually watch demographic trends. The share of Hispanics who are Catholic has probably been in decline for decades (Smith). The publication, “The Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos in the United States,” a pew Research Center study in 2014, speculates that the decrease mirrors trends in historically Catholic Latin America with the exception of Mexico. In Latin America,

the proportion of Catholics has fallen from 90 percent in 1910 to 72 percent in 2010, according to a Pew Research analysis and estimates from the World Christian Database, which provides comprehensive statistical information on religions.

Religion to Spirituality

The “American public is becoming less religious by some key measures of what it means to be a religious person. The recent decrease in religious affiliation and behaviors is largely attributable to the “nones” – the growing minority of Americans, particularly in the Millennial generation, who say they do not belong to any organized faith (Smith). For Millennials, the increase is larger, but the Millennials still feel there is a higher power. In the study, Smith indicates; “while stability is perhaps the best single word to sum up the Landscape Study’s findings about the religious beliefs and practices of religiously affiliated Americans, the trends among the religiously unaffiliated segment of the population look more like secularization. Not only have the unaffiliated grown in size, they also have become less religious over time” (Smith).

Because religion and spiritualities have some commonalities, and are often used interchangeably, it is important to make a distinction between the two terms. Let’s start by using the definition that I use for this study, which is spirituality an authentic relationship with your-self, others and the universe. In contrast, spirituality, is defined in this study as an unstructured, unfiltered understanding of the divine through creative and subversive practices. Spirituality is not official and does not abide by any official religious organizations. Spirituality is now a growing field within Chicana/o studies, evident in much of the literature since the late 1980s with the publication of *Borderlands: La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa.

Chapter Four: Review of the Literature

This chapter provides an overview of select Chicano scholarship on spirituality. My intent is to trace the origin of current spiritual thought through the work of a selected number of historians, poets and artists. I group the works chronologically to see the progression on spirituality and create a footprint of the discourse.

The first major work discussing spirituality, in the Chicano context, comes from Gloria Anzaldúa. Her book, *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, deals with the concept of a “borderland”—a physical place as well as a spiritual divide. Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands* explores a set of processes that targets de-colonization by rewriting the story of the colonized nations and by introducing new meaning into the content of myths and narratives that speak for the “other.” Anzaldúa’s work pieces a theory of identity and self-awareness. Her theory is created outside the prescribed restrictions of the Church. She does not use religion directly, so I am using the definition of spirituality used in the introduction of this document to show how spirituality is discussed by Anzaldúa. The Borderlands’ theory makes people interrogate the order of things and to challenge those that try to block our path to knowledge. Most importantly it demands that we ask questions regarding traditional structures of power, including those in our own communities and families. The process is a journey to understand the self, to collect knowledge, to glue together the broken fragments of the personal and to create a new version of the self.

Borderlands argues that there are other ways of looking at reality, and it gives agency from the point of view of the disempowered, the “others.” The *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza* looks at a new paradigm to understand the mestiza self.

Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* creates a space to privilege indigenous knowledge, to bring self-awareness, interrogate the present and past, as well as challenge the status quo. Most importantly, she reinserts the history of indigenous Mexico, which Europeans silenced.

Anzaldúa's first consideration (process) is the *nepantla* state (borderlands and *nepantla* are closely related to the extent that Anzaldúa uses the two terms interchangeably),⁶ which is the state where one needs to remain open to be exposed to different forms of knowledge. This knowledge comes from different sources, including Western and non-Western traditions. *Nepantla* is the state of in-betweenness where we make the decisions to create, destroy or just wait. It is in *nepantla* where the self is going through the process of change. The process of transition is inside the mind, the soul, and the psyche simultaneously. It gives the individual an understanding to look for deeper meaning in our realities, but at the same time allows the individual to rest and not make a choice. The individual needs to go through the *nepantla* state in order to be confronted with the fact that there are many ways of knowing. This includes knowledge outside Western ideology. For Anzaldúa, *nepantla* is a journey towards self-awareness, self-proclamation, and liberation. Furthermore, *nepantla* mirrors spirituality as it gathers knowledge from the soul (inside).

The second process is the *Coatlicue* state, which speaks about conflict, reconciliation and restoration, characteristics that are also important in spirituality. For, in spirituality, one needs to examine the self and at the same time forgive those that have transgressed against us. The *Coatlicue* state is the space of learning and digesting all the

⁶ Anzaldúa uses *Nepantla* and *Borderlands* interchangeably, but *Borderland* is considered a theory and *Nepantla* is a process in that theory.

knowledge gained in nepantla. In this stage “the conscious mind is occupied or immobile, the germination work takes place in the deep, dark earth of the unconscious” (Anzaldúa, 1988, p. 69). This is the stage where every step is a discovery of the self. At this stage Anzaldúa reminds us that we are stopping to digest all the knowledge that the individual has. Anzaldúa names the Coatlicue state the “dark night of the soul” (2007, p. 45). It is the stage needed to become aware or recognize where one is and to achieve transformation. Anzaldúa works from the viewpoint of an ancient spiritual perspective. She favors female indigenous goddesses because many of the ancient myths and stories are interpreted in a patriarchal sense, and thus detrimental to women.

The next process is one that integrates the work of all the previous states. *La conciencia de la mestiza* gives the Borderland theory its specific goal. *La conciencia de la Mestiza* gives us the stage to practice and develop a new tolerance for a hybrid space. We know that the new mestiza is a consciousness where all religious knowledge can co-exist and create a new spirituality or “nepantla spirituality” (Medina, 2006,) where no one is above the other. At this stage, the self and one’s identity are not dependent on the histories created by others. Anzaldúa writes:

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

Anzaldúa brings a new form of looking into a consciousness where the Chicana/o can create their new spirituality, re-affirm the current one or create a hybrid. A place where all is useful, and nothing is wasted. By using the Borderland as a place of survival and confrontation, the self will only use what is needed in order to survive and thrive. Anzaldúa brings Chicana/o spirituality outside the canons of the church and concentrates “the self” as a starting point for a new way to redefine the mestiza spiritualities.

Inside the Church, Chicana/o priests, nuns, and the laity were moving the lines of traditional canons to help the community. For instance, Virgilio Elizondo, a Catholic priest and theologian from Texas-who became a Professor of Pastoral and Hispanic Theology at the University of Notre Dame-worked from an insider’s perspective. For Elizondo, the Catholic Church’s rules and regulations are part of the lives of the community. Elizondo’s (2000), *The Future Is Mestizo Life Where Culture Meet*, creates a theory out of the author’s journeys; first as a mestizo living in Texas then as a Mexican American priest seeking to probe deeply into the gospel. Elizondo’s theology is driven by pastoral concerns and grounded in a pastoral praxis. In Elizondo’s first book, *La Morenita the Evangelizer of the Americas*, (1980) he directs his gaze to the pre-Hispanic people of the Americas and the legacy of massive disparity within the Catholic Church. “*La Morenita*” is a road map for Elizondo to reconstruct and connect to his culture and to understand the Catholic Church in the Southwest. It also starts a new reformulation of his theory that The Future is Mestizo. He draws from his experience as a Mexican American, to understand a mixing of cultures, indigenous and western with a Catholic base.

Elizondo emphasized the *mestizaje* of Mexican Americans. For Elizondo, the mixture of races, cultures and ideologies brings the best of both worlds. Additionally, the image of Guadalupe creates a powerful symbol of *mestizaje* and hope that should compel the Catholic Church to make a commitment to the Chicana/o community. Elizondo writes that the image of Guadalupe utilizes the “totality” of Nahuatl symbolic and glyphic expression, and the native population was able to decipher the Virgin’s visual message, since the Nahuatl could read it by simply looking at the image (p. 97). Guadalupe appeared native, originated in native soil, spoke the native language and by all these attributes, Guadalupe is a symbol of the new world and the Chicana/o religion. A brutal and painful death of indigenous cosmologies started with the defeat of the Mexica, but Guadalupe offered a powerful symbol of resurrection. Elizondo believed that the old order (old indigenous religion) had died, but I argue that it was not death and instead a rebirth or a reformulation. It was a reformulation of the old to give space to the creation of a new life for those conquered. According to Elizondo, the Catholic Church was not happy with the apparition. He writes:

From the preliminary silence of the rest of the clergy it seems they feared the apparition. They were convinced it was an attempt, on the part of the Indians, to reinstate their previous religion and were afraid of the consequences of allowing Tepeyac to become a major religious site. (Elizondo, 1980, p.99)

Elizondo sees the Southwest of the United States as the great “*frontera*” (Anzaldúa’s idea of a borderland) between the world of Catholic Mestizos and the White Protestant majority. The concept of “Mestizos” and “*frontera*” are directly related to

Elizondo's understanding of the identity and spirituality of the Mexican American community. He explains:

I faced issues of social justice erupting with great force among my people, especially in relation to questions of racial/ ethnic identity and belonging. The Southwest of the United States was the great "frontera" between the world of Catholic Mestizo Latin America and Protestant White Nordic America, between Mexico and the United States, and the Mexican American people lived in this great "in-between." (2000, p. 25)

Furthermore, Elizondo investigates parallels between our Mestizo experience of living in the "frontera" and the life of Jesus of Nazareth in Galilee. Elizondo sees a parallel between the suffering of Jesus of Nazareth and the plight of the Mexican-American community. For Elizondo, the Chicana/o community is as great as Jesus of Nazareth and also as misunderstood as the Christ himself. "The Mestizo existence is by its very historical nature and origins a radical biological, cultural, and spiritual openness to others" (2000, p. 129). Elizondo uses "indigenista exegesis in conjunction with the pastoral message of Chicano dignity and liberation which has been developing since about 1960 in the Southwestern United States" (1977, p. 158-159).

It is important to keep in mind that the concept of "in-between" that Elizondo wrote resonates with the concept of borderlands from Anzaldúa. It is important to recall that both were writing around the same time of the late 1980s. It is also important to remember that for Anzaldúa and Elizondo, our experience constructs our spirituality and mestizaje is a large part of our daily experience. Elizondo finds a parallel between the rejection of Jesus of Nazareth and the plight of the Mexican American, but at the same

time he dreams of Chicana/os' inclusion in the church. Under the Vatican Council II (1962-1965), the church opened its doors to new ideas and new ways of worshipping.

Elizondo explains the new attitude of the church by stating:

Whereas before we had always seen ourselves as opposed to all others, the Council sought to discover and proclaim what we had in common and what could be the basis of a world family without everyone becoming Western and Catholic: 'In her task of fostering unity and love among men, and even among nations, [the Church] gives primary consideration in this to what humans beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them (Nostra Aetate, no.1).'" (p. 102).

The question that must be raised is: whether the Catholic Church will still fully accept those that they perceive as different or outside the Western paradigm? Initially, those rules demanded that the community change their soul and create a new person. Furthermore, the institutions that were created to help and protect conspired against those same communities. Anzaldúa calls it, "las costumbres que traicionan" (1998, p. 44).

Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Yolanda Tarango's (1988) book, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in The Church* - which used the term Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology, later developed as Mujerista theology by Isasi-Diaz- details the religious perspectives of everyday Hispanic woman. The liberation theology of Hispanic women started showed more fully the meaning of oppression, the legitimacy of being the alternative, and the need for struggle. Isasi-Diaz and Tarango included several interviews with a diverse spectrum of Hispanic women. These women wanted to practice their faith and to be part of the church, not only as practitioners, but also as agents of their faith.

Isasi-Diaz and Tarango recounted from those interviews, “Hispanic women needed to illuminate the search for a theology that liberated them and at the same time showed that they were committed to the struggle for justice and peace” (1988, p.1). The use of liberation theology opens a dialogue to inspire and find the way women can free themselves from the oppression of society and culture. Although the viewpoint is Christian, Hispanic Women’s Liberation Theory is based on the personal experience of Hispanic women’s struggle for liberation from those who have relegated them to a secondary position, including their families and Christian (Catholic) Churches. Their struggle centers on the survival of not only themselves and their children, but also their community and their Hispanic culture, which becomes the channel for communicating their religious convictions. These personal experiences include feelings and attitudes, some out of their indigenous past and from the African traditions brought to America by slaves (Isasi-Diaz and Tarango, 1988, p. 65).

Isasi-Diaz and Tarango helped craft a “Hispanic Women’s Liberation Theology” based on Hispanic women’s life experience. This theology has power because Hispanic women are articulating their own experiences, rather than following others, like the Church or Christian traditions. Isasi-Diaz and Tarango explain:

Religion is central in the lives of Hispanic Women. It is precisely their religion, their deep sense of an existential interconnection between themselves and the divine, that provides the “moods and motivations” for their struggle to survival. In other words, the religious dimension in their lives constitutes a “revolutionary urge.” It is precisely the struggle for survival that defines the essence of religion for Hispanic Women. (1988, p. 65)

Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology created the space for Hispanic Women to open a dialogue and theologize about their experiences. They could reflect on how they practice their faith and understand their God. For Chicanas, spirituality is lived and created by the daily struggle. This theology mandates critical awareness, critical reflection and participation in the solution. Participation in Hispanic Women Liberation Theology shows the importance of lived experience and how this experience creates personal and collective knowledge.

The Hispanic Women Liberation Theology evolved into what is known as Mujerista Theology. Mujerista Theology is defined as a liberative praxis, which includes both ethics and theology and a main goal for liberation. Isasi-Diaz explains goals in Mujerista Theology:

The goals of mujerista theology are to provide a platform for the voices of Latina grassroots women; to develop a theological method that takes seriously the religious understandings and practices of Latina as a source of theology; to challenge theological understandings, church teachings, and religious practices that oppress Latina women, that are not life-giving, and therefore, cannot be theologically correct. (1989, p.5-6)

One of the most important aspects of mujerista theology's research methods rests on the self-naming of Latinas as "mujeristas." In no way does Mujerista theology desire to speak for Latinas. Rather, the highest value is placed on listening, with as little interpretation or analysis as possible, to the voices of Latinas as they speak about life, faith and God. Isasi-Diaz and Tarango acknowledge, with great awareness, that some interpretation will inevitably occur.

The source of Mujerista theology is the lived experience of Latinas. In Mujerista theology, the daily struggle informs the theology. Latinas struggle for liberation and mujerista theology is a communal theology based on the information gathered mostly during reflection sessions of groups of Latinas. In fact, mujerista theology benefits from feminist and Latin American Liberationist understanding and the critique of Latino culture as well as the dominant culture, and denunciation of racism, sexism and ethnic prejudice. All this makes mujerista theology a good starting point to discuss and create a spiritual pedagogy. Mujeristas struggle to liberate themselves not as individuals, but as members of a Latina/o community. They work to build bridges among Latinas and Latinos while exposing discrimination and division tactics. Mujeristas understand that their task is to gather the hopes and expectations of the people about justice and peace from a perspective of faith. Isasi-Diaz argued that women, by the nature of their role as religious source and teacher to their families and community, exercised moral agency in the world. They exemplify an immeasurable moral power and all their work allows women to be honored in the form of leadership roles in the function of the church. Yet, Chicanas recognition in the Catholic Church is still almost non-existent.

It has been a hard battle for Chicana/os to be accepted in the United States and the Catholic Church, which has “downplayed the legacy and commitment of the Mexican communities” (Dolan, 1994, p. 23). Dolan and Hinojosa’s (1994) book, *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*, depicts a painful history for the Mexican Americans in the United States. Despite the efforts of Mexicanos and a high religious commitment to the church, the American Catholic Church did not act in a reciprocal way. Dolan and Hinojosa tackle history from a Chicana/o viewpoint since the

histories available are mainly from the church or from those in charge in positions of power within the geographic area where the Chicana/o worshiped. Most of those in charge could not acknowledge the way Chicana/os practiced their religion, full of rituals and ceremonies that were outside the Catholic Church's dogmatic practices. Chicana/os popular spiritual practices are still considered "folk" and outside the mainstream community. Dolan and Hinojosa have recounted the history of Mexican Americans in the United States with a high number of repatriations in the 1930s due to political and economic struggle, which reinforced traditions, rituals and ceremonies. However, a large membership in the church did not improve their state within the Catholic Church. Other problems recounted by Dolan and Hinojosa are:

1. Negligence within the parish and parishioners.
2. Lack of interest from the directive of the Church to have a gospel directed towards the Chicana/o.
3. General inefficiency of the leaders.
4. Lack of understanding of the Mexican people.

The constant waves of immigration from Mexico and later from Central and South America, created a phobia of the browning of the American Catholic Church. The new Latino immigration, increased over the course of the 20th century, and expanded their demographics of Catholic Church. Despite the large numbers of new members, the Catholic Church refused to include Chicana/os in positions of power. Nevertheless, the increase of Latino faith expressions is a visible sign of this expanding diversity, and also a promising sign to create a theology based on the people.

Ana Castillo (1996), in *Goddess of The Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*, contributed to the narrative on Chicana spirituality. The strongest symbol of mestizaje, “La Virgen de Guadalupe,” was the obvious choice to reclaim spirituality for those that felt disenfranchised from the Catholic Church. In fact, Gloria Anzaldúa, which identifies herself as queer woman-of-color, informs some of her theory of a mestizo consciousness in Guadalupe. More specifically for Chicana/os, the image of Guadalupe brings to the Chicana/o community a sense of safety, and a feeling of unity as we unify all of what we are in her mestizaje.

La Virgen de Guadalupe, a mother goddess, patron saint of Mexico, protector of the downtrodden, made her first appearance on American soil in 1531. Ana Castillo reminds us that Guadalupe is Coatlicue, mother of Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec sun god. “She identified herself to Juan Diego as the mother of the supreme god, the mother of the giver of life, the mother of the Lord of the Near and Far (omnipotent), and the mother of the Lord of Heaven and earth” (Castillo, 1996, p. xvii). For the Catholic Church, Guadalupe is the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus and the mother of Christianity. For Chicanas, Tonatzin-the earth/mother Goddess, morphed into a mestiza goddess- is the survivor of conquest and the protector of all sacred indigenous spirituality for Mexicans and Chicana/os. She is essentially a rejection of Western epistemic boundaries and a reflection of mestizo consciousness. Guadalupe contains many symbols for those indigenous people, which had to battle a Eurocentric, patriarchal conquest. As Chicana/os, we still see secrets within the Virgin of Guadalupe, which have survived through a syncretic practice. The collection of writings in *Goddess of The Americas*, edited by Castillo, shows personal stories about the Virgin's place in Chicana, Catholic,

Mexica, folkloric feminist cultures, mythologies and traditions, where the religious and the cultural intersect. The examples given by Castillo range from helping our broken bodies to helping with sexual repression and pleasure. One can see the power of La Virgen de Guadalupe as Chicana/os reconstruct and reclaim her for their own spirituality. As Chicana/os, we have constructed our spirituality to seek balance. La Virgen de Guadalupe has served as our divine protectress from everyone, including the Catholic Church and/or divine forces. An unparalleled impact to the literature of the Americas, *Goddess of the Americas* is an exciting scholarship that is full of personal respect. Castillo shows a profound recognition of our need for the sacred, the unwavering love of “La Virgen de Guadalupe.” *Goddess of the Americas* shows how powerful Guadalupe has become for the Chicana/o community.

Furthermore, Ana Castillo adds to the argument in *Goddess of the Americas*, that as Chicana/os, we see the protection of the divine and thank her motherly gaze, but there are other ways to know the self. A new space of study is created by the carnal self; a new space to create new knowledge and spirituality. Cherrie Moraga’s (1999) *The Last Generation: En Busca de la Fuerza Femenina* (looking for the feminine strength) is a study in Chicana knowledge from the viewpoint of the Chicana sexual self. The auto examination helps the Chicana understand that part of herself that has been forgotten due to religion and culture. Sexuality without the darkness of “motherhood and machismo: images of the male body as ‘violador’ and vulnerable, and of the female body as the site of woman-centered desire” (Moraga, 1999, p. 71). For Moraga, this is the space of change where one can connect to different worlds. The sexual transcend to the spiritual creates a space where women, including queer women, can be represented. By creating a

realistic space in their lives, Chicanas create a space to analyze what has been done and then how they can reclaim it or redefine it. In the end, there is a decision of where to go or whether there is a new way of doing things. Moraga's identity is grounded in the brown lesbian woman's body, and how it creates knowledge as she understands herself and how women are silenced by the dominant white/brown male patriarchy. Moraga steps closer to a more inclusive solution by bringing an opportunity to challenge the current understanding of what women can bring to the table. She writes:

After resistance and affirmation, where do we go? Possibly to a place of deeper inquiry into ourselves as a people. Possibly, as we move into the next century, we must turn our eyes away from racist America and take stock of the damages done to us. Possibly, the greatest risks yet to be taken are *entre nosotros*, where we write, paint, dance, and draw the wound for one another to build a stronger pueblo. The women artist seemed disposed to do this, their work often mediating the delicate area between cultural affirmation and criticism. (Moraga, 1999, p. 71)

Moraga believes that we are still missing the "rage and revenge of women, the recognition that the violence of racism and misogyny has distorted our view of ourselves" (1999, p. 71). Except, Chicana/os cannot forget those stories that help patriarchy and are founded in religion and culture. For example, "La Llorona" is a woman transformed by grief, having sinned against her family, culture, and nation. From a religious view, La Llorona is paying for her betrayal; La Llorona is Malinche, "La Chingada" and as Catholics, we know Malinche is Eve. Moraga writes:

The root of the fear of betrayal by a woman is not at all specific to the Mexican or

Chicano. The resemblance between Malinche and the Eve image is all too obvious. In chronicling the conquest of Mexico and founding the Catholic Church there, the Spanish passed on to the mestizo people as legacy their own European-Catholic interpretation of Mexican events. ... the picture we have of Mexican Indian civilization during that period often contains strong Catholic and Spanish bias. (2000, p. 101)

By connecting Eve and Malinche, in a religious context, we have a way of subjecting mestizo women to the same standard. If we use female figures to relate to women in the Americas, then we only have two choices: the virgin (La virgen de Guadalupe) and whore (La Malinche/ La Llorona). This duality brings a trivial view of what it is to be a mestiza. Chicanas are relegated to two dimensions --the virgin or a traitor to our community. And if Chicanas are superficial beings, then they cannot be the ones deciding to change or recreate a new spirituality, a great problem as Chicanas are the ones teaching our spirituality in the family and community. What's more, if women are whores then a hit against women is a hit against our community's spirituality. Following this theory, if our women are sinners then who are the mestizo children? The Chicanas only "good" choice then is to be like the virgin.

For the Chicana/o community, Chicana/o spirituality needs to be defined, redefined or transformed by ourselves and never allowed to have others define it for us. According to Luis D. Leon, in *La Llorona's Children Religion, Life, And Death in The U.S.- Mexican Borderlands*:

religious belief and practice are continuously redefined by the devotees of various traditions that started in and were transformed by, brought to and found,

throughout the borderlands as a creative and often effective means to manage the crisis of everyday life. (2004, p. 5)

The reason, according to Leon, for change is if religion proves insufficient to meet expectations and not enough to quiet the fears, confusion, pain, and agonies of people on the margins of power, then the meaning of religious symbols can be “redirected,” “reinterpreted,” or conjured anew to fill the gap between what “ought” to be and the way it actually is. Leon (2004) writes, “poetic, creative religious practice does not occur only at the boundaries of institutions, but within, parallel to, and sometimes in direct conflict with established traditions” (p. 5). Leon believes that religion, broadly and personally, defines in addition to serving power as an ideological mechanism of social control, exploitation, and domination. It is also effectively deployed in attempts to destabilize those very same people who have access to only the bare resources that constitute conventional power.

For the mestizo children, personal knowledge and traditions have always played a major role in their experience. As an example, in a personal reflection, “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess,” Sandra Cisneros (1996) lamented her alienation and fear about her sexuality. She traced it to La Virgen de Guadalupe and the importance placed on her by parents and the influence that the traditional church wanted to force upon the mestizo children. She writes:

What a culture of denial. Don't get pregnant! But no one tells you how not to.

This is why I was angry for so many years every time I saw la Virgen de Guadalupe, my culture's role model for brown women like me. She was dam dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable. Did boys have to

aspire to be Jesus? I never saw an evidence of it. They were fornicating like rabbits while the Church ignored them as pointed us women toward our destiny-marriage and motherhood. The other alternative was puta hood [whoredom] ... As far as I could see, la Lupe was nothing but a goody two shoes meant to doom me to a life of unhappiness. Thank but no thanks (Cisneros, 2004, 13).

Luis Leon reminds us that “religion emerges in memory bearing out Milan Kundera’s famous proposition that “the struggle of freedom against oppression is the struggle for memory against forgetting”. Communal memory of our religious culture is the glue that binds together the spiritualities of the borderlands” (Leon, 2004, p. 17). Memory, the ability to transform and redefine religion to our current reality, has been a powerful combination that has kept La Llorona children’s faith safe. As mestizos, we have been changed by force; we are the product of violence including the dissolution of our indigenous religious cosmovision. Mestizo spirituality reveals how it has been able to change and progress to create cultural, sexual, and political hybridity. Our faith brings a different self-image that affirms our past and gives us agency and at the same time enables the Chicana/o mestizo children to resist oppressions from the dominant culture and from our own community.

Theresa Delgadillo’s (2011), *Spiritual Mestizaje Religion, Gender, Race and Nation in Contemporary Narrative* takes Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of mestiza consciousness and adds Chicana narratives like the concept of testimonios (by Demetria Martinez and Denise Chavez), and engages with the concept of lived experience and its influence on critical thinking about colonialism, gender, history, language, religion, sexuality, and spirituality. Anzaldúa calls spiritual mestizaje, a “morphogenesis,” and

inevitable unfolding. Delgadillo adds that the terms employed by Anzaldúa to describe spiritual mestizaje are alchemy, morphogenesis, unfolding, and serpent, underscoring its energetic process. We start by knowing the self from the location that we inhabit, our social status, our identities and our histories. The process combines and adjusts our parts to experience “previously suppressed knowledge, which includes the history of indigenous spirituality and suppression of Indian women” (Delgadillo, 2011, p. 7). In addition, it can be used to reveal spiritual mestizaje as central to the queer feminist Chicana theorist’s life and thought, and as a critical framework for interpreting contemporary Chicana literary and visual narratives.

Delgadillo transforms Gloria Anzaldúa’s theory of spiritual mestizaje by analyzing the process of excavating bodily memory (body knowledge). This theory develops a radical, sustained critique of oppression and renews one’s relation to the sacred. It illuminates the ways that contemporary Chicana narratives visualize, imagine, and enact their spiritual mestizaje. Delgadillo interprets her critical readings of literary and visual productions and demonstrates how Chicanas challenge normative categories of gender, sexuality, nation, and race by depicting alternative visions of spirituality. By creating alternative visions, Latinas are able to access their experiences and they are able to articulate their knowledge. Furthermore, Delgadillo brings into view how the idea of spiritual mestizaje might be interpreted and explores Anzaldúa’s notion of autohistorias as a model for critical consciousness enlightened by spirituality.

Cherrie L. Moraga (2011), in *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness Writing, 2000-2010*, critiques and analyses the first decade of the twenty first century. Her writing is steeped in symbolism, myth and story. Moraga’s writings are powerful

because of her understanding that daily life for the Chicana/os informs aspects of their religious life. She uses daily life as an example of changing consciousness from personal to political. These parallels create knowledge and this knowledge becomes Chicana/os lived experienced and a part of Chicana/o spirituality. Moraga, Anzaldúa, and Delgado draw from indigenous knowledge and then add location knowledge, which is the knowledge gathered in or new areas of residence and thus creating a base to counter the dominant narrative. Moraga explains:

Today, using a language reflecting a kind of liberal multiculturalism and parroted by much of academia, the U.S. ruling class intends to de-Africanize, de-Asianize, and de-Indianize its citizens of color. This is not without purpose. While its domestic economic policies ensure even further separation between whites and people of color, the government's cultural project is to convince us, mostly through empty rhetoric and tokenism that we are somehow "white"; that is, equal participants in U.S. democracy. Without a U.S.- (read Anglo-) identified people-of-color- population, how will it wage war against the "colored" nations of the world (2010, p. 83).

An indigenous perspective is dangerous for the establishment because it detracts from the policies and rules set for the "others." For example, if we try to assimilate our color, our culture, our otherness will never allow us to be white. Chicana/os, people of color, or the "others" move into a place where everything is a possibility. Mestizaje is the promise of using everything that we have in our power, our indigenous past, and our Western philosophies of the present to create a new future. We live in a world where we have to fragment ourselves, so we can only show our Eurocentric selves to navigate and

survive the white-dominated society. We have been moved to the sides and in the sidelines our personal knowledge is creating a new narrative. Our bodies remember our indigenous roots and demand that we open our mind, hearts and souls to our reality. We are in nepantla.

Lara Medina, in her article “Nepantla Spirituality”, acknowledges that there is duality within nepantla, a place where we can be clear and self-aware and transparent, and a “shadow side,” where diversity complicates and generates confusion. As such, Medina argues that “nepantla is a multifaceted psychic and spiritual space composed of complementary opposites: obscurity and clarity” (2006, p. 254). Medina further elaborates:

To be en nepantla is to exist on the border, on the boundaries of cultures and social structures, where life is in constant motion, in constant fluidity. To be en nepantla also means to be in the center of things, to exist in the middle places where all things come together. Nepantla, the center place, is a place of balance, a place of equilibrium, or, as discussed earlier, a place of chaos and confusion (2006, p. 254)

Border people, mestiza/os, constantly live en nepantla. We can never leave the middle space as that is where we were created, in “the contact zone” (Carrasco, 1995:78). As Anzaldúa stated, “As you make your way through life, nepantla itself becomes the place you live in most of the time-home” (2002:548). How we choose to occupy our home is crucial. Nepantla spirituality offers a choice, a choice to exclude or to include. (2006, p. 256). As Chicana/os, our mestizaje has made us a clear contender for finding nepantla spirituality. We have shaped syncretism because our beliefs are in the middle.

We still hold a duality of beliefs since we have amalgamated Mesoamerican cosmology to the new religion forced upon us. We survive at the border of different cultures that sometimes clash, fragmenting us; at other times, they run parallel mirroring Western philosophy, but it's never exactly the same, as white society does not allow us to belong or we choose not to belong and we have our own histories that plays a role. Finally, at other times, we converge. We are in fluidity and constant motion. We change as the culture changes. We redefine or redesign our lives to be able to function and survive. There is an advantage to being in the middle. *Nepantla* is being balanced and fluid in a world that does not stop. And “without balanced individuals, the community cannot exist in harmony. Balance was achieved by not negating the opposite but rather by advancing toward it and embracing it. Maintaining balance/equilibrium in all things, including oneself, is the moral responsibility of all individuals” (Medina, 2006, p. 254).

Laura E. Perez (2007), in *Chicana Art the Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* focuses on the presence of the spiritual, and “interconnectedness of all beings, human and no[n] human” (Perez, 2007, p. 18) in the art work of contemporary Chicanas. The art is culturally and spiritually motivated art. Perez uses the political and aesthetic as a tool for rearticulating a cultural, social and political self. The spiritual, Perez argues, is “another terrain upon which to challenge the cultural blind spots in mainstream values, in our assumptions and dismissals, in our pretensions to the universality and superiority of our beliefs, and in our anti-religiosity or religious dogmatisms” (2007, p. 3).

Perez has made an invaluable contribution to Chicana/o studies, visual cultural studies, gender and women's studies, performance studies and more. The importance of Chicana art stands out because it is full of symbolism that reflects traditional elements of

religion, including hybrid spiritualities, which make spiritual beliefs and practices more tangible. This art is used as a new way to see our daily life from politics to religion. Additionally, this new way can be used to guide the healing of the unfairly socially marginalized who live in toxic environments.

In *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation*, Laura Rendon (2009) wants us “to shatter the belief system (within higher education) that has worked against wholeness, multiculturalism, and social justice (p. 1). For Rendon, western sensibilities dictate that to be successful in American universities and colleges, we need to learn by some agreements in order to create a successful student and this “include[s] rational learning, separation, competition, perfection, monoculturalism, outer work and the avoidance of self-examination” (p. 47). For Rendon, the linking of mind and heart, or thinking and feeling, will help form relationships between faculty and students and at the same time connect faculty with the students’ life experiences. Rendon draws in her ancestors as well as other indigenous peoples to connect with ancient wisdom. Then she combines her experience with reflection and meditation to be able to teach with a holistic approach. Rendon wants to incorporate, in the teachers practice a more “integrative, constant pedagogy” (65), which includes the ability to integrate associations between seeming opposites, such as thinking and feeling.

Rendon conducted a study with 15 faculty in higher education. 10 professors were in 4-year institutions and 5 in 2-year institutions. 7 were male, 10 White, 3 were Latina/o, 1 Asian, and 1 African American. All faculty members had a commitment and reputation for teaching in a holistic way. The teachers who have adopted this way of teaching have

seen the connection between intellectual understanding and reflective practice. Choosing to honor, but not to privilege mental knowledge, using contemplative practice, as well as other teaching practices, helps students deepen their learning. While the commitment to academic rigor was present, the teaching strategies highlight storytelling, photograph, music, meditation, reflections and retreats. Rendon's second teaching position is rooted in social justice (2009, p. 92) validating their life experience. For Latina/os, spirituality is one of the most important parts of our personal vision and connects us with our fragmented self and our community. The purpose of rediscovering ways to transform people's personal life is a way of finding spirituality. Benjamin Wormald in "America's Changing religious Landscape" acknowledge that "Rendon seeks to define and identify spirituality as it relates to higher education, acknowledges the opposition to accepting pedagogical methods that embrace thinking not deemed rational or intellectual" (Worthington, 2016, p. 81).

Similarly, Elisa Facio and Irene Lara (2014), in the anthology *Fleshing the Spirit Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives* have focused on voicing and understanding spirituality through an intersectional, interdisciplinary, and nonsectarian lens. The knowledge that Lara and Facio have collected is under the supposition that spirituality plays a decolonizing role in creating meaning, inspiring action, supporting healing and justice in our communities. Their work is important because the academy has largely devalued spirituality, both as a serious academic topic and as an integral aspect of being alive. Another important point made by Lara and Facio is that although Chicana/os are widely perceived as religious or spiritual, until recently, there have been few works that address the gendered, sexualized, classed,

and racialized spiritualities of Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women. Even more importantly is that the experiences haven't been told through their own voices. In fact, there is less work relating to queer men of color. Therefore, it is critical that we write about all aspects of our lives and honor how experiences are valid forms of scholarship and knowledge.

In conclusion, As Virgilio Elizondo states, “the mission of the mestizo is to create a new...culture and at the same time finding strength from “otherness” or from our struggles.” (2000, p. 76) Anzaldúa reminds us that finding our voice has always been an inside job. Isasi-Diaz and Tarango have articulated mujerista theology that brings those problems together. Anzaldúa reminds us that the geographical area, as well as the current place where our mind and spirit are located, is important to be able to understand, reaffirm, and reconnect in order to move forward. Elizondo wants us to embrace all the aspects of our human life and out of this acceptance the divine will reveal itself. Isasi-Diaz and Tarango’s mujerista theology wants us to use our struggles as a way to clear the path way to our liberation.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis

In the beginning of the Chicano civil rights movement of the sixties and seventies, Chicana/o scholars and activist, considered religion a challenge to the advancement of the Chicana/o movement. They failed to see the intertwining of religious meanings in Chicano culture and the role of religion in Chicana/o history. Our ancestors had crafted religiosity as a way to mirror our identity, history and as an expression of our yearnings for a better future.

As I mention in this study, Chicana/os, Mexicans, Mexican- Americans had used syncretism to adapt indigenous histories and past religions to Christianity. But in academia, we need to remember that Chicana/o studies obscured, or in some cases, denied the relationship between the religious church and the Chicana/o movement. For example, as mentioned before in this thesis, El plan de Santa Barbara, lacks any interest in Christian religion. However, the Catholic-centric orientation of most Chicana/os is an indication that religion is important for the community. The daily life of Chicana/os is rich with religious traditions and rituals. Today, The Chicana/o community is still taking the imposed culture, religious and non-religious, and we are reframing it to make it our own.

In the artistic works of Chicana/os, some of them religious others not particularly religious, spirituality has become an area of focus where there is a conscious effort to gather knowledge by which to guide themselves and the community. In this thesis, I am arguing that Chicana/o artists have been using tools of decolonization fused with spirituality in their work and they use this work as a way to confront mainstream values and as a tool to create a new narrative that helps decolonize the community.

Furthermore, as with religion, Chicana/os work is a syncretism between their art and the daily life of the Chicana/o community. This study wants to decipher the meaning within the work of the selected Chicana/o artists and how their work reflects spirituality. The principles for the framework of spirituality in this study follows: 1) the definition of spirituality, which was defined as an authentic awareness of self, in relationship to others, the global community, and to Creation based on values of respect, social justice, reciprocity, compassion, and gratitude; 2) Mujerista theology which one of their major tenant is that spirituality is based on Chicanas lived experiences; and 3) Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands, mestizaje, nepantla, and la conciencia de la mestiza; 4) the sacred landscape, and sacred human being; 5) syncretism, and folk Catholicism. All this work allows Chicana/o to use spirituality to create an environment where our community becomes an agent of their culture and it will foster the process to be able to create their own identity. The literature and art I examine are: *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya, (1972), *Borderlands/La Frontera; The New Mestiza* by Gloria Anzaldúa (1988), "Our Lady" by Alma Lopez (1999), and "Reinvented Icon for this Time and Place" by Cesar Martinez (1991).

The interest in this section is to investigate if spirituality has been used by writers, poets and artists as a way to create decolonizing knowledge outside the confines of dominant culture. This work claims that Chicana/o art work is being used as a voice of dissent and at the same time using the work as a study in reinventing or reframing spirituality to bring a healing force to themselves and the community. I selected these works to serve, collectively, as a representation of the diverse struggles and hopefully the work is framed by the definition of spirituality to bring an example in how art is an

empowering tool with emancipatory potential since the work include a variety of literary genres ranging from a historical novel, personal reflection, autobiography, and painting.

In charting the new path, I want to see if literature and art creates a bridge from spirituality to daily life. Chicana/o spirituality has established discursive and visual spaces in which to negotiate alternative subjectivities through reworking the icons and cultural narratives within Chicana/o culture. We start with, *Bless me, Ultima* which is the creation of a space where Anaya creates a world where spirituality is a way of life and mixed into the Eurocentric society to change and create a new response.

Bless Me, Ultima

In the first case, *Bless me, Ultima*, Rudolfo Anaya recreates a sacred spiritual landscape that revolves around a seven-year-old Antonio Marez (Luna) and the healer Ultima. Antonio and Ultima's world mimics a Chicana/o microcosm where our religious experience, although ancient and deep, is on a discovery path within Antonio's western Catholic world. Ultima's entrance into Antonio's life denotes the beginning of a spiritual transformation. *Bless me, Ultima* is a picture of the spiritual realities that Chicana/os juggle in their daily existence. We live in more than one culture, which often has opposing messages and cultural realities, and our only defense is to create a new reality, to live in nepantla. Anzaldúa (1999) calls it the mestiza consciousness:

By creating a new mythos-that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the way we have- la mestiza creates a new consciousness. The work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject/object duality that keeps her prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race the

colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness in the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, or violence, of war. (Anzaldúa, p. 102)

The sacred space in *Bless Me, Ultima* has been established with the use of a geographical area that serves as a container for the varied religious objects that transform or manifest themselves in nature or in the life of those in the story. For example, the river, the golden carp and Ultima's owl are all symbols of spiritualities that are important to those in the story. Also, all of these symbols serve as religious manifestations that show the Chicana/o otherness.

Anaya uses spirituality as a mixture of Mesoamerican religions, traditional western spiritualities, American indigenous spiritual nature, and African knowledge, which connect all beings, human and non-human. Anaya shows the Chicana/os religious history by showing the diversity of knowledge and wraps it into a geographical area that is why the story begins in the town of Guadalupe, New Mexico. Guadalupe is the place where Ultima comes to stay with Antonio and his family. Guadalupe embraces all the different spiritualities including those that do not believe in God. Guadalupe, as previously noted, is the emblematic symbol and fundamental image of the Chicana/os community. Civil rights leaders like Cesar Chavez used La Virgen de Guadalupe as the symbol of the Chicana/o struggle. Guadalupe is also considered a unifying symbol for the community as well as her other roles as protector and comforter to the people. Maylei Blackwell (2012) reminds us that Chicana feminists established discursive and

visual spaces in which to negotiate alternative subjectivities by reworking La Virgen de Guadalupe and making her a cultural narrative of the Chicano movement.

For Anaya Guadalupe is a religious borderland that creates the notion of the sacred place where spirituality is crafted (nepantla). La Virgen is a symbol of protection, negotiation and transformation. In *Bless me, Ultima*, Guadalupe is a symbol of a negotiation and protection for Chicana/os and their life in the borderland. The borderland is transformed into another sacred space as described and the Chicana/o struggle to survive is crafted spirituality. The life of the Chicana/o is in “Nepantla.” The struggle is seen in different borders like USA vs Mexico, American Native Nations vs American Government, White vs Brown, Indigenous vs Mexican, and the ultimate symbol of mestizaje; Guadalupe is an icon with different meanings in the ideological and historical perspective; the mestiza saint/Goddess Guadalupe mother of the mestizo children, oversees those children under the umbrella of her name; and all those borderlands are crossed by the Chicana/o on our daily struggles.

Guadalupe is the perfect symbol to set the novel and show the diversity within the community. She is the new hope and the mestizaje of the new life of those who had migrated north looking for a better life for themselves and their family. The town's name, Guadalupe, recreates the unification of the old and the new as New Mexico reflects. The name also represents the mixture of the native residents and those considered new like the Chicana/o community. Anaya uses the city of Guadalupe to reflect on a sense of a borderland for the Meraz family. They live in the town but are still in the margins by living on the other side of the river that can only be accessed by a bridge. The home is also at the border of the llanos and the border of the town. Antonio's family lived at a

borderland physically and spiritually where religious movements and expressions converge creating a new reality that mimics society at large even though they are at the margins.

For the Chicana/o, spirituality identity is not an easy task. Recovering the spiritual identity is personal and full of hard work as our pieces are hard to puzzle together. *Bless me, Ultima* is full of political and ideological content, which creates a representation of our many traditions. In addition to the Eurocentric religion represented by Catholicism, In *Bless me, Ultima*, Anaya, also uses witchcraft which is represented by the Trementina sisters.⁷ They are the daughters of Tenorio Trementina. This brings the fear of western religions where evil is always present and hunting those that diverge from the prescribed. However, for Anaya, the opposite of Witchcraft is not the Catholic Church as it is not able to bring safety to Antonio's uncle, but the opposite and savior is indigenous spirituality represented by Ultima, and to great extent by Guadalupe. Ultima becomes an example of sacred people which in our personal spirituality allow us to create and use our myths and traditions. *Bless me, Ultima* plays with the many symbols of Chicano spirituality to help us mix our many traditions all under the umbrella of "nepantla spirituality" (Medina, 2006, p. 256).

As represented in the quotations from *Bless Me, Ultima*; "There are many gods," Cisco whispered, "gods of beauty and magic, gods of the garden, gods of our own backyards, – but we go off to foreign countries to find new ones, we reach to the stars to find new ones" (Carrasco 195). As Chicana/os we live in our mestizaje, and Chicana/os

⁷ The Trementina Sisters are considered witches in the town, which represent in the USA a Western tradition originated in England. Tenorio Trementina symbolizes the devil, which is another Catholic, Western myth.

have many gods that represent us, protect us or become symbols of “other” spirituality but always under the watchful eye of Guadalupe. Although, Chicana/os have changed Guadalupe to our own personal indigenous goddess/tonantzin.

The borderlands intermingle people and traditions. For Chicana/os, change is a constant and the creation of a new way of surviving and thriving in world not designed for their survival. Delgadillo (2011) explains:

Spirituality informs every aspect of the work that Borderlands performs with respect to subjectivity, epistemology, and transformation, including its consideration of inherited and invented practices honoring the sacred, recollection of home-centered religious rituals and healing ceremonies, descriptions of out-of-body experiences, research on and contemplation of the significance of indigenous deities, and exploration of love, compassion, and justice in addressing social inequalities (p. 6).

Antonio’s character must cross several bridges to enter different spaces, always crossing boundaries to access the world where he is not 100 percent represented. For example, the physical space, crossing the river to go to town, or when Chicana/o children go to school and are ridiculed for not speaking English. Our tongue is another border that we need to cross, even for those for whom English is a first language. *Bless me, Ultima* uses the Catholic Church with its rules to form a background that has replaced those rituals that are transmitted from his family; for example, Ultima’s knowledge is considered “other” even by the family that has benefited from her knowledge. This creates a fragmentation in Antonio’s mind and separation from his indigenous self.

The formation of sacred spaces and/or sacred beings is an idea of David Carrasco.

Carrasco writes about such idea in his article “A Perspective for a Study of Religious Dimensions in Chicano Experience: *Bless Me, Ultima* as a Religious Text.” It gives the idea of creating the sacred moment, spaces, and actions that give texture to the Mexican and Chicana/o experience. Ultima comes to stay with Antonio’s family and with her, a world of knowledge comes into Antonio’s life. The knowledge that Chicana/os have collected from members of our families (transmitted mainly by our women) from plants to cure our ailments to ancient spirituality in the form of rituals and stories, a combination of Christian views, divine indigenous powers and human experiences. As noted before, for communities, ritual and ceremonies create more than spiritual enlightenment, it creates new culture.

Following Chicana/os definition of spirituality, the Meraz family takes Ultima into their home, as part of helping someone in need. Ultima is a respected member of the community and at the same time, the Meraz are practicing a Mesoamerican tradition in the Chicana/o community where the community helps their elders. Ultima is a respected Healer, her knowledge transcends plant lore, and her long use of folk magic is in service of the community, but Maria Meraz still has some reservations because of her own Catholic faith. Maria, Antonio’s mom, is devoutly Catholic and Ultima is a healer with indigenous knowledge and this creates a conflict in her Catholic views.

Carrasco (1982) illustrates how the Christian-centric approach has limited our understanding of our Indigenous ancestors as creative human beings. The application of the Christian theological view of history allows no room for the consideration of Indigenous creativity, genius, imagination or spirituality. The aggressive use of a particular religious world view to define the nature and value

of another religious tradition does damage to an understanding of the “objects” of this exercise, in this case the Chicana/o (p. 198).

The most striking example of how our traditions are accepted or maligned is the way Anaya writes about the families. *Bless Me, Ultima* includes cultural resources shaped by experiences and memories of those in the family, and those experiences and memories create new spiritual spaces. For example, Antonio’s father, Gabriel, is a former vaquero, or cowboy, who wandered the llanos, (the great plains) of New Mexico. Antonio’s mother, Maria, is the daughter of farmers. Antonio’s parents now argue about their young son’s future; Gabriel hopes he will become a vaquero on the llano, and Maria hopes he will become a priest. When he was born, Ultima served as his midwife and buried his afterbirth. As a result, it is now thought that she alone knows what lies in Antonio’s future. Both sides of the family have rituals and ceremonies and include communion with earth, but only the rituals of Maria’s family are beneficial as they produce food and allow them to stay in one place. Those rituals are also entangled with the Catholic Church, and as such they create sacred spaces where Antonio is able to rest and have peace after an incident with the Trementina sisters. The space is considered a sacred space as it relates to the status quo. But for the Marez side of the family, the llano is not perceived the same way. The llano is equated with barbarism, the will, and ignorance, with no perceived rules and order. The standards of rituals and sacred spaces are not considered legitimate for those that are not part of the status quo. This brings us back to folk religion and the delegitimizing of sacred spaces. *Bless me, Ultima* displays that there is a sacred space –the “llano” creates a space where the vaquero communes with nature, but this is not reconciled by those outside this way of life and those in

traditional religions. Gabriel has his personal sacred space where he can connect to nature (God), but it conflicts with those of his wife. However, as in nature, the moon (Luna) moves the oceans (Marez).

The death of Lupito, a World War II veteran, creates a shift in Antonio's mind. Antonio's innocence is threatened after seeing Lupito's death, Antonio begins to wonder about sin, death, and hell. Antonio walks to church with Ultima the next morning, and she tells him that each person must make his or her own moral choices and must choose a set of values to use to understand the world. Although Antonio is submerged in the Catholic religion, the answer for this question will have to be made on his own using the values that he uses to understand the world, which for Antonio is a compilation of all his life including Ultima.

Contrasting the Catholic Church teachings, there is Antonio's friend Samuel, who takes him fishing, and tells him the story of the golden carp. It is about a river God who looks out for mankind. Antonio is moved by the story, but he does not know how to reconcile it with his Catholic beliefs. His beliefs are challenged again when the satanic Trementina sisters curse his uncle Lucas. The priest is unable to cure him, but Ultima, with Antonio's help, is able to banish the curse. Antonio realizes that there is no way to explain Ultima's powers within the worldview of the Catholic Church. All religions have their dark side. Afterwards Antonio and Cisco go to see the golden carp. Cisco says that if the people cannot stop sinning, the carp will flood the land to rid it of humanity's evil. Antonio wishes sadly that there was a God of forgiveness. He idolizes the Virgin Mary because of the ideal of forgiveness that she represents.

At last, the time comes for Antonio to begin preparing for his Communion. But he

seems to be surrounded by dissenting voices—that of his father, who worships the earth and open space more than he does the Christian God, and that of his friend Florence, who incisively points out the failings in Catholic thought. When Antonio finally takes Communion on Easter Sunday, he feels no different than he felt before. He still does not understand how there could be evil in the world or what kind of forgiveness is possible in a world of sin. Ultima continues to teach Antonio lessons about moral independence and goodness. Not long after that, Florence, Antonio’s friend, drowns while swimming in the river. Ultima sends Antonio to stay with his uncles to recover from the shock, and he spends a happy summer with them, learning how to tend a farm or communing with the earth. On the journey there, Antonio and Gabriel talk about some of the questions that have been bothering Antonio, and Gabriel tells him that he will end the conflict between the Márezs and the Lunas and let Antonio choose his own destiny. Antonio moves into nepantla, a place where everything is possible but also a place where everything convenes. With all the different views that Antonio perceives, he is changing to the role of the Sacred Human, Carrasco (1982) explains that in the “history of religions we find endless accounts of sacred specialists. These are individual[s] who have developed a profound knowledge of the sacred realities which guide their particular communities” (p. 206). For Antonio, all experiences have created a sacred space where experience is the key to see the different parts of the sacred. Antonio can see the different parts of power in his journey for knowledge. He has the power to create a new beginning where he can reclaim, redefine or reframe his new life. Antonio transforms into the “other,” the outsider who has to create a new set of rituals, ceremonies and sacred spaces to continue with his new sense of identity and spirituality.

The Borderlands

Gloria Anzaldúa (1988) in her book *The Borderlands* wrote, “the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (p. 25). The Chicana/os survives at the outside or the borderland of what is considered the dominant culture. There is an essence of resistance toward the cultures that harms us, and a constant fight to keep our identity. In our community, Chicanas have transformed and used every part of our religious knowledge to keep the community faith afloat. The mixture of knowledge which includes organized religion, indigenous knowledge and a mixture of all western and non-western spiritualities, is embodied in *mestizaje*. We are over 500 years from the Spanish conquest, and our people are still working from the borderlands and forced to shape and reinterpret religion in order to belong but, we are still considered the “other.” The Chicana/o community works at confronting the negative cultural realities and recreating or reinterpreting those traditions within the community that affect or benefit us to work simultaneously within and against the dominant culture.

This section is based on written sources. The essays are considered contemporary art, though I take an interdisciplinary approach to these readings. Anzaldúa does not use traditional religion as part of her understanding but I surmise that she uses “spirituality” as a way to distinguish between religion that is approved by official religious establishments, and a free, unfiltered understanding of the divine through creative and revolutionary practices. Spirituality, though not necessarily characterized by adherence to a specific religious tradition, does share the belief in a transcendent state. Chicana/o spirituality refers to the practices rooted in ancient religious beliefs, but may take customs

of other cultural traditions, as needed. In spiritual practice of this sort there is no power structure enforcing appropriate behaviors; the only power controlling it is the self.

Trying to reclaim your spirituality is always a difficult project. Religious traditions are oftentimes in place to the advantage of those in power. In this section, I discuss Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, and ways in which everyone who is on the borderland are connected to spirituality. I focus on how spirituality is used in order to liberate and empower the self, create community and become part of the world. *Borderlands* was a response to the "negative culture" in the Chicano community and mainstream U.S. society. Anzaldúa creates in her work the concept of "mestizo consciousness," creating an epistemic option for marginalized groups. This concept will give Chicano people, a new view in their identity and a new way to claim their reality. This new reality will encompass their pre-Hispanic roots as well as their Eurocentric influence. In *Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan*, Gloria Anzaldúa proposes a new look to our own family and community:

Culture forms beliefs. We perceived the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, challengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture. Culture is made by those in power-men. (1988, p.38)

Anzaldúa had to leave family life and culture in order to heal some of the fragmentation caused by the expectations of her family and culture. Anzaldúa explains, "I had to leave home, so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic buried under the personality that had been imposed on me" (38). For Chicanos, breaking away from our culture is hard as family is considered one of the most important features of a Chicana/o's

life. We search for the approval of family and from the community, and if one seeks approval and does not get, the disapproval becomes a burden and it can be devastating. For many in the Chicana/o community, it is painfully understood that if you want to select a new path in life, then you need to leave or challenge the expectations of your family, as you do not want to destroy their self-understanding; this is especially true for our Chicana sisters and our queer brothers and sisters. Anzaldúa talks about traditions that enslave our own people, in traditions that will promote those in power over others. Anzaldúa writes, “In my culture, selfishness is condemned, especially in women; humility and selflessness, the absence of selfishness, is considered a virtue” (40). Ambition is condemned in the Mexican culture, but where do we get this tradition? Norma Alarcon (1981) writes:

In our religiously permeated and oriented indo-Hispanic minds, it is often the case that devotion is equated with obedience and vice versa, particularly for women and children, so that disobedience is seen as a lack of devout allegiance, and not necessarily as a radical questioning of our forms of life. This factor makes it almost impossible to sense a shift from obedience to devotion; they have been one and the same for hundreds of years. As such, we are a greater unconscious prey to subjugation, which we then proceed to call devotion/love. To be obedient/devoted is proof of love, especially for women and children. (Alarcon p.186)

Anzaldúa contrasts and combats traditions with the introduction of the shadow-beast. She uses the shadow-beast as a protector and is in constant battle with the cultural constraints and outside authority. She writes that with a strong cultural connection to

family, culture and religion, the probability of limiting ourselves increases. The shadow-beast is the connection to the sacred self, in part animalistic, and the true nature of each of us. Anzaldúa's personal life was in many ways the perfect storm of rebellion. She notes, "for a lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can indulge in against her native culture is through her sexual behavior" (1987, p. 41). She goes against two moral prohibitions: rejecting a male God and homosexuality. Anzaldúa (1987) continues "being lesbian and raised Catholic, indoctrinated as straight, I made the choice to be queer (for some it is genetically inherent)" (p. 41). It creates a borderland where division imposed by others is possible. If borders were imposed by conquerors or are imposed by dominant culture, they still do the same work to push the "other" to the edges. Anzaldúa (1988) writes that "Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them" (p. 25). For Anzaldúa (1987), the "dividing line" is the border that establishes a state of fleetingness, one "vague" and "unsettled" and generated out of the, "emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (p. 25). Therefore, there are limitations that the family, culture and religion can place on a person and these combinations place a burden on the individual which translates into their position in society. There is a barrier to your development imposed by a culture that is made to serve those in power and only the abandonment or restructuring of the core ideas will create a world for those in the edges/margins. But how do you fight with those powers that limit and disempower the self? For Anzaldúa, there is a constant battle to go back to the power of her *mestizaje*.

In *Entering into the Serpent*, Anzaldúa starts to create new ways to contest dissenting voices using all the fragments at her disposal. The "self" fragments as it tries

to reshape to mimic what dominant society wants us to be, and during that transformation we lose some of our pieces. She draws from her present and past to create a new future. The concept of nepantla, which refers to the state of transition, to be in the middle motivates some scholars to understand the concept as transformative. Ana Louise Keating (2006) describes nepantleras as:

Threshold people: they move within and among multiple, often conflicting worlds and refuse to align themselves exclusively with any single individual group, or belief system. This refusal is not easy: nepantleras must be willing to open themselves to personal risk and potential wounding which include, but are not limited to, self-division, isolation, misunderstanding, rejection, and accusation of disloyalty, Yet the risk taking has its own reward, for nepantleras use their movement among divergent worlds to develop innovative, potentially transformative perspectives. (p. 6)

Chicana/os living in the state of nepantla make the conscious choice to live in a state of change and engage in different traditions. For Chicanas, ambiguity surrounds them, and their own culture has created barriers, but they have been able to not only answer but have also found ways to thrive as they lead the community out of institutionalized oppression. They use all that it is available in their arsenal. One of the weapons to fight oppression for Chicanas is nepantla. Chicanas, as nepantleras, make the conscious choice to engage in different traditions, as they understand the importance of maintaining balance between different paradigms. Nepantla serves as a place of empowerment and agency from which Chicanas form identities and worldviews. Chicanas are not afraid to walk in ambiguity; in fact, Chicanas thrive in ambiguity, but

ambiguity for many is a sign of oppression. Anzaldúa (1987) reminds us of the three symbols of women-hood that have brought Chicana/os into oppression:

Ambiguity surrounds the symbols of our three mothers. Guadalupe has been used by the Church to meter out our institutionalized oppression: to placate the Indians (indigenous people) and Mexicanos and Chicanos. In part, the true identity of all three has been subverted—Guadalupe to make us docile and enduring, la Chingada to make us ashamed of our Indian (indigenous) side, and la Llorona to make us a long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the virgin/puta (whore) dichotomy. Yet we have not all embraced this dichotomy. In the U.S. Southwest, Mexico, Central and South America the indio and the mestizo continue to worship the old spirit entities (including Guadalupe) and their supernatural power, under the guise of Christian Saints. (p. 53)

Anzaldúa uses the imagery of female deities to position and demand her space, especially in *La Herencia de Coatlicue*. The destruction of the feminine, and the cultural degradation of women is a main theme in her work. Anzaldúa rebels against traditionally incontestable and unbreakable roles imposed on women by those in power, men or institutions like the Church. Her rebellion is against what she calls “the slavery of obedience, of silence and acceptance” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 37). Anzaldúa uses the myth of Coyaxauhqui’s death at the hands of her brother Huitzilopochtli to represent the repression of both indigenous and feminist ideas at the hand of male dominance. By reinterpreting the myths of old Mexican indigenous beliefs, Anzaldúa reclaims the repressed feminine power and indigeneity of the Chicana. Another example of reinterpretation and reclamation is Guadalupe:

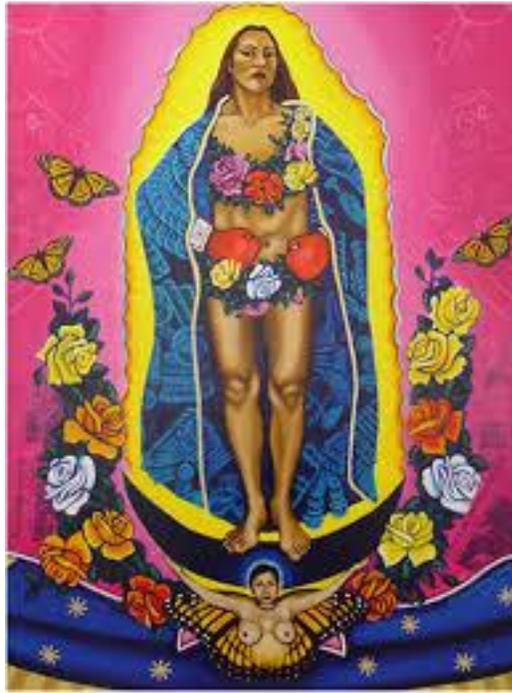
Today, la Virgen de Guadalupe is the single most potent religious, political and cultural image of the Chicano/mexicano. She, like my race, is a synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of the two races and our psyche, the conquerors and the conquered. She is the symbol of the mestizo true to his or her Indian values. La cultura Chicana identifies with the mother (Indian) rather than with the father (Spanish). Our faith is rooted in indigenous attributes, images, symbols, magic and myth. Because Guadalupe took upon herself the psychological and physical devastation of the conquered and oppressed Indio, she is our spiritual, political and psychological symbol. As a symbol of hope and faith, she sustains and insures our survival. The Indian, despite extreme despair, suffering and near genocide, has survived. To Mexicans on both sides of the border, Guadalupe is the symbol of our rebellions against the rich, upper and middle class; against their subjugation of the poor and the indio (Anzaldúa, 1988, p. 52).

Chicanas have been able to perceive a deeper significance of what appears on the surface of material structure and act to fend for themselves as their differences cast them away from central roles of power and influence. There has been a devaluation of the Chicana/o spiritual nature under the dominant “Western” culture, where what cannot be explained by reason simply does not exist. Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) calls this extra sense “*la facultad*,” (p. 60) developed as a way of perceiving the world. The outcast (by virtue of sex, sexual orientation, race, et al.) through the experience of pain can develop *la facultad*. The intuitive senses develop, giving an extra level of perception. For Anzaldúa, oftentimes, entering into a state of distress and pain is necessary for the

reception of la facultad; she calls this the Coatlicue state, from which individuals can enter into and be reborn with a new understanding of the world. The Coatlicue state describes the descent of the mestiza/o into a primal state, and underworld of unresolved cultural issues and painful transformation. The perspective gained is not to comfort but to disrupt.

In the Coatlicue state, the mestiza/o faces the darkest parts of her/his psyche. In the painful transformation the mestiza/o sheds her/his reliance on Western dichotomies. The Chicana/os are reborn with a new understanding and healed wounds created by Western culture. The body and spirit emerge from the darkness in balance, as complements rather than opposites, while Chicana/os use the understanding that mestizaje gives them to advance their spirituality. Guided by our traditions, Chicanos move to create a new life in a hostile environment. The destruction of our spirituality and culture by the Spanish and the attacks on the family and culture in the U.S. had a detrimental effect in our life. The destruction of those things that made us feel safe were the beginning of the destruction of our identity. Even now in 2018, our families are still being attacked under the guise of criminality, illegality and religion. The fragmentation of our souls continues. Chicanas have tried to protect our community and shape it into what we are meant to be and at the same time, we have tried to break down those traditions that bring us down. It is a fight with Western epistemologies and at the same time, a fight with ourselves. In our mixing of cultures and political allegiances, we have had to fight and form coalitions across identities. We have had to reframe our existing symbols to make them meaningful to those on the fringes of our community.

Our Lady Controversy



On February 25, 2001, the *Cyber Arte: Traditions Meets Technology* exhibition opened and one of the pieces in the show was Alma Lopez's *Our Lady*. *Our Lady* is described by Alma Lopez as an interpretation of a "feature performance of artist Raquel Salinas as an assertive and strong "Virgen" dressed in a bikini made from roses and cultural activist Raquel Gutierrez as a nude butterfly angel. It was inspired by Sandra Cisneros's essay, "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess" (Lopez, 1999). Lopez's image is far removed from the traditional Guadalupe because Lopez gives this new Guadalupe a powerful physical appearance. With her hands at her hips this Guadalupe is ready for battle. The nude butterfly angel denotes transformation and sexuality together as Chicanas struggle to embrace their sexuality into their daily existence.

Alma Lopez reformulation of La Virgen de Guadalupe (the Virgin of Guadalupe) is an effort to create a symbol where Guadalupe becomes a safe space for her and a positive icon for her gender and sexuality. Lopez's interpretation argues that the work

can pay homage to her roots and yet deconstruct the trappings of patriarchy. Lopez as most Chicana/os grew up venerating La Virgen de Guadalupe and there was a strong personal relationship with Guadalupe. For López, La Virgen de Guadalupe needed to free herself from the chains of sexual repression. Guadalupe transformation is a step to consciousness raising. However, Marla Morris (2002) writes, “heteronormative desire cannot stand ambiguity, androgyny, shifting borders, and slippery parameters. Heteronormative demands freeze-frame sexuality” (p. 137). Instead of seeing the image as a transformative image that serves a purpose, those in the status quo (Mr. Villegas and Catholic Church represented by the Archbishop Sheehan in New Mexico) demanded that the image be removed and tagged as offensive, making the decision for the rest of the community what is offensive and immoral. Lopez rebels against a culture and religion that has betrayed her and by this action she cultivates her religious agency⁸. As Anzaldúa pointed out, we cannot forgive our own culture when the culture betrays part of our community.

As mentioned before, for Chicana/os, breaking away from our culture is devastating. But if spirituality is based on the relationship with one self, then how can someone tell you what your expression is? How can you reclaim the image of the most important woman in our religion? Lopez resurrected the shadow-beast creating a storm of rebellion. The shadow-beast behaves differently but always with a destructive strength to change. Sandra Cisneros (2004), in her essay “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess,” directly addresses the issue of Chicana investment in the representation of brown female bodies.

⁸ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands, La Frontera The New Mestiza*. Ed. Gloria Anzaldúa. Vol. 1. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1988

My Virgen de Guadalupe is not the mother of God. She is God. She is a face for a god without a face, an indigena for a god without ethnicity, a female deity for a god who is genderless, but I also understand that for her to approach me, for me to finally open doors and accept her, she had to be a woman like me (Cisneros, 2004, p. 50-51).

Likewise, at the center of her art, Lopez constructs a picture of actual experience representing gender, race, and class identity. Lopez examines the nature and problematic Catholic legacy and the hetero-patriarchal presence in our daily life all within the image of *Our Lady*.

Within the Mexican Catholic Church, but adopting indigenous culture, Lopez tries to construct a new reality and a new identity. Anzaldúa calls this “new tribalism,” (Anzaldúa, p.568) which places the power of identity formation in the hands of the individual; Chicanas find agency in deciding which cultural practices are appropriate for their conditions and situations. For Anzaldúa, new tribalism is a necessity when breaking down cultural and epistemic categories and creating new forms of identity. For AnaLouis Keating, any deviation from institutionalized religions, which have long enjoyed unquestioned control over the spiritual identities of followers, is an act of resistance and moving beyond Western epistemic traditions (Keating, 2006, p. 12). As one of the tenants of *mujerista* theory, identity has to be shaped by ourselves.

The curator of the museum where Lopez exhibited *Our Lady*, explained that the show wanted to portray the balance between or negotiation of traditional and contemporary identities of Hispana (Hispanic) women’. It was a display of how these artists “translate and recast their deeply-rooted cultural beliefs, images and history by

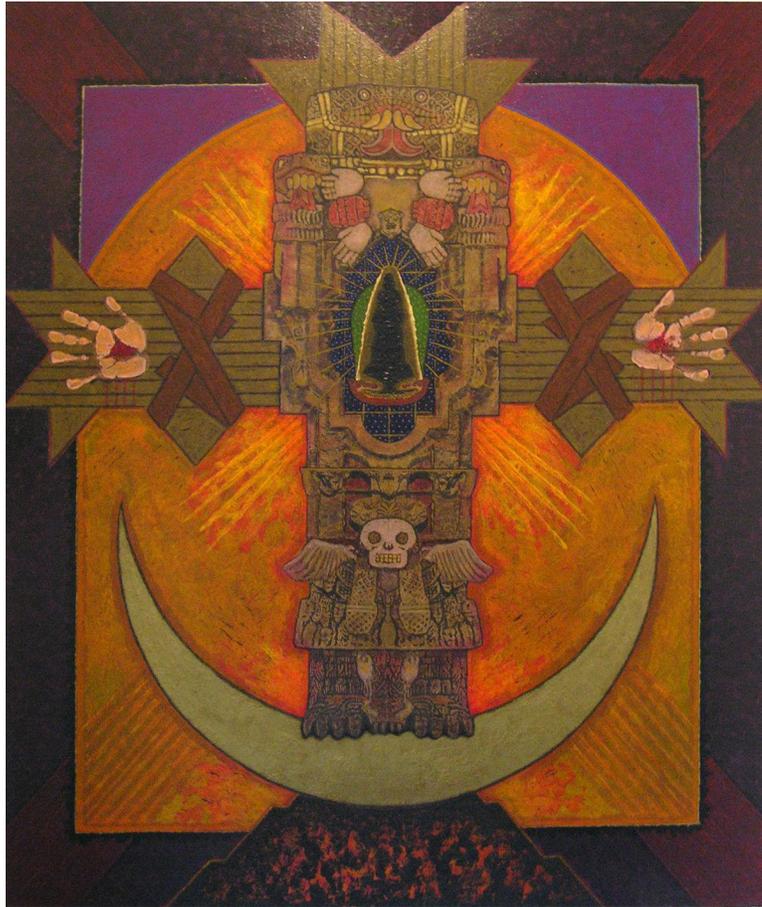
utilizing computers to create a new type of visual art” (Lopez, 2011, p. 56). Ana Castillo (1996) adds:

In Christian iconography, the figure of Mary is no longer simply the woman who joyously accepted her role as the sacrificial mother of a male savior. Mary is no longer essentially virginal (disconnected from her body and its erotic powers), passive (a mere vessel, allowing the story of the passion to be told through her), submissive (acquiescing to a higher, male power), and modest (not the doer of deeds, but rather a compassionate onlooker and servant) (p. 116).

The repression of Alma Lopez was a direct assault on the “other,” a queer woman who was applying a new interpretation of what she considers significant to her personal cultural, spiritual and self- identity. Throughout history, the image of The Virgin of Guadalupe has been used not only to liberate but also to erase those that are considered the “other.” For example, Cristina Serna reminds us that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the elites in Mexico used La Virgen de Guadalupe to legitimize their incipient nationalist consciousness, often at the cost of erasing indigenous people from that consciousness (Lopez, 2011, p. 170). The visual work of Alma Lopez reinstates the indigenous through symbols that bring the Coatlicue/mother earth, to the front of the discussion. “Chicana artists thus intervene in a long primarily male, traditions of utilizing her image either to subvert hegemonic religious structures or to give visual shape to politically and socially invested visions” (Lopez, 2011, p. 170). Lopez returns “La Virgen de Guadalupe” to her original element and “evokes a resacralization of women sexual bodies or, alternately, of lesbian love and eroticism” (Lopez, 2011, p. 174). This creates a new sacred icon, Lupe is now Coyolxauhqui the rebellious female warrior spirit

that fights and challenges patriarchy. Lupe becomes a new “symbol of female empowerment” (Lopez, p.176) and her power gives power to power to her children too. This provides an interesting canvas inviting male artists to interrogate religious and cultural ideologies.

Reinvented Icon



As demonstrated above, Chicana/os religious experiences are complex and diverse. Chicana/os, interrogate and reflect our diverse religious and cultural background to reflect our vision and show a path to action. Cesar A. Martinez (1991) *Reinvented Icon for this time and place*, calls on culture and history to understand where we are situated at this time and place. Martinez creates an image to represent the in-between place where Chicana/os are situated, Anzaldúa called it the “crossroad,” (1987, p. 102) where the Chicana/o can heal or not, and have the option to move backward, forward or stay in the same place. *Reinvented Icon* creatively divulges the diverse and complex world of Martinez, as he shows the old and the new, in his representations of mother

earth, the Christian Virgin, Jesus and her son. Martinez has based his image atop an Aztec temple, creating a way to bring indigenous history to the frame.

Coatlicue, a reference of Aztec cosmology, is a powerful symbol of indigenous history as well as earth, female, and fertility. Coatlicue personifies and mirrors the ambiguity of mestizaje, the chaos of the borderlands, and the creativity of nepantla. For Martinez, the image of Coatlicue is used as a background to display what is his core or on the middle, which is the Virgin of Guadalupe. Indigenous consciousness has been directly associated with Guadalupe and the connection is stronger with a new generation who see a Guadalupe between Catholicism and pre-Hispanic religions. Artists struggle to express their experience within the community and the image of La Virgen de Guadalupe/Coatlicue creates a bridge between what they know of their past and their present. For example, in his painting *Reinvented Icon for this Time and Place (San Antonio)*, Cesar A Martinez creates a bridge to his indigenous cultural heritage, but it also represents his place in today's society. The image of both deities creates a picture of a diverse and complex symbol that brings to the front his nepantla spirituality.

For Lara Medina and Gilbert Cadena (2002) nepantla spirituality is a transculturation or an encounter with more than two divergent views (p. 88). From nepantla, the self is recovered and healed and at the same time it is the place to confront and understand the spiritual space that Chicana/o's control. Nepantla is a place of transformation where the Chicana/o negotiates their fragmented identities, understanding of the divine and their place in the world. Nepantla helps the Chicana/o heal but at the same time, it helps with the recovery of our ancestral ways and fights against those that harms us. When looking at the pictures, we can see the influence of culture.

Martinez is recreating a new Goddess Coatlicue/Guadalupe, who doubles as a crucifix, a symbol of love and self-sacrifice, representing the Mesoamerica, colonial and present era. *Reinvented Icon* has changed into the Christ of Catholicism and Coyolxauhqui dismemberment has become the crucifixion. In *Reinvented Icon*, La Virgen de Guadalupe is a representation of the figure of the Virgen de Guadalupe inside the rose window in the Mission of San Jose in San Antonio. The Rose window comprises a part of the chest of the Coatlicue. For Martinez, The Virgin of Guadalupe in San Antonio symbolizes the epitome of sacred places where the Chicana/o can practice the traditions and will be a reminder of the new Icon. There is a realization that Chicana/o ethnicity, religious identities and place of origin are interwoven to meet the spiritual needs. There are other symbols in *Reinvented Icon* directing us to the crucifixion as the hands on the image have similarity with the stigmata or crucifixion wounds. There is also a similarity to the sign of the four elements. The ultimate visual reminder for Catholics is the cross of Jesus Christ which symbolizes the epitome of love and self-sacrifice, his life. There is constant renegotiation in the U.S. for it is in a state of nepantla, the painful transition between two or more states of being. The spiritual journey reclaimed Guadalupe and combines her with Coatlicue to seek a process to decolonize and locate the “other” into a new spiritual being, and by this actions *Reinvented Icon* becomes a symbol of Chicana/o resistance.

Martinez fights for his indigenous heritage to bring together his present experience with the pre-Columbian past that has been highly obscured. According to Randall (1996):

The brown Virgin surely speaks, in this incarnation of the dual oppressions of

race and class. Our Lady appeared to an Indian convert, a poor man, a person of color. In the hierarchy of Mexican religious symbology of the times, the whiter, more European Virgin of Los Remedios was worshiped by los peninsulares, the descendants of the conquering Spaniards who were taking possession of a “new” world. Guadalupe was beloved by Indians, creoles, mestizos, blacks, and mulattoes, all those who identified with the color of her skin and also needed her for compassion. Non-only did she choose a poor Indian as her link with the faithful, she instructed him to speak to the Spanish bishop on her behalf. And she provided him with the proof he would need in order to convince the European Church of her appearance. This is a story that begins with humiliation and disregard and ends with the Spaniard having to accept and honor the Indian’s account (p. 114).

Here, Martinez creates a new icon that includes pre-Columbian, Colonial and Modern references. Guadalupe is a symbol of protection from oppression, but also in her representation of Coatlicue is a reconciliation to the native. Guadalupe’s identity is directly connected to the identity of the people she protects. The image of *Reinvented Icon* has become an example of how a cultural myth forces the artist to always be ready to change and be flexible. The artist is ready to take a second look at his indoctrination and is able to change to unify his fragmented self. *Reinvented Icon* does not represent a divide; now she is the intersection. She is a crossroads or nepantla where the Catholic Church is part of the relationship that Chicana/os have with spirituality but not a total denial of our Catholic upbringing.

Reinvented Icon is a symbol reflecting the images of a culture which brings

familiarity and essentially creates a new form of expression outside the codes of orthodoxy. In this art piece, Guadalupe is grounded in the indigenous goddess and is breaking all the rules of the dominant male patriarchy. As a Chicano, Martinez negotiates identity and addresses issues related to the United States-Mexican border and to an individual's identity within our present culture. Martinez creates a new religious image and merges it with a sacred space which is the place where the individual resides or practices his/her spirituality. Equally important, Martinez's *Reinvented Icon* is a statement of a viable medium for political art, which he defines as art that has a purpose and proclaims the painting's ability to withstand the test of time.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The primary role of this thesis is to open up a space to engage in conversation about the intersections of Chicana/o spirituality and visual culture. This conversation forges Chicana/o art, both written and visual, for engaging the ill-defined and often suspiciously viewed spiritual elements within an adamantly secular scholarly tradition. Chicana/o art provides an extensive new archive while creating an original discourse that considers the spiritual within both academic and artistic practice. I started to write this thesis motivated by the idea that I could contribute to the scholarship dedicated to the study, analysis, and reconstruction of spirituality by exploring the applicability of spirituality within the Chicana/o community. After I started working on this project, I found more questions that I was able to answer. It is important to remember that spirituality is a concept too large for any single analysis. The analysis in this thesis is highly restricted to select art works and more work needs to be undertaken.

Because I use Mujerista Theology as a framework in this study, I want to reflect that there is a multitude of strategies and approaches to this way of knowing. I situate community knowledge as a valid narrative of survival, transformation, and decolonization. There is an emphasis in reclaiming histories, culture, and identities. I am interested in knowing to what extent spirituality can help the community with real equality, justice, and freedom. However, despite my interest in the subject, and my sense that this study is limited, I shall argue that having reached the closing section for this thesis, convinces me that the topic of spirituality has many different lines of inquiry that need further exploration. The study of spirituality is a lifetime project that requires additional research in order to deal with all its complexities, contradictions, and

possibilities. I do not attempt to claim that spirituality is a universal way to understand the world, but I dare to say that many people in the world understand that it is a good way to heal the open wounds in the community. I also understand that spirituality has been used as an agent of coloniality and as powerful tool for those in power.

The revisiting of the books and articles in the literature review has given us a point of reference of where the Chicana/o spirituality is set now. Chicana/os struggle each day to survive and understand our place within the Christian Church, and/or in the case of this thesis, academia. There is a spiritual hunger inside the community, the yearning to be able to live up to our spiritual potential and the desire from the community to be able to heal from historical traumas. Chicana/os have used many tools to help heal and to develop *conocimiento* (knowledge). Our spiritual knowledge (*conocimiento*) helps us change those binaries that do not work for the community like, female/male, white/brown, body/mind, and other “*culturas que traicionan.*” As an educational researcher, I find spirituality can be regarded as a tool that encourages self-determination and rejects any imposed limitations. Similarly, I am interested in finding out how spirituality is used as a tool of decolonization in academia.

In this sense, Chicana/os have used Our Lady of Guadalupe as community arsenal to eradicate colonial practices and heteronormative acts that excludes and divides. The devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe offers a chance for another important characteristic of Chicana/o spirituality, the ability to chance a dominant narrative. As conquered people, Chicana/os are pushed into the margin and those imposed divisions are as Anzaldúa (1988) writes, “borders that are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them” (p. 25). These lines create an “emotional residue of

an unnatural boundary” (p. 25). Rather than caving into the domination by the dominant “white” culture, Chicana/os use their spiritual nature to redefine the reality and defend themselves as their differences cast them away from central roles of power and influence. Chicana/os still develop ways of coping and perceiving the world in a positive way.

Colonization has produced fragmentation in the Chicana/o community. Our colonizers, a hetero-normative community, demands following the rules and no variation from the hetero-patriarchal norms, and those rules and norms attacks us. Despite the fact that the Chicana/os presence in the Christian Church has a long history, the current narrative by the church rendered their contributions invisible. We need to remember that the rules in most religions have been used as tools for exploitation, domination, and exclusion. Our own community has normalized those rules that destroy us, all of us, or anyone that queer the status quo, but we need to move carefully in a world not designed for us. We, the “other,” get thrown into the space of hetero-normative policing. Both outside and inside our community attack us, and our survival tactic has been to fragment our bodies, our brains, our souls and then show a congenial fragment of ourselves to each of our tormentors.

Some argue that assimilation is the key to survival but how can we assimilate if our otherness is marked in our bodies and in our culture. Where do I hide those parts that do not fit easily, those edges that queer the community like my brown body. Maria Morris reminds us that queer sufferings are situated in the body. These sufferings caused by oppression and hatred manifest as melancholy, depersonalization, splitting, dissociation, numbness, and detachment (2002, p. 141).

I am writing about spirituality to help us move forward and find solace in our time of need. By using spirituality, we have a better chance to bring the community together but respecting all the differences that we have as a community. If we define spirituality as a relationship with oneself, others and the universe, this values our inter connectedness. Anzaldúa reminds us that those that have spiritual knowledge (conocimiento) “refuse to accept spirituality as a devalued form of knowledge and instead elevate it to the same level occupied by science and rationality” (Anzaldúa 119) and adds:

A form of spiritual inquiry, *conocimiento* is reached via creative acts- writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism- both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as site of creativity).

Through creative engagements, you embed your experiences in a larger frame of reference, connecting your personal struggles with those of other beings on the planet, with the struggles of the earth itself (Anzaldúa 119).

The creation of spiritual pedagogy has created a debate between those that consider religion and spirituality a conservative tradition that is provided by the establishment but is detrimental to our community and those that consider them as a step towards making spirituality a tool of decolonization. Spirituality offers possibilities for strategies and tactics to engage and expand on by contextualizing a tangible vision into the present and into the future. Spirituality offers a safe space within the community to connect to each other, expand our knowledge, and explore new approaches. For example, the conception of *Mestizaje* is important, because it touches all points of reference for the “others”; in the Chicana/o community. The concept of *mestizaje* brings the whole community together as we accept the different parts that we bring to the table.

Writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Rudolfo Anaya develop their writings from the outsider perspective which most of the community inhabits. They both work in the borderland which is a location where many of the community exists.

Each chapter of this work represented a step along a journey toward making spirituality a vehicle for healing. Martinez's art has created a visual mixture of nepantla spirituality which brings all our parts to form a new path of understanding. Lopez's redefinition of Guadalupe creates a new sacred image that will help the Chicana/o grow and establish a free and unfiltered understanding of the divine. Additionally, Anaya creates a world where community knowledge can create a new environment to make us reflect on our multiple parts of the community. There is a balance where we can make our own moral choices and be able to set our own values to understand and navigate the world. The writings of Rudolfo Anaya, Gloria Anzaldúa, and art of Alma Lopez and Cesar A. Martinez significantly inform and guide the pathway I now journey. Their concepts and understandings of Chicana/o spirituality acknowledges the Chicana/o as a whole being, not fragmented by a history of colonization.

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