

Ostensibly, all women in colonial Mexico and Latin America, like their counterparts throughout the Christian world, were suspected of being witches on the basis of gender, but women of colonized groups were suspect on multiple grounds. Indian women, African-origin women, and racially mixed women—whether Indo-mestiza or Afro-mestiza—were suspect by virtue of being female, by virtue of deriving from non-Christian, or “diabolic” religions and cultures, and by virtue of being colonized or enslaved people who might rebel and use their alleged magical power at any moment.

—Antonia Castañeda, “Engendering the History of Alta California, 1769–1848”

Here we are weaponless with open arms, with only our magic.

—Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

## **BRUJA POSITIONALITIES: Toward a Chicana/Latina Spiritual Activism**

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*This essay elaborates on constructions of “la Bruja”—a female practitioner of spiritual, sexual, and healing knowledges—in our contemporary cultural imaginary grounded in a legacy of the otherization of women healers in Europe and las Américas. Specifically, I analyze Ricky Martin’s song “Livin’ La Vida Loca” about the ambivalent witchy power of a racialized woman over a man. The essay explores the ways that “brujas” are feared for their knowledge and power and hence subjected to oppressive treatment. I argue for the a bruja positionality within Chicana/Latina studies that includes developing our own bruja-like epistemologies. As a practice of what Gloria Anzaldúa might call “spiritual activism,” a bruja positionality is built on healing the internalized beliefs that demonize la Bruja and the transgressive spirituality and sexuality that she represents. [Key words: Chicanas/Latinas; spirituality; spiritual activism; cultural studies; feminist epistemology; brujas; curanderas; “Livin’ La Vida Loca”]*

Are women of color always immediately found suspect of using our magic? “¡Bruja mala!” (“Evil Witch!”) was my acquaintance’s chilling invective to me for what he perceived as not “following through” with the passionate flame I ignited in him while dancing. “¡Bruja mala!” was his attempt to discipline me back into proper womanhood for expressing my sexuality and spirituality on my own terms. Such an accusation, not too long ago throughout Europe and las Américas, could have meant my physical death by hanging, burning, drowning, or other torturous means.<sup>1</sup> At that time I did not live with my father, brother, or any other man, was economically autonomous although not wealthy, questioned the authority of the Catholic hierarchy and patriarchy in general, dabbled in herbology and other healing arts without state certification, and partook in other socially disordering activities. All of these things would have made my mortality even more likely.<sup>2</sup>

At the very least, the deeming of a woman as witch marked the desire for her social death, an attempt to silence her bodymindspirit.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, many of the accused were imprisoned, publicly humiliated, or exiled out of or into the margins of their communities. Their construction as inherently bad women served the interests of the patriarchal church, state, and family by making them examples of how not to behave. Lamentably, more than seven centuries after the establishment of the Inquisition in the so-called Old World and more than four centuries after its inauguration in the New World, women who exercise spiritual and sexual agency continue to be feared and hence socially judged, ostracized, and punished.<sup>4</sup> As documented by many feminist scholars, women in las Américas—as heiresses of “la Bruja,” as well as “Evil Eve,” “la Malinche,” and other female figures—continue to be physically and metaphorically kicked out of “paradise” for our desire to know, speak, and practice transgressive

knowledge about nature, spirit, and the erotic.<sup>5</sup> As an empowered female cultural figure, la Bruja symbolizes power outside of patriarchy's control that potentially challenges a sexist status quo. In las Américas, where she is associated with "superstitious" and "primitive" Indian and African beliefs and practices, la Bruja is also a racialized cultural figure.<sup>6</sup> Many people in indigenous and Chicano/Latino communities today are not comfortable with the term "bruja" because it signifies someone who uses her powers for bad, for others, she positively symbolizes the persistence of indigenous *conocimientos*<sup>7</sup> in spite of Christian colonial and western<sup>8</sup> scientific attempts to destroy, invalidate, and appropriate them.

This essay is part of a larger project concerned with decolonizing the sacred from oppressive Christian and western worldviews that perpetuate *desconocimientos*<sup>9</sup> that negatively impact women's lives.<sup>10</sup> I am specifically interested in the ways that the powerful sexuality and spirituality of women of color in las Américas has been dichotomized and colonized by social institutions, as well as how these women decolonize such constructions through healing practices. With the goal of understanding the complex ways that patriarchy and colonialism impinge on racialized sexual and spiritual subjectivities, my research includes an analysis of the bruja-ization (witch-ification) process. What is the colonial cultural legacy of the bruja discourse? Why are racialized women, and in this case Latinas, still being subjected to this misogynistic bruja trope? How do Latinas resist, appropriate, and transform such bruja-ization?

With such crucial questions traversing my thinking, in this essay I first elaborate on constructions of "la Bruja"—a female practitioner of spiritual, sexual, and healing knowledges rooted in indigenous or mestiza *conocimientos*—in our contemporary cultural imaginary. This imaginary is grounded in a legacy of the otherization of women healers in Europe and las

Américas.<sup>11</sup> I specifically analyze an international hit song, “Livin’ La Vida Loca” sung by Ricky Martin, about the perceived ambivalent witchy power of a racialized woman over a man. I draw from the thinking of Chicanas/Latinas<sup>12</sup> and others to explore the ways that brujas, or women perceived as such, are feared for their knowledge and power and hence subjected to oppressive treatment. Finally, I argue for the development of a bruja positionalality within Chicana/Latina studies that includes developing our own bruja-like epistemologies in the re-membling, revising, and constructing of knowledge as well as participation in other forms of social change. As a practice of what Gloria Anzaldúa might call “spiritual activism,” a bruja positionalality is built on healing the internalized desconocimientos that demonize la Bruja and the transgressive spirituality and sexuality that she represents.<sup>13</sup> If we are indeed to enact a spiritual vision of interconnectedness between all living things, this entails claiming la Bruja within and without in spite of the fear her representation engenders in dominant culture. Moreover, nurturing la Bruja within and outside of our selves is part of social change that legitimizes indigenous and mestiza spiritual and sexual conocimientos that, in turn, can inspire and facilitate more positive social change.

### **La Bruja in the Cultural Imaginary:**

#### **A Bad Bruja/Good Curandera Dichotomy?**

Many people have internalized a perception of brujas as evil, loathsome, lustful, crazy, troublemakers, producers of illness, and having the ability to destroy (be it crops, animals, or people). Another related perception is that of la Bruja as a practitioner of sexual magic; someone who knows how, for example, to attract and “tie” a man beyond his will and cause impotence (Behar 1989, Quezada 1975). Such projections of societies’ fears, to whatever extent they are based on reality, continue to justify the oppressive treatment of brujas or bruja-like women. The common belief that brujas are essentially mujeres

malas (evil women), or, conversely, that mujeres malas are essentially brujas, is a desconocimiento rooted in the patriarchal western thought of medieval Europe and the colonial Américas that generally constructed women as the inferior sex.<sup>14</sup> When not oppressively represented as spiritually superior to men (that is, the belief that women should emulate the Virgin Mary as the sacrificing, pious, and asexual mother), women's spiritual, sexual, and healing conocimientos have often been negatively coded as heretical, superstitious, diabolic, and/or primitive. Such ideologies are related to the construction of women as either hyperspiritual and asexual (or sexual within the confines of heterosexuality and marriage) or bruja-like (anti-spiritual) and hypersexual. As such, they reaffirm the gendered spiritual/sexual binary.

Moreover, many indigenous, Black, and racially mixed "Latina" women have borne the brunt of this split, one that has been and continues to be racialized (Castañeda 1998a). This supposed spiritual/sexual split has been exacerbated by the west's need to redefine and differentiate itself from the New World "other" after 1492 (Todorov 1999). Indeed, one of the desconocimientos perpetuated after the colonial encounter, or more precisely "encontronazo" (violent encounter) (Torres 1998), was the demonization of indigenous women and "goddess" figures.<sup>15</sup> Such discursive violence about spiritually and sexually powerful feminine-gendered figures and women justified the legacy of physical and psychological violence against women in las Américas, primarily perpetuated by European colonizers but also by indigenous imperialists. As Antonia Castañeda asserts, "in the Christian imperialist gaze, non-Christian women and their mestiza daughters were sexualized, racialized, and demonized for the ostensibly religious crime of witchcraft, although they were often tried in secular courts, where witchcraft was treated as a political crime" (1998a, 237).

Given such a negative portrayal of the racialized bruja, it is no wonder that in

similar fashion to the virgin/whore dichotomy that attempts to regulate Latina sexuality along the axis of a Christian worldview (Castillo 1994, 116), a good curandera/bad bruja dichotomy has developed in an attempt to order non-institutional spirituality. In this binary framework that valorizes the former over the latter category, curanderas are de-sexualized healers and brujas work in “black magic” and “sexual witchcraft.”<sup>16</sup> In resistance to this binary that many of us have internalized, Ana Castillo argues that both brujas and curanderas are valuable healers. The former is “a spiritual healer or psychic” (1994, 156) who can “communicate with the spirit world” (157) and the latter is “a specialized healer” who is learned in the knowledge of different areas of medical expertise: for example, medicinal herbs (yerberas), massage (sobadoras), or midwifery (parteras). Both types of healers view the body, mind, and spirit as integrated and “consider the ailing person as a whole” (156).

Indeed, as Tey Diana Rebolledo discusses in her analysis of Chicana writers’ engagement with the curandera-bruja<sup>17</sup> “archetypal heroine,” some of these healing practices intersect in one healer, blurring the distinction between the two. As she argues, “the curandera is always also the witch; that is, she has the power to become one, but she may never choose to do so” (1995, 83). The attribution of negative characteristics to la Bruja, such as her ability to destroy, seek revenge and justice, and “control the other, nebulous world,” emerges from a western cultural worldview. As Rebolledo makes clear, “these same ‘negative’ attributes are incorporated by Indian and folk cultures as part of the vital life cycle” (83).<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, when Rebolledo makes a link between the curandera and the Virgin Mary, she focuses on the “positive” characteristics of “healing, curing, helping” that they share (83) and excludes discussion about sexuality, a prominent aspect of the “virginal” Marian figure. Likewise, in her discussion about how the bruja-curandera “represents more than the helping, nurturing side...like the Nahua deities, she also has the capacity for death and destruction”

(89), Rebolledo does not explore the cultural constructions of la Bruja that link her to sexual magic and a powerful sexual drive, especially when juxtaposed to the more positively looked upon curandera/Virgin Mary figure.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, citing Anzaldúa, Rebolledo concludes her exploration with the ultimate lesson offered by the curandera-bruja archetype: “to become ourselves, in the fullest way possible, one must integrate the serpents, the ‘negative,’ and accept the power of self-knowledge and self-expression that comes with it” (94).

The binary split between “bad” brujas and “good” curanderas is precarious when one considers the force of western medicine and social science in delegitimizing both as non-scientific practices and the power of the institutional church in sanctioning both as pagan practices.<sup>20</sup> In trying to validate the benefits and wisdom of the healing knowledge of curanderismo in las Américas in the face of such eurocentric worldviews, the bruja/curandera split has been wittingly and unwittingly reinforced. In order to decolonize the binary systems that limit our spiritual and sexual power, I join Castillo in claiming the “term [bruja] for women who are in tune with their psyches, allow their lives to be informed by them, and offer their intuitive gifts to their communities without fear of being seen as loathsome or mad” (1994, 157). Such present-day brujas-curanderas, like the women described by Castillo, the Chicana writers Rebolledo analyzes, and other women, work toward being in harmony with their whole selves, their bodymindspirits, as part of the natural sacred world, and as resources of knowledge for personal and social change.<sup>21</sup> However, such an empowered representation is not as common as the image of an ambivalently powerful bruja who is to be ultimately mistrusted and feared.

### **La Bruja in Popular Culture: “Livin’ La Vida Loca”**

Previously known for his love ballads and high-energy pop songs sung in Spanish, it was “Livin’ La Vida Loca” that finally catapulted Puerto Rican Ricky

Martin into very lucrative “crossover” status in 1999.<sup>22</sup> It is not a coincidence that this number one hit represents the culturally familiar image of a bewitching racialized and sexualized Latina, an image not only palatable but also delectable to U.S. music marketers and consumers during the so-called cultural “Latino boom.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the opening lines of this song make use of familiar gendered western symbols of evil and primitiveness: “She’s into superstitions/ Black cats and voodoo dolls/ I feel a premonition/ That girl’s going to make me fall.” Assembling the loaded symbols of black cats (associated with witches and bad luck) and voodoo dolls (a catch-all cultural signifier for African-influenced religious practices negatively coded as “black magic”) links the history of witch-making in Europe with the history of witch-making in the Americas. Like the catchy, dance-inspiring pop rhythm, the lyrics are easily digested and spewed by fans—men and women alike (I too am complicit here); many of whom have been born into a dominant Christian cultural framework that normalizes woman as a sinful temptress: “That girl’s going to make me fall.” Drawing from more than 1,000 years of Eve-bashing and 500 years of witch-bashing discourse, these lyrics reproduce an ambivalent representation of a sexually and spiritually empowered woman, or, rather, “girl.” The “premonition” of the song’s male subject is actually a testament to the ways in which women are always already responsible for making men “fall” within a Judeo-Christian worldview (Warner 1983, 58). According to this western religious tradition, women embody the dangerous wildness of nature and the flesh and, moreover, it is “the Christian’s duty to master this threatening nature...to maintain the life of the soul and of the mind,” one believed to be naturally embodied by men (Turner 1997, 22).

In drawing a parallel between “that girl” and Eve, the male subject constructs himself as a contemporary Adam. This circular cultural logic of “woman=Eve=devil=woman” justifies a “the devil made me do it” scapegoat attitude. From infidelity to “crimes of passion,” this ideology continues to



absolve men from responsibility for their behaviors. In this culturally common and normative patriarchal narrative, the male subject is interpellated into witchcraft; he can't help but live "la vida loca:" "She'll make you take your/ Clothes off and go dancing in the rain/ She'll make you live her crazy life." Moreover, a subtle judgment difference is made between the male subject, who has a socially acceptable premonitory experience, and the "superstitious" (in other words, ignorant and irrational) female. Sound familiar? Who decides what is superstitious? Who is always already heretical, or hysterical? Moreover, who is invested in maintaining these related gender constructions?

This distinction plays itself out in contemporary representations of gender differences between male wizards and female witches. While the etymology of "wizard" as "sage" is documented in *Merriam-Webster's*, the roots of "witch" as "diviner or seer" are not.<sup>24</sup> As exemplified by the popularity of Harry Potter and his mostly male cohorts, wizards are legitimized as gifted in magic. In contrast, witches are still largely delegitimized as superstitious and practicing demonic magic except when related to the magic of feminine sex appeal.<sup>25</sup> Castillo also articulates the existence of this sexist double standard between representations of male-gendered spiritual forces and female-gendered ones in dominant Mexican conceptualizations. She states, "In Mexican culture, a brujo is someone to fear and to revere while a bruja is someone to hate to the point of killing if at all possible" (1994, 157).<sup>26</sup>

The current fascination with witches in mainstream media conveys the message that white women witches are okay—particularly if they embody what dominant culture deems attractive (that is, fair skin, youth, and thinness)—but that brujas are of another species altogether. Participating in the history of racial formation that negatively associates dark skin with moral darkness, Martin sings, "Her lips are devil red/ And her skin's the color of

mocha/ She will wear you out/ *Living la vida loca*.” Considering that few media representations of Latinas in the United States exist, especially of dark-skinned Latinas, it is important to acknowledge that “Living La Vida Loca” at least represents a powerful woman of color.<sup>27</sup> As temporarily gratifying as this may feel however, we can not forget that her power is contained under the rubric of sexual witchcraft, a very old patriarchal construct in which women’s power is limited to her deceitful, manipulative ways. Is this song a celebration of a sexually and spiritually empowered Latina? Or is it a commiseration between the boys about the exciting hot-to-trot Latina who will “wear you out” through her voracious sexuality? Given that this song enabled Martin’s profitable crossover into the U.S.-led global media market, I suggest that it ultimately sanctions “the white and brown boys” reveling in their misfortune.<sup>28</sup>

The song’s reference to the devil—not just red lips, but “devil red” lips—further suggests the racialized woman’s inherent association with evil: an evil literally inscribed on her body and manifested through her sexuality. In fact, the song’s male subject describes an ambivalent desire reminiscent of colonial desire toward the simultaneous pleasure and danger represented by native, African, and other racialized and sexualized women (McClintock 1995). The cultural construction of the Latina as a sexy bruja, a “mocha” to be consumed at your own risk, normalizes the racialized Latina as a dangerous object of heterosexual pleasure.

It may be tempting for women of color to use this form of sexual power, especially given that it has historically been or felt like the only way to subvert “the sociosexual order sanctioned by religion and enshrined in the colonial honor code as an ethical system” (Castañeda 1998a, 237). However, this limited strategy has backfired on women. It is a tactic that not only negatively recodifies woman as wild, flesh, and nature within a modern-colonial framework, but also avoids addressing long-term structural cultural change.

As such, it may further justify the need to tame or “civilize” women, including control through rape and other forms of violence. However, it is important not to blame or shame the ways that women embody their sensuality and live their sexuality. As feminists have successfully argued, violence inflicted against women is not and has never been their fault (Castañeda 1998b, Hernández-Ávila 1993). For women, the problem is not being a sexy bruja, a spiritually and sexually empowered woman, but being subordinated by prevailing cultural strictures. Unfortunately, many of us know from experience that a sexy bruja is often one step away from becoming a bruja mala, and that a threatened, angry, or hurt (usually male) person is often the source of that redefinition. Or, given that we learn early on what it means to be sexy through the androcentric and heterocentric male gaze, is it even possible? Are we always performing what we have been socialized to believe sexy is?

Moreover, as the song continues: “Once you’ve had a taste of her/ You’ll never be the same/ Yeah, she’ll make you go insane.” Getting “a taste of her” is the colloquial for “having sex with her.” The popular phrase, “I want a taste of that,” is from the family of phrases that sexually objectifies people, and racialized women in particular. These lyrics also resonate with a legacy of fear toward women who use their bodily fluids and knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants and their effects to supposedly control men. Fear of the sexually and spiritually empowered woman goes hand in hand with fear of her knowledge of “love potions.” Called “sexual witchcraft,” these ancient rituals are typically used by women with the aim of “subduing” or “taming” a man, such as making a beloved fall in love, end his infidelity, or even cease his violent behavior (Behar 1989, 179–80). The fear here is that “you” may indeed get “a taste of her” in the form of menstrual blood or bathwater used to wash her vagina, possibly mixed into your food or beverage; after which you magically will “never be the same” because you will be under her command.

Interestingly, the “serving of ensorcelled food to men” can be interpreted, as Ruth Behar does in her analysis of colonial Mexican sexual witchcraft cases, as an attempt to reverse the social and sexual order that subordinates women. It is a literal way for woman to “penetrate” man and control his often oppressive behavior (1989, 179). Emphasizing the song’s contemporary link to this age-old fear that women might be able to turn the sex and gender hierarchy upside down through their “food magic,” we later hear: “she must’ve slipped me a sleepin’ pill.” This contemporary spin on the ensorcelling of food against a man who wakes up robbed, disoriented, yet pining for this “loca” girl who “took [his] heart” makes light of the alarming use of such “sleeping pills” (or date rape drugs) mostly against women.

Another fear of the bruja is, like the song says, that “she’ll make you go insane.” As it is, the reasoning faculty of people of color is made suspect by a racist society that compels us to continually prove we are thinkers and just as intelligent as dominant society. Here, a presumably irrational woman is putting a presumably rational male’s sanity at risk: “She’ll make you live her crazy life.” The irrationality caused by this powerful yet threatening woman is compared to the extreme irrational act of suicide. For although she compels man to follow her bad example (reminiscent of interpretations of Eve and Adam’s story in Genesis), there is relief from pain, ambivalent as it may be: “[S]he’ll take away your pain/ Like a bullet to your brain.” Like Adam, this man is absolved of responsibility for his own actions, and instead, like Eve in the popular imagination, this woman is ultimately held accountable for the male subject’s “crazy” behavior.

Such representations of the dangerously powerful witchy woman are shaped by, and contribute to the shaping of, the cultural imaginary that constructs women as men’s “other” (Beauvoir 1989) and hence justifies the attempt to reign in her power. Given that her power is largely made manifest through her

sexuality and the desire that she is capable of provoking, such representations further the belief that women's power is mostly or solely exercised within the realm of sexuality. Ironically, such a representation depicts the male subject as lacking in power and self-control, and arguably celebrating such circumstances. Yet interpreted from a Judeo-Christian cultural framework, as it is commonly accepted, this same representation absolves man for his understandable "weakness" at the hands of woman who is constructed as a wily temptress and more closely influenced by the serpent/Devil than man (Warner 1983, 58–59). Moreover, as theorized by many feminists, such a focus on female sexual strength over males draws attention away from the social conditions that maintain an uneven power balance between the sexes as a whole, and for women of color in particular. While the bruja figure challenges the western binary that splits sexuality from spirituality, the flesh from the spirit, her erotic power is vulnerable to being contained within a patriarchal and colonial cultural rubric that delegitimizes her form of spirituality as "superstition," and ultimately, as dangerous to the social order.

**Fear of la Bruja Within and Without: "Re(con)ceiving the Other"**

She has this fear that when she does reach herself turns  
around to embrace herself a lion's or witch's or serpent's head  
will turn around swallow her and grin

—Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

By invoking the "dark beast" within and without, which many have forced us to deny, the cultural and psychic dismemberment that is linked to imperialist racist and sexist practices are brought into focus.

—Norma Alarcón, "Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of 'The' Native Woman"

Western dominant societies have many reasons to be afraid of la Bruja and have constructed her as a signifier of the other and the unknown to be feared and hence controlled. As Castillo argues, “The key is to remember that historically woman, who is fertile and filled with the mysteries of reproduction, was hated and feared by men for that reason alone” (1994, 157). Indeed, brujas-curanderas, especially midwives, have historically been the carriers of knowledge about creation, procreation, and sexuality. Related to such *conocimientos* is knowledge about the erotic; “erotic” as is broadly defined by Audre Lorde, a transformative energy that bridges the spiritual with the sexual/sensual and facilitates a sense of wholeness and connection with one’s being as well as with others across similarities and differences. As Lorde has argued, western cultures have constructed a fear of the erotic. It has divested the erotic of its association to eros as love and “creative energy” (1984a, 55), and instead has focused on its link to pornography that Lorde claims “emphasizes [sexual] sensation without feeling” (54). Such fear is related to the apprehension of “going there” emotionally and spiritually. It is the fear of feeling beyond superficial sensations. Our society seemingly accepts “new sensations,” as celebrated in “Livin’ La Vida Loca,” but these are often primarily sensations devoid of content or, as Lorde would articulate, lacking “deep feeling” (58). Moreover, she asserts, “As women, we have come to distrust the power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in service of men, but which fears this depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves” (54).

It is the empowering experience of such deep feeling, or eroticism, that creates well-being and connection within oneself and in relationship to other people and the earth as a whole. The more often that people are in this state, the less

likely they are to subordinate others or to allow others to have power over them. Indeed, as Anzaldúa articulates in her theory of *conocimiento*:

With awe and wonder you look around, recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the planet, the ultimate unity and interdependence of all beings—*somos todos un país*. Love swells in your chest and shoots out of your heart chakra, linking you to everyone/everything... You share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label. This *conocimiento* motivates you to work actively to see that no harm comes to people, animals, ocean—to take up spiritual activism and the work of healing. (2002, 558)

As Anzaldúa explores in this essay, such consciousness work can lead to reconnecting to an erotic energy within and outside one's being and "connects the inner life of the mind and spirit to the outer worlds of action," what she terms "spiritual activism" (2000, 178).

Brujas are also feared because they have the ability to "fly," and will exercise their spiritual epistemologies, or what Anzaldúa terms "*la facultad*" (1987, 38–39), in spite of ideological and physical attempts to control them.<sup>29</sup> As a metaphor for being free, to fly suggests having a decolonized bodymindspirit (Lara 2002). Brujas refuse to believe the lies about their inherent badness, and the badness of the natural world, that can be stifling and disempowering. They know that in spite of misogynist messages that suggest otherwise, *la mujer, como la madre tierra*, is good, or rather, is complex and extends beyond either/or categories of good and evil. Furthermore, as Aurora Levins Morales reminds us, brujas are seers who are not afraid to see and speak what they see as they fly:

One of the common accusations against witches is nightflying: the ability to change shape or endow a household object, a pot or broom,

with magical powers and soar above the landscape of daily life, with eyes that can penetrate the darkness and see what we are not supposed to see... Those who can see in the dark can uncover secrets: hidden comings and goings, deals and escapees, the undercover movement of troops, layers of life normally conducted out of sight. (1998, 49)

The willingness to fly, “to leave the familiar ground and see what is meant to be hidden” (49) may very well be one of la Bruja’s most socially threatening qualities. Striving to see from a holistic perspective and bridge the spiritual with the physical world, la Bruja models such holistic vision for us. As suggested by Morales, a politics of holism includes discerning the oppressive machinations of power “normally conducted out of sight” that adversely affect the subjugated (49).

With such a cultivated “*facultad*” that helps her to read the signs of power to respond or resist most effectively, la Bruja is an appropriate symbol for “a methodology of the oppressed.” Chela Sandoval theorizes this methodology as “a set of processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination” (2000, 68). Indeed, Sandoval cites Anzaldúa’s description of the witchy figure “*la naguala*” in an epigraph: “She is willing to...make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes a *nabual*, able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person” (Anzaldúa 1987 qtd. in Sandoval 2000, 66). As a shamanistic “*naguala*,” or shapeshifting “perceiver of shifts” (Anzaldúa 2002, 542),<sup>30</sup> la Bruja can transform into whatever she needs to so that she can do her socially transformative work. Aware of her interrelatedness with others and with the universe, la Bruja transforms herself and the outside world of which she knows herself to be an integral part through her words, images, activism, or other “*curandera* (healer) work” (Pérez



1998, 41).<sup>31</sup> Such an ability to transform herself as well as situations potentially riddled with injustice is also feared as threatening to dominant power.

Given the violent legacy of bruja-ization, linked to the discursive and physical violence against “the maligned and abused indigenous woman” (Alarcón 1998, 375; Anzaldúa 1987, 22–23, 42–43), and the ways in which humans internalize a fear of the “other,” it is understandable that many of us have internalized a fear of la Bruja, both as an aspect of ourselves and in others. Indeed, colonial and patriarchal institutions may very well be guilty of the greatest *hechicería* (sorcery) of all, encouraging through their technologies of power this internalization that keeps us from re-membering, developing, and constructing the *curandera-bruja* part of ourselves and valuing it in one another. “Livin’ La Vida Loca” is just one manifestation of this sorcery. Moreover, as Inés Hernández-Ávila forcefully writes, the violences of colonialism have created many wounds of the spirit, including, I would argue, this process of bruja-ization. She shows us that although “[w]e have been recovering from the moment we began to question, know, and understand” many of us have internalized “the *hechicería* of the worst kind,” the belief “that we will never recover from the violence, or that we will recover only slowly, painfully” (2002, 534). The bruja-*curandera* “spiritual activist” is in the process of embodying and living this spiritual *conocimiento*, re-membering and creating powerful knowledges for personal and community healing.

Healing from such colonial *desconocimientos* is a challenging endeavor. As Anzaldúa explores, the process of re-membering and constructing one’s multiple and dynamic identities is fraught with fears. In particular, she addresses the fear of being “swallowed” by one’s “dark” or darkened side, what she variously describes as having “a lion’s or witch’s or serpent’s head” (1987, 43) and terms her “Shadow-Beast” (20, 44) and “*musa bruja*” (72).<sup>32</sup> In the context of the Nahuatl philosophy of duality from which Anzaldúa draws, being “swallowed”

by la Bruja does not mean being destroyed, at least not in an ultimate sense. It is more a receiving and reconceiving of one's whole being, indeed, of "re(con)ceiving the other" (Keating 1996, qtd. in Anzaldúa 2002, 570). It is an integration of supposed opposites and an embracing of the whole self in spite of colonizing attempts to keep one's "darkness" and "lightness" split and hence less powerful. In fact, Anzaldúa reconceptualizes "dark" and "light." She writes: "*Soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings" (1987, 81).

By theorizing from her own experiences and studies of Nahua ideas and archetypal psychology, Anzaldúa explores the role of what she terms "the Coatlicue State" in subject formation. This process "precedes a spiritual and political crossing through which one arrives at a higher spiritual and political consciousness" (Saldívar-Hull 1999, 7). She begins with the fear of not knowing her self and becoming lost or trapped in the "darkness" of the psyche or spiritual "underworld"; Anzaldúa fears that "she won't find her notches on the trees...won't find the way back" (1987, 43). But after she moves through the whirlwind of the Coatlicue State and embraces her "Beast," Anzaldúa is able to declare "I am not afraid" (51). Given that this is a continual process, however—for not only are we continually faced with discourses and structures of power that question our beings, but also we ourselves are always subjects-in-process—the fear may also return.<sup>33</sup> Invoking Lorde's following words is particularly heartening here: "When I dare to be powerful to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."<sup>34</sup> In this case, our liberatory "vision" calls us to "question, know, and understand" (Hernández-Ávila 2002, 534)—and, indeed, to heal—what Alarcón describes as "the cultural and psychic dismemberment that is linked to imperialist racist and sexist practices" (1998,

375). To enact such healing is to create a decolonial vision of love: the love of self, the love of other as “a hermeneutics of social change” (Sandoval 2000).

### **Bruja Positionalities: “...With Only Our Magic”**

If Chicana feminist critical practices have been what Laura E. Pérez calls “disordering” to Chicano nationalism as well as to the U.S. nation-state (1999), then brujas—who have been causing trouble for dominant societies for centuries—are an appropriate symbol for Chicana/Latina feminists to reclaim. If our work aims to be personally and socially transformative, what better symbol than a bruja, whose work and words are about transformation? For those of you not comfortable with making “bruja” one of your identities, la Bruja can function as a critical positionality. As Chicana cultural studies has been articulating for quite some time, there are a “multiplicit[y] of subject positions...rooted in our communities” (Fregoso and Chabram 1990, 208–209). I propose that we further elaborate on the ways that brujas are one of them. What is possible when we speak and listen from and through our bruja positions? What might we be able to imagine, think, and sense that we may not otherwise? How might we be better able to build solidarity with the dark, india, puta, queer, outcast, and maligned “others”?

Some would say that we (Chicana/Latina scholars, activists, and artists) are not ready to come out of the spiritual closet much less self-identify as literal or symbolic brujas, at least not in public.<sup>35</sup> This concern is well warranted. Though we aim to transform our selves and our worlds, the reality is that we are part of a society still largely organized around racist and sexist binary ways of knowing. As we carve transformative spaces in a profession built on a rigid foundation of reason that invalidates and binarizes itself with spiritual intuitive knowledges (hooks 1994), we are still judged by that value system. Also, considering the cultural leaning toward viewing brujas as evil, we risk being associated with

maliciousness and all of the other dark attributes that form the evil half of the good vs. evil binary with which we are already associated by virtue of our gender and race (that is, female, natural, earthy, fleshy, emotional, irrational, lustful). And we definitely do not need more fuel that can be misused to suppress women of color. I can imagine the silent yet potent thoughts: “don’t give her tenure, she’s a witch” or “she got tenure because she’s a bruja.”

By being more public with our brujandera-ness<sup>36</sup> we also risk opening our selves to harmful criticism, or, in spiritual terms, *energía que no es de nosotras* (energy that is not ours), including *envidia* (envy) (Avila 1999, 51). It is not necessarily “bad” energy, but definitely energy that does not belong to us and can affect our self-concept, potentially fueling the self-doubt that leads to questioning whether our work is indeed needed and beneficial, or blocking us from doing our transformative work at all. Given the documented and undocumented legacy of a politics of violence toward brujas, the concern is real.

Moreover, as articulated by Castillo, it is important to be cautious when referring to one’s self or someone else as a bruja, for in “the real brujo world” people stand ready to take away your bruja power by killing you because they want it for themselves. As she suggests, it is one thing to jokingly refer to oneself as a bruja in a “safe” space—for example, she has referred to a group of women who yearly gather for prayer and spiritual rejuvenation as the “bellas brujas;” it is quite another to “announce it.” Castillo states, “I don’t like that word to be used lightly. It is a very, very powerful word for very good reasons in Mexico” that needs to be respected.<sup>37</sup>

All of these concerns are important. Yet the need remains to “transform silence into language and action” (Lorde 1984b). As scholars committed to social justice, it is our responsibility to self-define and redefine, speak and act in spite

of the fears caused by real threats. As Lorde reminds us, whether or not we speak and act, the fear may still remain. We cannot wait for the luxury of fearlessness or completely “safe” conditions. We must speak and act in spite of the fear, through the fear, strengthened by the aim of our vision. Although to speak one’s truth(s) is a challenge and an accomplishment to be recognized, it is not enough. In posing the haunting question, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Spivak (1988) reminds us it is never enough to speak, we must also be heard. To this end, we must work toward transforming the ideologies and social structures invested in maintaining age-old desconocimientos and not hearing our voices.

Moreover, in her witchy missive “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers” (1983), Anzaldúa raises awareness about those “who have words and tongue [but] have no ear, [who] cannot listen and [who] will not hear” (173). She reminds us that in order to enact liberatory change one must also develop a critical practice of listening to one’s self and others. This too is la Bruja’s lesson: We need to listen to our hearts, intuitions, subconscious, bodies, bodymindspirits—whatever we want to call our faculties of knowledge that include but go beyond our rational minds. As spiritual activists we need to nurture our ability to hear each other, across differences. Talking back to each other will not get us far if we do not also listen back. Sure, there are those who may refuse to listen and may refuse to recognize our full humanity. As explored in “Speaking in Tongues” there are those who—in fear of our power to revolutionarily speak, create, transform, love, and enact other acts of magic—will try to shut us up and shut us out. However, others’ fears cannot stop us from working toward being whole, as individuals and as a world community. To embrace a bruja positionality is to embrace our whole being and the whole beings of other women of color, in fact of all “others” who have been similarly other-ized and fragmented. Indeed, when I listen to my being, I know that we are all connected. With Anzaldúa and other brujanderas

I implore us to use all of our powers—including our erotic powers—to work toward being whole and connected with our selves, each other, the earth, and the cosmos. For it is in this connecting that transformation is possible.

### **Postscript: Enacting a Bruja Positionality**

There are endless ways of enacting a bruja positionality. It is one of a multiplicity of subject positions from which we can shift in and out if not embody all of the time. I return to the story with which I introduced the essay to share with you one of the ways that I have lived this positionality. As suggested by the threatened young man's reaction with which I began, the fear of being bewitched and feeling controlled can lead to accusations of "bruja mala." Indeed, as long as you do not talk back and go along with others' desires, in this case a woman with a man's, you may stay in grace and even be celebrated for your "feminine" power. As we have seen, and perhaps experienced for ourselves as I have, there is a thin line between a bruja mala and a bruja buena, a line often ambiguously defined by the agents of patriarchy. Indeed, dominant discourses steeped in binaries would have us believe that brujas "malas" and "buenas" do not actually live in the borderlands, in the same interstitial spaces, quite possibly in the same bodies.

Though initially afraid of the misogynistic words that led me to questioning my behavior, indeed my being, I let them go. And instead of internalizing the accusation that carried the millennial weight of patriarchal cultures, I soon after wrote a poem to validate my instincts and erotic power, as well as to honor the orisha (divine being) Ochún whom I had respectfully invoked before heading out for dancing with my friends that night. In Yoruba belief and practice that initially traveled to las Américas with slavery and is now practiced as Santería, Lucumí, and other spiritual healing practices that have often been bruja-ized and misunderstood, Ochún is the orisha of agua dulce (fresh water) who popularly

represents the energy of love and the erotic and “is owner of female genitalia and the female egg” (Castellanos 2001, 42).<sup>38</sup> With the hope of extending my conocimientos beyond my self and inspiring socially transformative consciousness and dialogue, I performed “Brujandera” at a Latina/o poetry reading in San Jose, California, in 1999. At a “Lunada,” on the full moon, of course.

**“Brujandera”**

me pongo la pulsera de cuentas amarillas  
acaricio mis caderas fuertes, fértiles  
peino mis rizos negros  
limpio mi alma con salvia

contemplo mi ser  
y me embrujo

te invoco querida Ochún  
en busca de la llama de mi pasión  
no necesariamente a mi Changó<sup>39</sup> allá  
sino, al Changó de aquí  
en los labios de mi corazón

y en el corazón de mi panocha  
busco la fuente de mi deseo

y en mi lengua  
también la encontraré

mi lengua  
capaz de seducir

**“Brujandera”**

I slide on the yellow-beaded bracelet  
caress my strong hips and fertility thighs  
comb my curly locks  
cleans my soul with sage

I behold my being  
and am bewitched

I invoke you beloved Ochún  
in search of the flame of my passion  
not necessarily my Changó out there  
but rather my Changó in here  
on the lips of my lit heart

and in the heart of my panocha  
I seek the river of my desires

and on my tongue of fire  
I will also find it

my tongue  
likely to seduce  
with her slow smooth words  
honey flavored

my hungry tongue  
likely to seduce me  
with her salty saliva



IRENE LARA

con sus palabritas suavécitas  
sabor de miel

lengua hambrienta  
capaz de seducirme  
con su saliva sabor de ron

lengua que se suelta  
hacia mi liberación

yo soy una mujer sincera  
que goza del amor

puta, no  
pura, tampoco  
¡pura puta bruja sí!  
conciente  
vestida en toda “nuestra américa”

Ochún, curandera panochera  
me entrego a tu poder  
bailo en el fuego de tus aguas  
y en tu dulce calor  
seguiré

¿Bailamos?  
Aché<sup>40</sup>

and taste of rum

my flying tongue  
that lets loose for liberación

I am a sincere woman  
who enjoys love, loving

whore, no  
nor virgin  
pure whore virgin bruja yes!  
conscious  
dressed in all of “our américa”

Ochún, curandera panochera  
I trust in your power  
I dance in the fire of your waters  
and in your sweet heat  
I will remain

Dance, anyone?  
Aché

### Notes

First and foremost, I am thankful for the presence of Gloria Anzaldúa’s work and words in my life and in the cosmos. This cultural warrior has passed on, yet she continues to inspire us to be spiritual activists who “stand weaponless with open arms, with only our magic.” My gratitude extends to Yolanda Venegas, Laura E. Pérez, Inés Hernández-Ávila, AnaLouise Keating, Christina Grijalva, and Laura Jiménez for their helpful comments throughout the life of this essay and my poem, Sarahi Nuñez for her research assistance, and all of the women with whom I have had

the honor of speaking and listening for the larger manifestation of this project. Muchas gracias también to all of the many other people who make my work possible and pleasurable, including the loving caretakers of my daughter, Belén. This meditation is for her y su generación.

<sup>1</sup> During the European witchcraze, according to conservative estimates, thousands of women were killed, but according to others as many as several million women were killed. Anne Llewellyn Barstow argues that some 200,000 women were accused of witchcraft and 100,000 were killed (1994, 20–23). The sex of the violence was undisputedly female: about 85 percent of the people who were put to death “during the period of major witch hunts (1560–1760)” were women (25). According to the sexist ideologies of the time, women were inherently more susceptible to witchcraft due to their supposed “lustful...weak, frivolous, [and] malicious natures” (Nelson 1975, 339). Such representations of women as “Devil-worshipping and evildoers” traveled to las Américas where women healers continued to be linked to maleficence (Glass-Coffin 1998, 36; cf. Lavrin 1989, 15). In spite of the fierce repression experienced by indigenous and racially mixed women with the onset of Spanish colonialism, the vehement witchcraze experienced in Europe never took hold in las Américas. Nonetheless, as Antonia Castañeda documents, New Spain officials “dismissed, discredited, exiled, or sometimes put to death nonwhite women charged with witchcraft,” which was treated as a religious and oftentimes political transgression (1998a, 237).

<sup>2</sup> According to Barstow, the typical person accused of being a witch in Europe was a woman, single, “hence suspect in her sexual behavior,” poor, widowed, old, outspoken, and “possessed the power of healing, a power that everyone believed was also the power to kill” (1994, 16, 19, 27). Although most of the accused were poor, many were also economically independent and did not rely on a traditional patriarchal medieval family structure for their survival.

<sup>3</sup> I created this compound to mark and transform the constructed divisions between the body, mind, and spirit prevalent in modern western thought. Drawing on indigenous thought that views the body, mind, and spirit as holistically connected, the term signifies one’s whole being. Also see Lara 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Although the Inquisition was established in the early thirteenth century throughout Christian Europe, it was not until the emergence of Spain as a nation-state that the Spanish Inquisition came into full force beginning in 1478 (Blötzer 2003, Giles 1999). As explained by Castañeda, it was “a terrifying political institution designed to ‘cleanse’ Spain of heretical non-Christian beliefs and practices.” Moreover, “[w]hile targeting Judaism and Islam, the Inquisition also sought to abolish all residual ‘paganism,’ especially witchcraft and sorcery” (1998c, 638). Informal inquisitorial activity in present-day Mexico began in 1522 soon after the Spanish invasion (Greenleaf 1969). The first bishop of New Spain, Juan de Zumárraga conducted twenty-three witchcraft and superstition trials from 1536 to 1543. The accused Indians were punished for being sorcerers, idolaters, prophets, inciters of rebellion (Behar 1987, 128–29), and “probably” for practicing traditional medicine (Quezada 1991, 39). Although these initial trials involved only one female (Klor de Alva 1991, 6), many more women were tried in the following decades and throughout the life of the Mexican Inquisition which formally began in 1571 and ended in the early 1800s. In my own analysis of Noemí Quezada’s study of seventy-one “Mexican” curandero/as (healers) who were accused of, for example, “healing by incantation,” taking “peyote as a divinatory aid,” and being a “superstitious

curandera” or “maleficent midwife,” forty-seven were women (66 percent) (1991, 41–45).

<sup>5</sup>Ana Castillo, for example, discusses the socially and psychologically powerful Judeo-Christian origin myth of Eve and the lesser-known Mexica myth of Xochiquetzal that construct them as the causes of humankind’s “fall” from a supposed “paradise” (1994, 106–110). Gloria Anzaldúa also discusses how “in the pursuit of knowledge, including carnal knowledge... , [these] female origin figures ‘disobeyed’.” For their disobedience and “eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and for taking individual agency” they are “expelled from ‘paradise’” (2002, 543). On la Malinche as archetypal traitor and whore who sold out her indigenous people to the colonizers, see Norma Alarcón’s classic essay “*Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism*” (1989).

<sup>6</sup>In an extensive study of sexual witchcraft cases in colonial Mexico, Behar notes that “uncanny power” was particularly attributed to “women of the marginal Indian and mixed castes” (1989, 179). Of the seventy-one anti-curandero/a cases documented by Quezada, all but eleven Spaniards and eight who were unidentified were categorized as Indian, Black, mestizo/a, mulato/a, or castizo/a (73 percent). Of these fifty-two cases, the majority (thirty-one) were women of color (60 percent) (1991, 42–45).

<sup>7</sup>I follow Gloria Anzaldúa’s use of the term “conocimiento” to connote knowledge and ways of knowing, especially knowledges, wisdom, consciousness, intuition, insights, or awareness that are not legitimized by dominant cultures (2000, 177–78).

<sup>8</sup>I deliberately write “western” in lowercase letters in order not to reinscribe the “west” as a privileged and monolithic geopolitical space.

<sup>9</sup>“Desconocimiento” connotes “not knowing, either by willful intention...[or] by default, by expediency” (Anzaldúa 2000, 177).

<sup>10</sup>My book in progress is tentatively titled *Decolonizing the Sacred: Healing Practices on the Borderlands*.

<sup>11</sup>See Barstow for a historical overview of how and why European women healers were redefined as witches (1994, 109–27). Also see Ehrenreich and English (1973) who discuss the impact of science and the rise of medicine as a male profession in continuing to delegitimize women healers.

<sup>12</sup>On the multiple meanings of a backlash between “Chicana” and “Latina” see Karen Mary Davalos and Alicia Partnoy, “Editors’ Commentary: Translating the Backlash” (2004).

<sup>13</sup>On spiritual activism see Anzaldúa 2000, 178; Anzaldúa 2002, 568–74; Keating 2002, and Keating forthcoming. As AnaLouise Keating defines the term, “spiritual activism is a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics, a way of life and a call to action. At the epistemological level, spiritual activism posits a metaphysics of interconnectedness and employs nonbinary modes of thinking. At the ethical level, spiritual activism requires concrete actions designed to intervene in and transform existing social conditions. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation” (n.p., forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> Dominant western sexist beliefs about “natural” female inferiority can be traced to earlier articulations of Christianity, Judaism, and Greek philosophy (Turner 1997, 24–25). Although my focus in this essay is the legacy of western colonial thought, it is also important to consider negative indigenous constructions of the feminine.

<sup>15</sup> I write “goddess” within quotes to signal that this western term does not adequately describe the revered indigenous figures that symbolize the forces of nature.

<sup>16</sup> Acknowledging that “the word ‘curandero’ does not have a precise meaning,” Treviño defines it as “a person who cures, or tries to cure, in accord with the ancient pre-Hispanic indigenous pattern, adding knowledge that accrued for nearly five centuries since the Spanish Conquest” (2001, 47). The hybrid roots of curanderismo, “from the Spanish word *cura*, which means ‘to heal’ or ‘to be a priest’” (Avila 1999, 16) include Greek, Arab, Sephardic Jew, Spanish, indigenous, and African medicine (22–35). As Elena Avila, a Chicana curandera, elaborates, curanderismo “does not separate the soul and spirit from the body. It is medicine and spirituality practiced simultaneously” (16). Moreover, it “is an earthy, natural, grounded health-care system that seeks to keep all of the elements of our being in balance” (19).

<sup>17</sup> I signify the connection between la curandera and la bruja by using a hyphen that links the words rather than a backslash as Rebolledo does to visually deconstruct the view that they form an oppositional binary (as sometimes signaled by a backslash). Not only might curanderas and brujas share similar knowledges and abilities, but also they are oftentimes viewed and treated similarly (mostly negatively from dominant cultural perspectives). Moreover, I alternate between writing curandera and bruja first in the dyad in order not to privilege either and especially to counter the historically demonized “bruja,” a word that still conjures up racialized and gendered fear and hatred. As indicated in my poem included as a postscript, I also use the neologism “brujandera” as a way to suture their split legacies.

<sup>18</sup> Citing the writings of Pat Mora, Carmen Tafolla, Gina Valdés, and Sandra Cisneros, Rebolledo writes, “...the curandera [in their writings] is not always beneficent (and perhaps this is the reason Chicana writers are so attracted to her representation). She has the capacity to fight social evils, with destruction if necessary. She can and does sometimes seek vengeance and revenge, careful to retaliate only against a particular evildoer and not in general. She fulfills our desires to seek justice against those perceived as more powerful. She can be a witch—yet she is also a curandera. She can control the other, nebulous world, but generally she chooses the positive side, the healing world. However, when evil is being enacted against us, the curandera can provide public protection against that evil by exposing it in a ritualistic fashion” (1995, 88).

<sup>19</sup> I find this omission curious, especially given that Rebolledo states that the “curandera/bruja figure incorporates the figure of the Virgin with those of the pre-Columbian deities in all of their attributes” (1995, 93) and cites Anzaldúa’s description of Coatlicue as “the symbol of the dark sexual drive, the chthonic (underworld), the feminine, the serpentine movement of sexuality, of creativity, the basis of all energy and life” (Anzaldúa 1987, qtd. in Rebolledo 1995, 93).

<sup>20</sup> A recent example of the ways that Christian ideologies about the “pagan” curandera-bruja

persist in secular society is the banning of Rodolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* from a high school in Norwood, Colorado. According to the Associated Press, "Superintendent Bob Conder said some parents were offended by obscene language and paganistic practices in the 1972 coming-of-age novel about a 7-year-old boy and his life with his Roman Catholic mother, Luna, and Ultima, who uses herbs and magic to heal...[Conder] gave more than two dozen copies of *Bless Me, Ultima* to a parent to destroy" ("Superintendent Bans Novel from Colorado School" 2005).

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Norma E. Cantú's essay "A Working-class *Bruja's* Fears and Desires" where she writes that, along with some friends, she "jokingly" appropriates a bruja identity (2001, 315).

<sup>22</sup> It is very important to note that "la vida loca" (the crazy life) is also used by many Latino/as across las Américas to refer to queer life. Although it is not my focus in this essay, this queer cultural history has been subject to its own form of bruja-ization. In the United States, "la vida loca" also has a longer critical trajectory as a reference to urban youth counter-culture (i.e. "bato loco").

<sup>23</sup> I encourage the analysis of other contemporary songs that also feature a sexualized bruja; for example, Santana's "Black Magic Woman," a song from the 1970s that still has widespread appeal, the Mexican pop band Maná's "Hechicera," and the Puerto Rican salsa band El Gran Combo's "Tú me hiciste brujería."

<sup>24</sup> The etymology of "witch" comes from the Anglo-Saxon *witga*, the short form of *witega*, meaning a seer or diviner (Walker 1983, 1077). "Witch" is perhaps also related to the Old High German *wih* that means "holy" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., s.v. "witch").

<sup>25</sup> As exemplified, for example, by the television shows "Sabrina, the Teenage Witch" and "Charmed," and the older "Bewitched" that will be released as a movie in July 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the Spanish language dictionary, *El Pequeño Larousse Ilustrado*, expands its definition of "bruja" as a woman who practices "brujería" to include "mujer fea, vieja y de aspecto desagradable" while omitting the same or similar additional definitions for "brujo." The association of an "ugly, old" woman with an ill-tempered "disagreeable aspect" with witchcraft further suggests a sexist and ageist gender difference in this case largely focused on a woman's physical attributes. *Larousse* also defines "bruja" as a "mujer de mal carácter o malas intenciones" (woman of evil character or evil intentions) without a parallel definition for "brujo" (2003, s.v. "bruja" and "brujo, a").

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, while the song explicitly refers to a dark-skinned woman, a relatively fair-skinned woman is represented in the music video suggesting the prevailing influence of dominant western culture's ideal of beauty.

<sup>28</sup> I thank Yolanda Venegas for this insight. It is also important to consider that the backdrop to the collaboration "between the boys" is global capitalism that banks on a homogeneous Latino/a identity that can be sold and consumed even as it constructs it. Whether conscious of it or not, the two male co-writers of "Livin' La Vida Loca" and producers of most of the songs in the album (Desmond Child and Robi Rosa) are functioning as late capitalism would have them function, trafficking a female image from the (neo)colonial imagination for a global market. Both Latino

and Euroamerican men in the male-dominated music industry and corporate America are clearly reaping the benefits. Ford Motors, for example, made a deal with Ricky Martin to promote one of their cars. As Ford President Jim O'Connor is quoted as saying in a news article, "The Ford Focus is targeted at the youth market and Ricky Martin is clearly singing their song" ("Ford 'Livin' La Vida Loca' With Ricky Martin" 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Discussing how in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) Anzaldúa "returns to the center of our vision the importance of marginalized ways of knowing through our spirits," Laura E. Pérez gives the example of how "*La facultad*"...and other forms of 'inner knowledge,' affirm the 'divine within' (50), as well as the 'supernatural' (49) or 'the spirit world' (38), and represent alternative forms of perception ('seeing' 39, 42, 45) and 'other mode[s] of consciousness' (37), and thus, other epistemologies and paths of knowledge (37, 42) than the rational as it is understood and privileged in Euroamerican and European dominant cultures" (1998, 52).

<sup>30</sup> Anzaldúa elaborates: "*Naguala* is the feminine form of *nagual*, the capacity some people such as Mexican indigenous shamans have of 'shapeshifting'—becoming an animal, place, or thing or by inhabiting that thing or by shifting into the perspective of their animal companion. I have extended the term to include an aspect of the self unknown to the conscious self. Nagualismo is a Mexican spiritual knowledge system where the practitioner searches for spirit signs. I call the maker of spirit signs 'la naguala,' a creative, dreamlike consciousness able to make broader associations and connections than waking consciousness" (2002, 577).

<sup>31</sup> See Laura E. Pérez's essay, "Spirit Glyphs: Reimagining Art and Artist in the Work of Chicana *Tlaminime*," that has been very formative in my own thinking. She describes the work of various Chicana writers and artists as engaging in "*curandera* (healer) work: reclaiming and reformulating spiritual world views that are empowering to them as women, and that in that same gesture reimagine what the social role of art and the artist might be" (1998, 41).

<sup>32</sup> See Erika Aigner-Varoz's analysis of Anzaldúa's "serpentine Shadow-Beast" as "a reappropriation, a reinscription, and most importantly, a synthesis of the older metaphors that negatively label or exclude women, the darkskinned, and homosexuals" (2000, 60).

<sup>33</sup> I am informed by Erika Aigner-Varoz (2000), Sonia Saldivar-Hull (1999), Caridad Souza (n.d.), and Norma Alarcón's (1998) profound readings of the "Shadow-Beast" and the "Coatlicue State."

<sup>34</sup> This quote is attributed to Lorde in a postcard and various biographical websites (i.e., <http://www.femmenoiret.net/Leaders-Legends/AudreLorde.htm>). I was unable to locate its original published source.

<sup>35</sup> It is also important to consider that for many within an indigenous cultural context it is not appropriate to call oneself a *curandera*, healer, or *bruja* for that matter because such titles are to be given by the communities whom one serves. Such honored titles are given in recognition of one's many years of study and gifted abilities and carry a heavy social responsibility.

<sup>36</sup> See note #17.

<sup>37</sup> Personal interview, 12 December 2002a. Also see Castillo 2002b.

<sup>38</sup> For further introduction to Santería practice and philosophy, see the Santería initiate and scholar Marta Moreno Vega's *The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería*.

<sup>39</sup> Changó is the honored natural element of "lightning, thunder, and force" and represents majestic fierceness and a warrior spirit (Murphy 1993, 182). As further elaborated by Isabel Castellanos, he also "rules over male sexual organs and the semen that impregnates women" (2001, 42) and is one of Ochún's lovers (35). Moreover, "he personifies—together with Ochún—the joy of being alive" (41).

<sup>40</sup> In Santería "aché" means "power, grace, growth, blood." It is "the life force of God, the *orishas*, and nature" (Murphy 1993, 175).

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