

## THE STAGING OF HETEROPATRIARCHAL VIOLENCE AND ITS TRAUMATIC AFTERMATH IN ADELINA ANTHONY'S *BRUISING FOR BESOS* AND DULCE MARIA SOLIS'S *CHELA*

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*Working from the juncture points of Latina feminist studies, trauma discourse, and theater studies, this essay discusses the work of two Latina playwrights and performers, Adelina Anthony and Dulce Maria Solis, and their staging of the trauma of institutionalized heteropatriarchal violence in their individual plays Bruising for Besos and CHELA (both published in Chicana/Latina Studies, vol. 9, no. 2 and vol. 12, no. 1, respectively). Through dramaturgical analysis of the published scripts and live performances, the author explores how Anthony and Solis use testimonio to document and define institutionalized violence. The essay opens with a discussion of Cherríe Moraga's essays and plays as foundational to its reading of how Anthony and Solis's plays illustrate the role of testimony in the process of navigating through the traumatic aftermath of heteropatriarchal violence. Drawing on her interviews with the playwrights and her dramaturgical work preparing the scripts for publication, the author also looks at how these dramatists and performers understand the potential of their plays to foster realizations about one's relationship to heteropatriarchal violence and thereby open up avenues for personal and social change.*

**Key Words:** Chicana/Latina drama, dramaturgy, teatro, testimonio, trauma, violence

It was during my editorship for *Chicana/Latina Studies* that I first saw Adelina Anthony's *Bruising for Besos* and Dulce Maria Solis's *CHELA*. As a scholar of theater studies, I was immediately enthralled by the emotional and critical force of both stories, but also galvanized by the storytellers, the dual authors and performers of the work. Anthony and Solis are virtuosic actors who deftly shift into multiple characters to realize on stage the many people who populate these two plays about the legacy of family trauma born from patriarchal oppression and the impact this violence has

for everyone in the family, but especially the daughters who experience—as well as witness—trauma and then carry forward their wounds into a matrix of relationships. With a focus on the daughters' point of view, the plays posit a key question: how to foresee an end to patriarchal oppression if women are inculcated to perpetuate the system of heteropatriarchal violence at the hands of both fathers and mothers? Notably, *Bruising for Besos* and *CHELA* are solo plays and, as such, the focus of the work is not about the emotional arc of the many articulated characters but rather the storyteller's journey and the ways she has been shaped by the people she brings on stage in a theater space that through her enactment of testimonio becomes transformed into a public arena for the telling of lived experience and the bearing of witness. This last point is highly significant, for without a public accounting there can be no public examination and address. These boldly intimate stories are offered as a springboard into affectively charged scenes of critical engagement that might lead to personal transformation and social change, launched from the realm of witnessing known as theater.

The testimonio is a foundational genre of Latina narrative, from creative writing to critical essay. While there is a significant body of work in Chicana/Latina studies about testimonio as a written genre, there is little focused on testimonio within the realm of theater and performance. The differences here are important: work written for the stage is, by definition, incomplete since it requires the embodied presence of both the storyteller and the audience to finalize the work. In the world of a play, a speaker does not unfold the story in isolation. That a character communicates on a public stage is significant because it illustrates the vital role that language (verbal, visual, gestural, aural) and witnessing (the audience) plays for dramatic storytelling generally, something especially key for a character who represents survivors of violence and trauma. Violence seeks to put under erasure language and witnessing.

Trauma is the debilitating result of perceiving that one is alone within the aftermath; it is the enduring state of shock of feeling singularly without a language to comprehend events or without witness in the guise of a bystander or advocate to confirm or verify experience. Plays about trauma and violence do vital cultural work in expanding the realms of representation and healing by telling stories of trauma and violence in spaces that deliberately invite individual and collective grappling.

Within the field of Chicana/Latina studies, works of literature and criticism have strongly focused on addressing matters of trauma and violence, even if not explicitly so. This organically reflects how our histories, both as a people and as academics, are constructed through experiences of violence, from the legacy of colonialism to institutional heteropatriarchal violence.<sup>1</sup> Within Chicana/Latina studies scholarship, Cherríe Moraga's work is positioned as foundational because of her use of the personal voice to render frank observations and criticism. In my own work, I further read her as one of the field's major trauma theorists because of the methodology and vocabulary she has introduced as the result of a career-long grappling with the many ways matters of violence and trauma have shaped her life across the entire spectrum of the identity positions she claims. Significantly, Moraga's work is largely directed by her quest to understand how, as a daughter, she has been so indelibly shaped by the mother's role as a dual source of love and violence, culture and assimilation, queerness and heteronormativity, liberation and oppression.<sup>2</sup> In her groundbreaking memoir, *Loving in the War Years* (1983), Moraga shares a story about a phone conversation with her mother that becomes interrupted by call waiting and results in her mother immediately cutting short the original chat to speak with Moraga's brother. Ruminating on the pain of this experience prompts Moraga to theorize, "The daughter must constantly earn the mother's love, prove her fidelity to her. The son—he gets her love for free."<sup>3</sup> Despite the

level of personal hurt caused by this event, Moraga notably refuses to blame her mother; instead she focuses on addressing how a mother's behavior reflects the ways women have been molded by heteropatriarchal histories that permeate the relationship dynamics between a mother and her children: "I sense that she feels this way because she wants to believe that through her mothering, she can develop the kind of man she would have liked to have married, or even have been. That through her son she can get a small taste of male privilege, since without race or class privilege that's all there is to be had" (1983, 102). As she more pointedly articulates in her play, *Shadow of a Man*, through the character Hortensia, "That's one thing, you know, the men can never take from us. The birth of a son. Somos las creadoras" (1994, 61). The memoir's oft-quoted phone scene articulates a moment of passing forward wounds—in this case, wounds of heteropatriarchy. Driven by testimonio, Moraga's memoir and her plays read as accounts of processing various forms of violence and trauma, a project that Moraga describes as "touching the wound" in order to heal. In her play, *Giving Up the Ghost*, the characters speak of putting fingers to "forgotten places" as a means to transform the state of feeling violated as a "hole" (absence) into that of a whole (presence). In her most recent book, *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness* (2011), Moraga explains why testimonio-driven theatrical work so powerfully carves a path for personal and social healing: "The revolutionary promise of a theater of liberation lies in the embodied rendering of our prisons and, in the act, our release from them" (40).

Chicana/Latina studies scholars—ranging from Yvonne Yabro Bejarano, Alicia Arrizón, and Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz to Marivel Danielson—have recognized Moraga's plays as bringing onto the stage central questions and concerns grounded in her critical essays.<sup>4</sup> Reflecting on the evolution of her work into the present, Moraga shares, "[M]y writings have always had bodies and as such are best rendered through the physical space of staging" (2011, 36). Through

the actor's embodied presence, her plays quite literally translate onto the stage her concept of "theory in the flesh"; notably, presence is something that traumatic events thwart as survivors find themselves cast into the undertow of disassociation and fragmentation. Moraga's move from the page to the stage is highly significant toward thinking about how writers extend their theorizations of violence and trauma into the realm of witnessing for public address. She has said of her writing across genres that while she works on a play she is usually simultaneously writing an essay or poetry; this reflects a quest to find the right words and medium to express a story of struggle that over the course of the writer's oeuvre never appears quite fully addressed or resolved. One sees this interplay exemplified in her essay, "A Long Line of Vendidas," from *Loving in the War Years*, in which she explores the historical resonance of the Malinche myth, and in her play, *Giving Up the Ghost*, which figures a young girl named Corky who is violated by a male janitor who reminds her of a relative.<sup>5</sup>

Moraga's dramaturgy asks audiences to confront what the essay explores as a culturally specific mythology that positions women—and by extension girls—as betrayers of culture with the mouth and the vagina definitively marked as sites of shame and disloyalty. In her pivotal testimonio-driven monologue, Corky distills everything into screaming out, "HE MADE ME A HOLE!" (43).<sup>6</sup> Enacting this scene on stage in a live theater positions the audience member as accountable—as both an individual person and as part of a social group—for responding to an unfolding scene of crisis, if only first to the actors presenting the work. The visceral experience of performance also positions the audience to leave transformed in both thinking and feeling. As Mary Pat Brady argues in *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies* (2002), "Interactions with space are not merely schematic but also highly affective; places are felt and experienced, and the processes producing space therefore also shapes feelings and experiences" (8). The theater space exists to bring together a social group for the explicit goal of provoking, energizing, and fortifying public culture

by recognizing the power of storytelling to transform audience members into agents of change whose impact spans from the household to the courtroom. In *Homecoming Queers*, Marivel Danielson notes the importance of calling attention to the political work organically born from the stages we inhabit in our daily lives as well as the realm of performance: “How we experience the world informs our representation of this world, and how we represent this world conversely transforms how we live in it” (2009, 8). These observations speak to the critical force of testimonio-based teatro in providing a language and a space that fosters new vocabularies toward new ways of seeing both the self and the world.

Understanding the import of Moraga’s *Giving Up the Ghost* is critical to opening this essay’s discussion of Adelina Anthony’s *Bruising for Besos* and Dulce Maria Solis’s *CHELA* because it is the first Chicana play to employ the testimonio voice in a theatrical work devised to explore traumatic memory and situate that exploration as crucial to personal healing and collectively countering the force of heteropatriarchal violence. It therefore resonates as a foundational text with which Anthony and Solis’s plays critically and artistically stand in conversation. Situating these works together directs a spotlight to the evolving conversation about violence and trauma taking place in Chicana/Latina theater and the development of a vocabulary within Chicana/Latina drama that reads in tandem with the theorizations taking place within Chicana/Latina feminist literature, theory, and criticism.<sup>7</sup> *Giving Up the Ghost* was groundbreaking for its themes, language, and aesthetics, and Chicana/Latina feminist theater practitioners continue to remain highly attuned to the dominance of male-defined forms and the violence they enact in deforming how female artists create work and how their work is then received and produced within both mainstream and Latina/o theater.<sup>8</sup> As exemplified in plays by Maria Irene Fornes, Caridad Svich, Migdalia Cruz, and

Virginia Grise, Chicana/Latina feminist dramatists expand the boundaries of playwriting in both themes and forms. An earlier feminist genre created for enacting storytelling on stage, *teatropoesía* displays characteristics of the *testimonio*, most notably the privileging of voice and embodied knowledge—what the field has come to refer to as *conocimientos*.<sup>9</sup> Originally conceived as a work of *teatropoesía*, Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* performs a resistance to the narrative of patriarchy by employing a gender- and culture-specific poetics to construct a lens of dramatic storytelling driven by feminist aesthetics.<sup>10</sup>

In *Giving Up the Ghost*, three Chicana lesbians both individually and collectively share their experiences of surviving various forms of traumatic violence and their journey toward personal healing. Amalia, an older woman and an artist, is lover and mentor to Marisa, a young woman whose child persona, Corky, is articulated as a distinct and separate character that represents Marisa's fragmented self. Through independent as well as overlapping monologues by Corky and Marisa, the play spotlights the painful distance between the wounded child within the adult trying to live without the baggage of violence and trauma. Amalia is positioned as an active witness who affirms Marisa's experiences. An emotional and verbal choreography drives the play with Amalia and Marisa able to recognize in one another the wounds each cannot separately see in herself. In this way, they are positioned as tellers and witnesses, and the stage directions further work to visually articulate this point for the audience. Through the combination of *testimonio* driven dialogue and scripted movement, Moraga effectively positions the audience to bear witness to the characters' grappling with traumatic events. Corky is the fractured child whose voice gives insight into what drives and motivates Marisa's behavior. At a certain point in the play, Corky disappears from the stage, illustrating the overwhelming force of trauma but also the healing force of telling, one that leads to a sense of integration and

wholeness. The story that Corky tells and how she unravels it through her testimonio are important. Her body, her childhood, her relationships, and her sense of the world have all been fractured by the violence of rape.<sup>11</sup> The play illustrates how the unraveling of traumatic memory is never coherently linear and that making sense of events requires processing all into a tangible narrative framework to construct a discernable lifeline toward healing. Corky begins to tell a story, gets so far in the telling, and then halts and disappears, leaving Marisa and Amalia to complete the play. This staging illustrates the struggle of trauma survivors to articulate the unspeakable, enunciate the story of events that have so indelibly shaped one's existence, declare the pain it has caused, and secure validation through the process of testimonio and witnessing. This is what facilitates Corky's release from the vortex of trauma. Her departure from the stage signals that a certain level of individual work has been achieved and that another level of work remains with the audience. In the words of fellow playwright Josefina Lopez, some wounds are so deep that they demand sharing on a public stage so that the entire community can take account and engage in the needed healing.<sup>12</sup>

Adelina Anthony's *Bruising for Besos* and Dulce Maria Solis's *CHELA* extend the genre of testimonio-based teatro demonstrated in Moraga's early play to further represent how Chicanas and Latinas experience and process heteropatriarchal violence. The writing of both plays began with Anthony and Solis reflecting on their experiences as witnesses and survivors of familial violence. *Bruising for Besos* is part of Anthony's *Xiqana Xronicles* series, a project she describes as deeply engaged in "spirit work" (62). Anthony conceptualizes these plays as "offerings" (62) promised to her mother that, in her words, "would take the experience of what she and my family have survived (and also what we haven't survived) in order to make peace with the legacies of violence I inherited" (63). In her introductory notes to *Bruising for Besos*, Anthony further explains, "These

plays take up the knowledge of surviving domestic violence, and through the transgressive process of honest art-making, I allow the story to shape itself. And this is how it becomes part of the communal work. I know the stories touch upon the experiences of many of us” (63). Anthony says of the activist imperative that defines the making of this and her other works, “My hope as others read the text is that they imagine the world vividly and always remember that plays are not written for the sole purpose of the page—they must be performed. In the ephemeral space of performance, the transmission of shared energy creates a wholly sacred and cathartic experience, and it confirms that the solo work is never just about one individual” (63). Most significantly, in her emphasis on spirit work and catharsis, Anthony defines theater as a healing art with its own artistic conventions and sees her role as an artist to foster the audience through the emotional journey enacted by a play. Her assertion that plays “must be performed” affirms the significant role of embodied storytelling in front of a live audience as what distinguishes theater. While the play may be a solo work, it is “never just about one individual” because stories carry the force of representation with meaning constituted not merely by individual telling but also by collective reception.

Notably, theater shares with therapy in its emphasis on talking and listening. Writing about her journey in researching for *CHELA* by first conducting interviews with her mother about surviving domestic violence from childhood into adulthood, Solis reflects on the vital role of active listening:

When I first started to write *CHELA*, it did not come from a place of wanting to understand my mother. Rather it came from a very self-centered place of wanting to regurgitate the pain that had fermented inside me over the years so I could feel better. I had no idea that the interview process and the obstacles it presented would allow me to

see my mother holistically and draw us closer. And I definitely did not know that in my hands I had a story, one that not only needed to be told but also expressed on a public stage to help others. (162)

Though stated in very different language, Solis echoes Anthony's understanding that personal stories are meaningful to others. The playwright's realization that bearing witness to her mother's story released her from clinging to toxic emotions brought further understanding that her own performed story might do the same for audiences. In their respective playwright's notes, both Solis and Anthony clearly situate their work as generative to their own healing process; they also understand that their solo stories of violence are generative for others. The comments of both playwrights evidence how testimonio—from writing their own testimonio-driven plays to absorbing the testimonios of their mothers—plays a pivotal role for each artist. Like Moraga, Anthony and Solis have worked to critically process their stories and experiences into publicly accessible narratives that present epistemological work for others to then engage.

Both playwrights situate their audiences as witnesses who are asked to collectively recognize violence and the ways it directs and informs a person's self-perception and her relationships with others. Significantly, the production history of *Bruising for Besos* and *CHELA* includes performances at university and community theaters as well as larger theaters, a history that speaks to the playwrights' shared goal to participate in a broader theater for social change.<sup>13</sup> Theater shifts our ways of seeing and helps us resist reading pain and suffering as the status quo. It makes wounding a visible and tangible part of both individual and collective identity and not just a source of weakness, but also a source of strength. As Antonia Castañeda remarked at the beginning of the plenary session at the 2009 MALCS Summer Institute: "Our experiences are

imprinted on our bodies. Like the maguey, as new shoots grow, the old shoots become embedded, thus fortifying the plant” (López and Davalos 2009, 18).

Employing testimonio in the writing, telling, and performance of these plays, Anthony and Solis explicitly position themselves as artists committed to ending the cycles of heteropatriarchal violence. Both plays tell the story of mothers married to emotionally and physically abusive men in a culture that upholds patriarchal privilege and inculcates women to unquestionably accept being subservient to the male authority of their husbands, fathers, and other patriarchal figures of authority to the detriment of their own well being and to that of their children. In both of these plays, we see men physically and emotionally abuse women who then pass forward these wounds. The fact that mothers and queer women participate in continuing the cycle of abuse makes clear that while men commit the acts of violence represented in the play, violence is not rooted in men or masculinity, per se, but in systems of heteropatriarchy.

Anthony’s assurance that she and her characters are not alone in their experiences of violence comes from her artistic training as part of a generation that grew up with the testimonio narratives of Moraga and Anzaldúa, something Anthony signifies through the presence of a specific prop that has appeared in several of her plays: a giant *OED* sized copy of *This Bridge Called My Back* placed at the front of the stage like a sentient being to watch over the production and call the audience into further inquiry. In *Bruising for Besos*, a Raggedy Ann doll effectively serves as a proxy witness for the protagonist Yoli, a “queer Xicana daughter.” While she is en route to visit her mother, Yoli’s car breaks down. During the time it takes to wait for the tow truck, with Raggedy Ann doll at her side, she revisits memories of her childhood, the cycle of heteropatriarchal violence within her family, the ways wounds were passed forward from father to mother, mother to daughter, and then

later from the daughter to her own lovers. As an adult, Yoli finds herself in a series of dysfunctional relationships, culminating in a particularly volatile one in which she engages in physical violence against her partner. Recounting the events, Yoli shares, “In a flash it was like my father was in my body and I knew exactly how to hurt another female” (86). As Moraga observes, “[F]amily is the place where for better and for worse we first learn to love” (1994, 39). Anthony uses testimonio to stage a profound moment of realization about how we are shaped by familial violence to continue perpetuating the aftershock of trauma through our own inculcated behavior, passing forward unresolved wounds in ways that, however unconscious, nevertheless perpetuate personal wounding and cycles of violence.

In *Bruising for Besos*, the father’s violence is described as inclusive of both physical violence (he hits his wife and children) and emotional violence (he verbally abuses his wife and children). His described behaviors take on a pattern: He is threatened by the outspoken nature of his daughter and the ways she confronts him about his actions; he cheats on his wife and becomes reactive when she seeks to flee the relationship; and he verbally denigrates his young son for displaying effeminate characteristics (such as playing with a pink Easter egg). The latter plot point is significant as it emphasizes how misogyny and homophobia exist on a spectrum of heteropatriarchal violence. Dramaturgically, the only character in the play with an emotionally developed arc is the protagonist Yoli Villamontes; the constructed focal point of Anthony’s play is precisely how Yoli has been shaped by violence. Anthony’s playing all of the characters engages in critically performative work: She embodies Yoli and the entire community of family and friends that populate the play, including the father, to illustrate how Yoli bears the imprint of those who have emotionally and physically touched her. *Bruising for Besos* thus demonstrates two types of testimonio: directly narrated and indirectly narrated. As Yoli, Anthony directly

speaks to the audience about this character's experiences of violence; as an actor performing all other characters in the play, Anthony conveys a testimonio indirectly told, one that physically and emotionally illustrates the actions and events that have shaped the survivor.

Both *Bruising for Besos* and *CHELA* explore how formative experiences of familial and heteropatriarchal violence inform our life paths: paths that have been set before us, paths we choose for ourselves, worn paths we blindly follow, new paths given to us by others who have forged the way, as well as the many paths we have had to fiercely blaze or reconstruct. These plays stage several emotionally wrenching and politically urgent questions: How do we absorb violence and pass our wounds on to others? How do our expressions of love and friendship, including the sharing of emotion and sex, reflect residues of trauma? How do we resist the gravitational pull of paths that easily appear before us yet are dangerous precisely because of their toxic familiarity? With their work, the playwrights help audiences see the paths we need to carve in working toward personal and cultural healing.

Dulce Maria Solis's *CHELA* stages the evolution of three generations of women ensnared within the cycle of heteropatriarchal violence, beginning with an autobiographically-rooted story based on the playwright's grandmother and her passing forward the wounds she carried to her daughter; the daughter's experiences of heteropatriarchal violence and the wounds that she incurred but desperately wanted to resist passing forward to her daughter; and Solis's journey as a daughter grappling with the wounds she absorbed as a witness to her own mother's life, and her subsequent desire to break the cycle of violence by telling the story of her mother's survival. The play evidences the trauma survivor's quest to process violence as a means to fully discern how one's sense of self is—and is not—tethered to events of heteropatriarchal violence.

In *CHELA*, Solis tells the story of the evolution of Chela's life, from her growing up years to adulthood, and her journey to survive multiple forms of violence (molestation, rape, spousal abuse) and cultivate a life of presence and affirmation that includes a sexual sense of self. The performance of this solo play is made all the more powerful by it being based on the playwright's interviews with her mother and Solis's quest to understand the ways her mother, Chela, had passed on to her daughter the trauma of her own abuse. Documenting Chela's testimonio allowed Solis to create a solo play; but it also enabled her to articulate her own testimonio about the wounds she carried as a daughter, wounds that unexamined led her to harbor feelings of hate toward her mother. As Solis interviewed her mother and found herself bearing witness, she felt directed by empathy to become more cognizant of her own history of violence and wounding. Solis's strategic crafting of *CHELA* works to duplicate that experience for the audience, ushering us into a shared space of possibility through a critical practice of empathetic listening based on the reality that everyone has a mother.

From the outset of her performance of *CHELA*, Solis enables channels of empathy by revealing that this is a true story about the history of violence that informs her life. As a theater artist, Solis performs a dual narrative of testimonio, simultaneously unfolding both her mother's and her own story. In her artist's statement, the playwright speaks frankly about growing up hating her mother, and she affirms it was the project of interviewing her mother for this play that allowed her to gain a deeper awareness and understanding about the events of violence that shaped her mother's life and, in turn, her own. The project of constructing Chela's testimonio allowed Solis as a daughter to comprehend the life of her mother through a lens of understanding and awareness based on their shared identity as women navigating a patriarchal world in all its hazards of history. Significantly, like her daughter Dulce María

Solis, Chela grew up with a mother (represented in the play as the character Angelita) who passed on her own wounds. *CHELA* is thus a prism reflecting generations of struggle. In this way, *CHELA* joins *Bruising for Besos* in adding to Chicana discourse's theorizing of mother-daughter relationships as foundational to understanding Chicana identity.

It is noteworthy that the plays *Bruising for Besos* and *CHELA* are performed by their authors. Both Anthony and Solis are virtuosic actors capable of creating diverse characters across gender, class, and ethnicity.<sup>14</sup> Solis originally wrote and performed *CHELA* as a one-woman play with nearly sixteen characters in total. However, as she clarifies in her author's notes about the characters, in staged productions she portrays seven of the sixteen characters and brings the remaining roles into the play through other forms of visual storytelling and design work via multi-media and props. Significantly, Solis includes video within the production with these scenes representing Chela's memories brought to life. Like Anthony's deployment of the Raggedy Ann doll, the camera serves as a witness and invites the audience to become cognizant of the critical force of bearing witness. In the style of cinema vérité, video provides undeniable documentation of the horrors of domestic violence and its aftermath. The camera portrays the figure of the young daughter, Dulce-María, and shares her point of view. She picks up the camera and then drops it to the floor, visually conveying the shock of trauma; with the shift of the camera's gaze, our point of view becomes that of the child hiding under the bed fearfully peering out to witness her mother being assaulted at the hands of her stepfather. Through the footage of domestic abuse captured on video, Chela's memories become tangible and our position of witnessing is made active. It is impossible to sit as a neutral spectator.

In her goal to present the complexity of Chela's life story and the quest of trauma survivors to define themselves as much more than victims who

have endured and escaped violence, Solis deploys comedy and playfully incorporates other forms of media and props into the play. These scenes bring levity to an intense story of violence and trauma, but they also illustrate the complicated ways that such experiences make one sensitive to humor and beauty as well as social injustice. For example, in the scene where Chela attempts to seduce her second husband Jose Luis, Solis creatively casts him in the form of a life sized male rag doll. This humorously spotlights Chela's experience of intercourse with a man who is sexually ignorant, inexperienced, and generally uninterested. Playing Chela, Solis acts out the scenario, laying the giant rag doll on top of her to demonstrate the husband's quick humping— rabbit-fast then decrepitly slower—before Jose Luis abruptly climaxes and passes out asleep on top of Chela. No foreplay, no cuddling, nothing but silence and then sleep. The scene also emphasizes how Chela's actions fit into the trajectory of her life story; in a journey to heal from violence and trauma, one often searches for people and things to “prop up” the spirit. The complexity here is further illustrated when the play explores the part of Chela's life she spent partnered with a woman, which ultimately is shown to have been out of a deep hunger for unconditional love (the woman rescues her from a domestic violence shelter) with Chela ultimately learning from the relationship about codependence. Throughout the course of the play Chela comes to realize that being a survivor of sexual assault and domestic violence does not mean she is a person devoid of sexual needs or feelings. Each relationship leads to higher knowledge, with Chela evolving into an understanding that her emotional and physical needs exist together as part of a complete sense of self. The scene with Jose Luis in the guise of a doll offers an important counterpart to the play's framing scenes that depict Chela engaging in a poignant act of sexual self-reclamation as she chooses Pancho to be the man with whom by her own volition she wants to have sex. Her

pleasure is both verbally articulated and theatrically illustrated. Notably, the focus is not on what the man wants or what he is doing to Chela (though that is part of it), but rather more so on what Chela is doing, how she is taking the lead on behalf of herself by deliberately choosing her own lover. What might it look like for heterosexual women to actively orchestrate a life free from male violence yet inclusive of sex with men in a way that resists the dynamics of heteropatriarchy? Here it is important to keep in mind Moraga's passage in *Loving in the War Years* that invites heterosexual women to narrate their experiences of sex and the erotic. This very complex scene in the play compels the audience to ruminate over the possibility of women living in sexual and domestic partnership with men apart from heteropatriarchy.

It is on the stages of testimonio-driven teatros that we see violence not only named and defined but also physically and emotionally illustrated. Histories of violence and their aftermath are verbally articulated and visually rendered in front of an audience gathered together to bear witness. Theater is a confrontational art form that speaks across the senses to compel us to weather the journey of the story and ruminate about our roles as audience members and social agents. As witnesses, do we find ourselves feeling passive, active, resigned, bored, infuriated, or compelled? The role of witnessing is most crucial to a testimonio-driven theater practice that seeks to raise awareness about violence. Individual perpetrators and systemic structures of violence seek to eradicate the role of the witness, and theater recovers this. That one is left to feel alone, isolated, and disempowered is a large part of what defines violence; and the communal nature of teatro facilitates a recovered sense of presence and community. That drama is a medium of storytelling in the present tense is tremendously significant when it comes to the work of processing violence because trauma dehumanizes and suspends one in the devastation of past events and/or propels one to obsessively envision a distant future that

is far removed from those past events. Being part of an audience is an act of commitment that locates one in a realm of possibility where the spectrum of behaviors and circumstances brought onto the stage in all of their complexities and contradictions remind us that we are malleable human subjects capable of recovery. Theater is a location where a character like Corky from Moraga's *Giving Up the Ghost* can scream out, "HE MADE ME A HOLE!", and create a space of recognition and release. The magic of theater takes us to other worlds and at the same time allows us to see that those worlds are devised, constructed and reconstructed. We can discern that just as there are representations, there are counter representations; there are directions and redirections; and so, too, are there acts of healing to counter acts of violence. Theater is a powerful vehicle for healing for many reasons but especially because of its ability to articulate things through multiple registers via embodiment and live performance; in doing so, it makes palpable and present Chicana epistemology—knowing, feeling, doing—for both the storyteller and the audience. The state of presence required by the practice of theater-making is absolutely key in testimonio-driven teatro because presence is precisely what the dramatically intrusive nature of heteropatriarchal violence and its traumatic aftermath disrupt.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's edited anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*; Moraga's *Loving in the War Years*; Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Carla Trujillo's edited volume, *Living Chicana Theory*; The Latina Feminist Group's *Telling to Live*; Eden Torres's *Chicana Without Apology*; Norma E. Cantú's *Canicula*; Helena Maria Viramontes's *The Moths*; Lorna Dee Cervantes's *The Cables of Genocide*; Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*; Josie Méndez-Negrete's *Las Hijas de Juan: Daughters Betrayed*; and Carla Trujillo's *What Night Brings* form a selected core bibliography of feminist voices who write on heteropatriarchal violence. As the pages of the journal *Chicana/Latina Studies* so powerfully illustrate, Chicana/Latina visual artists additionally engage with matters of violence and trauma as central to the conversations they visually enact. Representative works include Yolanda Lopez's *Who's the Illegal Alien, Pilgrim?*,

Barbara Carrasco's *Pregnant Woman in a Ball of Yarn*, Delilah Montoya's *La Guadalupana*, Alma Lopez's *Desert Blood*, and Adriana Garcia's *This Too Shall Pass*.

<sup>2</sup> See the following published essays in which I have written about Moraga's vocabulary of trauma and violence and the role of her mother as part of the author's grappling with heteropatriarchal violence: "Veneration and Violence: Pedagogical Forces in Chicana Literature and Art" in *Global Migration, Social Change, and Cultural Transformation*, edited by Emory Elliott, Jasmine Payne, and Patricia Ploesch, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, (2007, 139–161); "Emotional Contraband: Prison as Metaphor and Meaning in U.S. Latina Drama" in *Captive Audience: Prison and Captivity in Contemporary Theater*, edited by Thomas Fahy and Kimball King, New York: Routledge, (2003, 25–40); and "Performing Aztlán: The Female Body as Cultural Critique in the Teatro of Cherríe Moraga" in *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theater*, edited by Jeffrey D. Mason and J. Ellen Gainor, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, (1999, 160–177).

<sup>3</sup> Cherríe Moraga. (1983). *Loving in the War Years*. Boston: South End Press.

<sup>4</sup> In *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherríe Moraga* (2001), Yarbro-Bejarano writes, "The essay and the theater perform different functions in Moraga's writing: the essays attempt to make sense of the contradictory aspects of her identity, especially the intersections of race and sexuality; her theatrical characters embody these contradictions. Since they live in the flesh, so to speak, they voice truths the analytical mind rejects, represses, or censors" (27).

<sup>5</sup> In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga writes of the origins of the ways women pass forward the wounds of heteropatriarchy: "What looks like betrayal between women on the basis of race originates, I believe, in sexism/heterosexism. Chicanas begin to turn our backs on each other either to gain male approval or to avoid being sexually stigmatized by them under the name of puta, vendida, jota. This phenomenon is as old as the day is long, and first learned in the school yard, long before it is played out with a vengeance within political communities" (98). She then explains how this work of patriarchy is bolstered by the culturally-specific influence of the Malinche mythology: "The sexual legacy passed down to the Mexicana/Chicana is the legacy of betrayal, pivoting around the historical/mythical female figure of Malintzin Tenapal. As translator and strategic advisor and mistress to the Spanish conqueror of México, Hernán Cortéz, Malintzin is considered the mother of the mestizo people. But unlike La Virgen de Guadalupe, she is not revered as the Virgin Mother, but rather slandered as La Chingada, meaning the 'fucked one,' or La Vendida, sell-out to the white race.... There is hardly a Chicana growing up today who does not suffer under her name even if she never hears directly of the one-time Aztec princess" (99–100).

<sup>6</sup> This scene in *Giving Up the Ghost* connects to what Moraga writes in *Loving in the War Years* about heteropatriarchal violence, sexism/misogyny, and the Malinche myth through its content, language, themes, and setting. The rape takes place within a school classroom; the monologue invokes fathers and male relatives; and the line, "he made me a hole," graphically articulates the reduction of the female body to a violated object.

<sup>7</sup> It is also significant that Moraga is Adelina Anthony's playwrighting mentor and is formally credited for the play's initial dramaturgy. Additionally, Anthony and Moraga collaborated as co-

directors of the world premiere of Moraga's play, *Digging Up the Dirt* (Breath of Fire Latina Theater Ensemble, Santa Ana, Calif. July 20, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> At the recent historic Convening of the Latina/o Theater Commons, when Luis Valdez called for positioning Latina/o theater as the New American Theater, Josefina Lopez responded, "I dream of a future where art-making practice is no longer conceptualized after the model of male orgasm. I want to see a world filled with the vision of theater as multi-orgasmic, spiraling and flowing like female energy" (Boston. October 31–November 2, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> In an early essay, Yvonne Yarbo-Bejarano discusses *Tongues of Fire*, a pivotal testimonio-driven play based on Anzaldúa and Moraga's edited anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*. See Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz's discussion of TENAZ and the creation of teatropoesía in *Wild Tongues: Transnational Mexican Popular Culture*. She describes teatropoesía as "a performance that incorporates theater, poetry, and music," the goal of which is to convey the message of feminist resistance and change (118).

<sup>10</sup> For further discussions of teatropoesía and Moraga's work, see Yvonne Yarbo-Bejarano's *The Wounded Heart* and Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz's *Wild Tongues*.

<sup>11</sup> For a powerful work of Chicana theater about rape in early female adulthood and its traumatic aftermath, see Cristina Nava's solo drama, "Rocks in My Salsa," published in excerpt as part of the play trilogy, *Slip of the Tongue*, by Cristina Nava, Sara Guerrero, and Elizabeth Szekeresh, in *Chicana/Latina Studies*, Volume 11, Issue 2, Spring 2012, with an Introduction by Tiffany Ana López. López writes about the work's engagement with matters of heteronormative patriarchal violence: "[T]he narrator journeys from adolescence into womanhood and reflects on culturally proscribed gender norms and their hazards for young girls discovering their bodies and then later for women grappling with their sexuality. The character 'Johnnie' represents romanticized heteronormative masculinity and how girls are taught to define their female worth (beauty, sexuality, cultural capital) in relationship to this icon. Nava spotlights the extreme harm of the term La Puta and shows the levels of violence that result from teaching women that masturbation is sinful or that personally initiated sexual curiosity is the gateway to bigger sins. Nava's work portrays the end spectrum of such thinking: that forms of sexual violation are a woman's responsibility. Her work asks: How then is the Chicana survivor of rape to heal and reclaim her full sense of self, inclusive of sexuality?" (104–105).

<sup>12</sup> Public interview with the artist. University of California, Riverside. December 11, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> *Bruising for Besos* had its world premiere on February 20, 2009, at the Davidson/Valenti Theatre at the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center, under the guidance of Jon Imparto, the director of the Lily Tomlin/Jane Wagner Cultural Arts Center. It was presented in workshop form in part or full at the following places from 2004–2008: Stanford University, University of California at Davis, University of California at Santa Cruz, La Peña Cultural Center, and aligo (a statewide queer people of color organization in Texas). The first incarnation of the script came out of Cherrie Moraga's playwrighting courses, and she provided initial dramaturgy. *CHELA* has toured widely and been featured at the New York Fringe Festival (2012) and the Hollywood Fringe Festival

(2011). The play received its Los Angeles Premiere at the Frida Kahlo Theater (October 2008) as a bilingual production and its first English language production at Casa 0101 (February 2010) with productions at MECA (Multicultural Education Through Counseling with the Arts) in Houston, Texas (April 2010), the Santa Monica Playhouse (October 2010), and the Ion Theatre in San Diego (June 2011). *CHELA* has also been performed for college audiences at California State University, San Marcos. Both plays currently have film versions underway.

<sup>14</sup> See the following essay for a discussion of both Moraga's play and Adelina Anthony's role as a leading actor in this work: Tiffany Ana López (2010). "Performance Review: The Staging of Violence Against and Amongst Chicanas in *Digging Up the Dirt* by Cherrie Moraga." *Chicana/Latina Studies* 10, no. 1: 108-113. Anthony has also appeared as a cast member in Moraga's *New Fire—To Put Things Right Again* (Brava Theater, San Francisco, January 2012). In the post-play discussion that López facilitated for *Digging Up the Dirt*, Moraga shared that she could not have written the play without having met and worked with Anthony as a Chicana lesbian actor committed to the politics of the play and other works.

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