

THE (GOTHIC) GIFT OF DEATH in Cherríe Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea (2001)*

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*Death is a central issue in many of the essays and plays by Chicana activist and writer Cherríe Moraga. Interestingly, this manipulation of death often centers on the role of mothers in Moraga's work, as is evident in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*. This futuristic play is a rewriting of Euripides' Greek tragedy *Medea* from the perspective of a Chicana activist exiled from the new Aztlán because of her love for another woman. This essay addresses how Moraga manipulates gothic themes of violence, death, and sacrifice to highlight homophobic and sexist discourses that destroy family and hinder love. In effect, Moraga produces an alternative "decolonial" space in the most unlikely of moments—the murder of a child—in order to strip the destructive power of patriarchy. The complex analysis of death in this text requires a literary discussion of the gothic, Western religion, indigenous cultural practices, and Chicana feminism in order to show how Moraga not only critiques the replication of power and authority in the Chicano community, but also contributes to a reconceptualization of death as a "gift"—both a sacrifice leading to salvation from patriarchy, and a place of redemption and grace. [Key words: Cherríe Moraga, *The Hungry Woman*, Chicana theater, Chicana feminism, gothic literary theory]*

According to M. G. Spinelli's study of infanticide, at least one infant is killed every day in the United States, often by a parent. While this may be the case, I would suggest that 2001 was a particularly visible year for the murderous mother. In Houston, Texas, Andrea Yates drowned her five children in the bathtub because Satan told her that if she did, he would spare her children from hell (Spinelli 2005, 16). The national media emphasized the horror of this act, wondering what kind of a woman would commit such a heinous crime (Huckerby 2003, 150–51). A year later, Yates was found guilty of capital murder and sentenced to life in prison (Spinelli 2005, 17).

Coincidentally, 2001 was also the year Alejandro Amenábar's gothic thriller *The Others* was released in movie theaters across the nation. In addition to the spectacular re-creation of the haunted mansion—dark, candlelit hallways, misty landscapes, and strangeness—the film introduced Grace (Nicole Kidman), a distraught mother whose husband had left her with two pale white children suffering from a strange allergy to sunlight. What makes *The Others* so horrific, of course, is the eventual disclosure that Grace and her family are the ghosts in the house; in a fit of madness, Grace killed her children and herself. The premise for the story, then, is that in this ghostly form, Grace manages to find a strange kind of forgiveness from her family as she and the children are reconciled and decide to figure out a way to exist in an “other” world.

In addition to the real-life and cinematic cases of infanticide that occurred in 2001, that same year Chicana feminist playwright, essayist, poet, activist, and teacher Cherríe Moraga published her futuristic play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*. Moraga's version of Euripides' ancient Greek tragedy is set in the future, soon after a global uprising that, for one thing, returns Aztlán to the Mexican and Chicano community.¹ In *The Hungry Woman*, Medea is a Chicana activist and midwife exiled from Aztlán for falling in love with Luna—another woman. Medea's ex-husband, Jasón, cannot maintain his lands in Aztlán without a blood claim, and his new (and much younger) wife is barren. So Jasón requests custody of their son, Chac-Mool, who is approaching his thirteenth year and entering manhood. Rather than let her son return to a land and people who have betrayed her, Medea kills Chac-Mool and ends up in the mental ward of a penitentiary, where she abides during the course of the play. Moraga melds a very real experience of monstrous mothering with a ghost story of sorts. Medea is haunted by her dead son *and* her past as a Chicana activist. In this play, Moraga presents both a realistic portrait of a woman who kills her child to save him from a hellish existence

in the new Aztlán *and* uses an apparitional reconciliation that imagines redemption for a murderous mother. Notably, the three actual and fictional narratives of infanticide presented so far are linked. Andrea Yates, Grace, and Moraga's Mexican Medea are each presented as mad women who have killed their children to "save" them. However, while the documented story of Yates's killing of her children spotlights contemporary incidents of infanticide in a way that offers a moralizing tale about motherhood failed through violence, the fictional tales of gothic horror in the film and play contain hopeful elements, hinting that there might be a new way to imagine and construct family out of a violent act. I want to argue that this hopeful side of gothic horror is precisely what *The Hungry Woman* offers. My emphasis is on Chac-Mool's ghostly return to take Medea "home" because it is in that moment that Moraga, like Amenábar, uses the gothic to offer a new way of conceptualizing family in terms that heteronormative and patriarchal society refuse.

Before continuing, however, I must acknowledge that connecting Amenábar's overtly gothic film with Moraga's Chicana feminist play is not an obvious course, because *The Hungry Woman* seems more indebted to mythologies across the Americas and, indeed, around the world. Moreover, reading Chicana/o and Latina/o writing in the context of a gothic or American Gothic tradition is not a common practice.² In most cases, when ghosts or supernatural occurrences appear in these texts, the first association made is with Latin American magical realism. Nevertheless, there is a connection between Chicana/o and Latina/o literature and the gothic. For instance, Moraga's play deals with the violence induced by living as an abject Other. This is one of the key assumptions in gothic theory, as Eric Savoy suggests: "The entire history of the gothic lies behind... Julia Kristeva's understanding of the abject, that which is 'radically excluded' from individual and national self-definition yet which 'draws [the subject] toward the place where meaning collapses,' for 'from its

place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (1998, viii). Medea’s banishment from Aztlán and her inability to define herself as a member of that community are two ways she fits into Kristeva’s theory.

The gothic is important here because it is historically a literary genre that not only introduced literary monsters such as Dracula, Frankenstein, and Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde, but that also served as the aesthetic space where authors could comment on the socially and culturally aberrant. In eighteenth-century England, for instance, such gothic writers as Matthew “Monk” Lewis could portray Catholicism and the priesthood in scandalous ways. While many early gothic texts were written to titillate and reinforce racist and sexist national ideologies, contemporary uses of gothic romance and the horror fiction that followed in its steps focus more on what Judith Halberstam has called “technologies of monstrosity”—the construction of visual and rhetorical abjection by those invested in maintaining the status quo (1995, 22–23).

Medea seems monstrous in *The Hungry Woman* not only because she does not fit into what Moraga constructs as the unifying and fascist regimes of new Aztlán, but also because Medea refuses the bounds of a strictly defined sexuality. She is constantly shifting between her lesbian desire and her need to be acknowledged by her ex-husband, Jasón. Moraga presents this internal dilemma as another indicator of the complexity of life as an Other, something she must establish in order to challenge the technology of monstrosity that fosters stereotypical or facile ideas about a particular experience. Teresa Goddu indicates the importance of the gothic for some African American authors, who utilize it as a “mode of resistance” to “the master’s version of their history; by breaking the silence, they reclaim their history instead of being controlled by it” (1997, 155). Linda J. Holland-Toll further defines this as a “disaffirmative” practice, indicating that these gothic texts of horror do not offer happy

resolutions and therefore do not work to “conservatively...reaffirm the values of the society with which they are concerned” (2001, 8).

Moraga, of course, practices this “disaffirmative” writing, and articulates this as her goal in many of her essays. Indeed we can say her discursive strategies are more than this gothic disaffirmation, as we use Norma Alarcón’s “disidentification” (1990) or Chela Sandoval’s “methodology of the oppressed” to name the decidedly Chicana feminist bent of her aesthetic innovations. In the case of the Medea story, Moraga wanted to bring into focus the abject figures of Medea, La Llorona (the wailing woman who violently kills her children), and the pre-Colombian creation myth of the Hungry Woman by creating a drama that forced the reader and the audience to come to terms with Medea’s violence as something other than jealous rage. Indeed, Moraga allows her play to speak back to the many versions of the tale that only replicate false notions that a woman would sacrifice a child to simply spite a partner:

The official version was a lie... *Who would kill their kid over some man dumping them?* It wasn’t a strong enough reason. And yet everyone from Anaya to Euripides was telling us so. Well, if *traición* was the reason, could infanticide then be retaliation against misogyny, an act of vengeance not against one man, but man in general for a betrayal much graver than sexual infidelity: the enslavement and deformation of our sex? (2000, 145)

These questions lead Moraga to create an alternative mythology in order to work out a potentially more liberatory space for women. She offers that women—and, in particular, Chicanas and Latinas—might be hungry for justice and for an existence they do not have to protest violently. Moraga writes, “She is the story that has never been told truly, the story of that

hungry Mexican woman who is called puta/bruja/jota/loca because she refuses to forget that her half-life is not a natural-born fact” (2000, 147). Moraga chooses to tell the story of women who are not satisfied with the “whore/witch/dyke/madwoman” categories used against them, because these women do not conform to the expectations of patriarchy. It is a Chicana feminist revision of mythology and history that just happens to revolve around violent death.

Moraga’s use of murder and Medea’s seeming redemption via the last scene of the play, where she introduces the ghost of Chac-Mool, indicates that she, again like Amenábar, is introducing a family that has not been seen before and that can only be imagined as otherworldly. Goddu recognizes that many writers use the gothic as a way to deal with the complexity of culture: “Although the gothic is not the only form that articulates abjection, it serves as a primary means of speaking the unspeakable in American literature. Many texts that are not predominantly gothic use gothic effects at key moments to register cultural contradictions” (1997, 10). These cultural contradictions are precisely what Moraga wants to highlight in her plays.

When Medea kills her son and he reappears in phantasmal form, she inserts a gothic ghost into what was once a strictly mythological narrative in order to provide a hopeful ending that, without this generic experimentation, we could not comprehend. Indeed, I would argue that without attending to the gothic possibility in this text, or ignoring the possibility of reading this text through the gothic, one could miss the entire point of Chac-Mool’s final reappearance. Reading *The Hungry Woman* as a strictly realist text (which also, by the way, ignores its setting in the future and its potential as science fiction), one might believe that Chac-Mool did not die and that Medea is simply insane.³

But Medea is not simply mad in *The Hungry Woman*. Moraga's version of the Medea myth makes family from the "scratches" of love—from the pain and disappointment she experiences from patriotism and romantic love—offering a violent alternative to motherhood that both fulfills the function of a loving family and challenges the technologies of monstrosity that affect the dynamic between mother and child, lover and beloved, citizen and state. While some may find Moraga's fixation with death as potential—or as a gift—a macabre or a cynical approach to social justice, I would argue that she is simply countering this gesture in much the same ways we find death signified in Judeo-Christian belief *and* indigenous cultural practices. In this sense, death becomes an act of love, facilitating social change. By playing with murder as an act of—and death as a space of—subversion of patriarchal power, Moraga highlights the difficulties in escaping ideologies that perpetuate discourses of difference. In *The Hungry Woman* even strong feminist characters can internalize the language of patriarchy, and the resulting violence at once releases patriarchy's hold and represents a symptom of its power. As we look at how Moraga utilizes a (gothic) gift of death, we will first observe how Moraga represents mothers in her work, combats the gothic technologies of monstrosity, embraces *movidas*—movements—of love, and manipulates the gothic trope of the ghost to achieve successfully the gift of death, one we can read as love instead of madness or pathology.

Moraga's Mamas: Changing the Script

Moraga is perhaps most famous as a Chicana essayist and theorist since her coeditorship with Gloria Anzaldúa, of the important collection of writing by women of color, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1989). Her later, single-authored collections of essays and poetry—*Loving in the War Years: Lo Que Nunca Pasó Por Sus Labios* and *The Last Generation*—represent her theorizations about the Chicano community's relationship to racism, sexism, and homophobia. Scholars have commented on Moraga's ambivalence toward

Chicano nationalism (cf. Esquibel 2006; Tatonetti 2004; Yarbrow-Bejarano 1991, 2001). In some of her writings Moraga desires acceptance into the Chicano community; but at other times she critiques it for its unifying strategy and sexist tendencies. Lora Romero suggests that Moraga's visualizations of the Chicana/o Movement and nationalist politics is simplified in order to strengthen the position she makes against exclusionist policies and ideologies constructed to maintain difference. Instead, Romero reminds us, we should recognize that communities are comprised of complex groups and individuals, which implies that discussion and conflict were central to the movement (1993, 127–28). Nevertheless, Moraga's vision of Chicano nationalism is different from her fictional representations of Chicano family and community, where she consistently depicts and celebrates the characters that exist outside of patriarchal and exclusionary ideologies.

Throughout her playwriting career, Moraga has utilized ghosts, apparitions, shadows, madness, and murder in order to show the way cultural outsiders are treated by the patriarchal forces of Chicano nationalism and homophobia. Mothers play an important role in her critique of a traditional Chicano nationalist ideology that imagines heterosexuality as the norm and women as carriers of traditional roles. These expectations include continuing the practice of *marianismo*, or Mary worship, that suggests “good” women should follow the model of the Virgin Mary.⁴ This same ideology implies that those not defined or contained within this paradigm must represent La Malinche—the ultimate traitor to the race. Bad mothers, likewise, are associated with the myth of La Llorona. As Catrióna Rueda Esquibel suggests, these narratives can at once maintain patriarchy or be manipulated by Chicana feminists to challenge the patriarchal order.⁵ Moraga has consistently presented the complexities of maternity in order to challenge the stereotypical images of saintly Mexican and Chicana women. For instance, Moraga's play, *Shadow of a Man* (1994) can be

read as a tale about Hortencia, a Mexican American mother who must deal with her husband's abusive behavior while she maintains patriarchal standards for her daughters. In *Heroes and Saints* (1994) the mothers must organize against the pesticide use that causes cancer and birth defects, but they only do so after the (sacrificial) death of a baby and the martyrdom of Cerecita, a young woman presumably disfigured by the poisons. However, Moraga does not simply challenge the use of saintly imagery. She manipulates the so-called bad mothers and, in so doing, forces us to engage with real women who may not fit the aforementioned archetypes.

Moraga embraces the socially maligned mother as an opportunity to counter the ways some women are disassociated from the maternal. Moraga moves to address the actual difficulties with her own motherhood in her memoir, *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood* (1997). This text offers a realistic portrait of the struggles women have with maternity, especially as affected by nationalist discourses that attempt to prescribe women's roles. These portrayals of motherhood are so striking because of their strong connections to notions of death—both metaphoric and physical. Moraga uses the following quote from Michel Montaigne as an epigraph to her memoir: “To practice death is to practice freedom. /A man who has learned how to die/Has unlearned how to be a slave” (1997, 11). Moraga's use of this epigraph suggests that one must avoid being enslaved by the fear of death. She offers a way to grapple with death and the metaphors of monstrous motherhood represented in Medea narratives and the myths of La Malinche and La Llorona. As several critics have commented, Moraga's memoirs and plays define a process of building family that does not have to conform to heteronormative structures when traditional methods of building family limit emotional, social, and sexual needs. *The Hungry Woman* picks up this call.

Idealized representations of mothers persist in Chicano culture. As mentioned before, the language that states Chicana mothers are central to the communal cause hinges on a mythic idea of motherhood and purity exemplified in the Virgin Mary. Historian Emma Pérez has articulated the nationalist dependence on the symbolic mother as a systematic regression: “The nationalist imperative is to move back in time, a regression, a return to the mother, but the mother cannot be Malinche. She must be la Virgen de Guadalupe; she cannot be sexual. She must be pure for the nationalist dream. Hence, nationalism becomes a return to the mother—Aztlán—where woman can be only metaphor and object” (1999, 122). By desexualizing women and constructing them as metaphors, Chicano nationalist paradigms erase women, perhaps most especially mothers, as active and sexual agents of change in their own right. As metaphor, mothers protect the family structure; the problem is that the “real” mothers are not valued or recognized. According to Sonia Saldívar-Hull, “it takes Chicana feminist writers to tease out and present alternatives to women’s unequal positions in [the Chicano] family structure” (2000, 137).

In *The Hungry Woman*, Moraga’s treatment of the Medea myth also recognizes the discursive vilification within traditional misrepresentations of motherhood. Moraga thus approaches what Pérez has described as “the dark area that motherhood constitutes for a woman,” by creating another version of history; she is attempting to “express or authorize [Chicana] narratives” (1999, xv) and explores the complexities of a woman’s struggle with her love of nation, lover, and child.⁶

The (Gothic) Language of Murder

The vilification of women who defy the characterization of virginal or Holy mothers is part of what Justin D. Edwards terms a “gothic discourse”—that which “arises out of a language of terror, panic, and anxiety.” He continues,

“It consists of the rhetoric of repulsion and disgust; it is a discourse of regulation, establishing cultural modes of conduct by constructing taboos and regulating desires” (2003, xii). By taking up the stories of Medea and La Llorona and making the issue of death and murder central, Moraga acknowledges that these figures have been rhetorically maligned. Moraga’s investigation of this horrific tale discloses the complexity and extent of this gothic discourse.

Karen Halttunen has traced a “Gothic narrative of murder” from the murder sermons of early America that were used to instruct the community on grace and repentance to contemporary narratives that construct the murderer as monstrous. The views of the criminal shifted “from common sinner...into moral monster from whom readers were instructed to shrink, with a sense of *horror* that confirmed their own ‘normalcy’ in the face of the morally alien, and with a sense of *mystery* that testified to their own inability even to conceive of such an aberrant act” (Halttunen 1998, 4–5). The language of the gothic—the descriptions of monstrous acts or grotesque crimes—differentiates members of a community from those who would break the law. Thus gothic discourse can maintain social order, but it also contains political acts of terror. That is, if, as Moraga posits, these women are searching for satisfaction, or if they are hoping for retribution from many years of inequality and misunderstanding, then the gothic descriptors of murder are what silence them. These women are rendered as monstrous instead of as political activists.

The gothic imagination that Halttunen describes makes the horror of the Medea/La Llorona myth so potent. As they are traditionally depicted, these tales show Medea and La Llorona as monstrous women transgressing moral decency and the laws of maternal love. These so-called evil women

thus become examples to the greater community of whom *not* to become, reinforcing the male-dominated understanding of motherhood and love. As Moraga states, “The ancient myth reminds Mexican women that, culturally speaking, there is no mother-woman to manifest who is defined by us outside of patriarchy. We have never had the power to do the defining” (2000, 147). Contemporary rewriting of these myths, however, show that the gothic discourses can be manipulated for other purposes. In American Gothic texts—especially those written by women of color, such as Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *Paradise*, or Cristina García’s *The Agüero Sisters*—monstrous women draw our attention to the ways society at large makes us see these women as criminal instead of asking why these women performed violent acts.

Consciously or not, Moraga manipulates gothic tropes to challenge the rhetorical insistence on maligning murderous mothers. She offers complex and nuanced portraits of individuals who attempt to carve out lives and loves in an insistently repressive culture. In *The Hungry Woman*, Moraga portrays Medea as an active political woman who makes certain choices for reasons that cannot be construed as simply monstrous. After Medea kills Chac-Mool and is sent to the mental ward of a penitentiary, Luna—her partner—visits her every Saturday even though Medea never talks to her. Then finally, Chac-Mool returns from the dead to take his mother “home.” The complexity of Moraga’s version of the Medea story is also written into the structure of her play, which is set in the penitentiary’s mental ward but is also peppered with flashbacks of Medea’s interactions with her grandmother, Mama Sal; Luna; Chac-Mool; and Jásón. Interestingly, by highlighting what might traditionally be construed as the “monster’s” perspective, Moraga also demonstrates how gothic discourse can occlude “operations of love”—diverse forms of love activated in efforts to achieve social change.

Operations of Love

Chela Sandoval has theorized love as a political, democratic operation of change: “It is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political ‘*movidas*’—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being” (2000, 141). Sandoval connects love and political maneuvers in a way that explains Medea’s actions in *The Hungry Woman*. Medea’s activist passions arise from her love of nation, community, and family. While Jasón feels that “politics changed [her],” Medea seems to believe that her position hasn’t changed that much—that “politics” is not a problem but a right:

MEDEA: “Politics.” Men think women have no love of country, that the desire for nation is a male prerogative. So like gods, they pick and choose who is to be born and live and die in a land I bled for equal to any man. Aztlán, how you betrayed me! Y acá me encuentro in this wasteland where yerbas grow bitter for lack of water, my face pressed to the glass of my own revolution like some huérfana abandonada. (Moraga 2001, 15)

It would seem that Jasón’s notion of an “innocent” prepolitical Medea is a fiction—an ideal that lies far from the truth of Medea’s experience. Nevertheless, Medea expresses her disillusionment with that space in an interesting way. She seems caught in the ideological trap that manifests in the rhetorical Othering of her new community. Medea appropriates the language Jasón uses to describe the land outside of Aztlán, calling it a “wasteland.” She clings to her desire for Aztlán, “her face pressed up against the glass of [her] own revolution” at the cost of beginning a new “*mother land*” outside of this space. She refuses the new beginning she has made in exile and moves in the direction of self-loathing and antagonism toward those she loves outside of Aztlán: her grandmother, lover, son, and friends.

Medea's banishment from Aztlán and her inability to define herself as a member of any community together make up one way she is affected by patriarchal forces represented by the laws of a new Aztlán. However, Medea also has other issues. Throughout the play, she shifts between her lesbian relationship with Luna and her need to be acknowledged by Jasón. Moraga presents this internal dilemma as another indicator of the complexity of life as an Other, and the self-loathing Medea has internalized—something she must combat in order to challenge the master narrative that fosters stereotypical or facile ideas about love and desire. Medea's refusal to commit to Jasón or Luna is less a reflection of her disillusionment with her idyllic understanding of love and of the nation-state, and more an inability to live outside of the nationalist construction. It is a loss of her activist identity and her connection to the land that replaced all other subjectivities for her. In this way, Moraga shows us the challenges of living outside the parameters of what gets defined as the norm. This is not an idealized tale. In the moments of Medea's doubt, this story is a tragic depiction of the many ways patriarchy and nationalism affect even those strong women who actively work toward change and freedom. Her disenchantment causes Medea to wonder at the potential to live outside of Aztlán and outside of heteronormative relationships.

Medea's doubts about an alternative life in exile do not mean she wholeheartedly espouses the new Aztlán. In fact, the dramatic tension in *The Hungry Woman* centers on the fact that Jasón wants Chac-Mool to return to the homeland with him because it is the only way he can assure his bloodline and retain property in Aztlán. Medea is furious because she fears Chac-Mool will become like the rest of the men in that place:

CHAC-MOOL: I want to be initiated, Mamá.

MEDEA: You want to cut open your chest?

CHAC-MOOL: No, I—

MEDEA: Is that what this is all about! Toma! (*Grabbing a letter opener from the table*) Then start your initiation right here. Cut open your mother's chest first! Dig out her heart with your hands because that's what they'll teach you, to despise a mother's love, a woman's touch—. (Moraga 2001, 74)

At this moment, Medea equates the initiation rites in Aztlán with Chac-Mool's learning to "despise a mother's love, a woman's touch." She fears that upon opening his chest, Chac-Mool will let his affection and sensitivity out and replace them with disdain. Of course, Medea's reaction to Chac-Mool's desire equates his ceremony with her own death—a dramatic link between the two bodies and souls that will make her final act more understandable. Nevertheless, Medea's violent reaction repulses Chac-Mool, who denies her accusations but admits, "I gotta get outta here. I can't do this no more, Mom. I'm just a kid, it's not normal!" (Moraga 2001, 74–75). This moment of tension between mother and son uncovers the complexity of their relationship; while Chac-Mool assures Medea that he will return, he also desires the "normal."

It is this desire for the norm that causes Medea so much anxiety. She understands that "normal" is merely a rhetorical fabrication that she attempts to deconstruct:

MEDEA: You want normal? Then go with your father. He's perfectly normal. It's normal to send your five-year-old child and his mother into exile and then seven years later come back to collect the kid like a piece of property. It's normal for a nearly sixty-year-old Mexican man to marry a teenager. It's normal to lie about your race, your class, your origins, create a completely unoriginal fiction about yourself and then name yourself *la patria's* poet. But that's normal for a country that

robs land from its daughters to give to its sons unless of course they turn out to be jotos. (Moraga 2001, 74–75)

Where Chac-Mool hints that “normal” exists with his father, Medea discloses the false foundations upon which this perspective is built. Medea helped establish Aztlán. She fought alongside other men and women—heterosexuals and homosexuals alike—to regain Aztlán for the indigenous community. Nevertheless, she was exiled because of her separation from Jasón and her decision to live and love another way. She knows firsthand the dangers of “normal.” Once Aztlán was recovered, the men decided that women must exchange their role as active social agents for their “natural” role as nurturing mothers. The men of Aztlán have rejected their “daughters” and “jotos” in order to claim sovereignty over their land. Thus, Jasón’s lies are accepted, his actions condoned. This perception of “normal” is unacceptable to Medea because of its exclusionary practices. By challenging the desire that is developing in her son, she makes an effort to change the “natural” progression of this mentality—a “revolutionary maneuver” indeed.

What Medea does not realize is that Chac-Mool is very aware of how the new Aztlán was formed and at what expense. The first signs of Otherness in Aztlán occurred, according to Medea’s grandmother Mama Sal, shortly after it was established as a nation-state. It was then that some of the revolutionaries who fought for change were relegated to subordinate positions in society, or refused access to the land. When she describes these moments to Chac-Mool, Mama Sal and her friend Savannah shift between the language of revolution and revulsion:

MAMA SAL: . . . Pan-indigenismo tore América apart and Aztlán was born from the pedacitos.

SAVANNAH: Uniting the disenfranchised diaspora of Indian-

mestizos throughout the Southwest.

MAMA SAL: We were contentos for awhile—

SAVANNAH: Sort of. Until the revolutionaries told the women, put down your guns and pick up your babies.

MAMA SAL: ¡Fuera de las calles!

SAVANNAH: And into the kitchen! (*Beat*) Now that's not in the "official" version. (Moraga 2001, 23)

In this exchange, we see that even though the "disenfranchised diaspora of Indian-mestizos" come together to revolt and create Aztlán, they are quickly divided according to gender. The official story, much like the Chicano nationalist rhetoric challenged by Chicana feminists, emphasizes solidarity by relegating women to the "kitchen" in order to raise the children and maintain nationalist values. Of course, these women recognize that this is a rhetorical ploy; Savannah declares, "Now that's not in the 'official' version," indicating that, as Saldívar-Hull notes, the official history would celebrate women as central to the movement, so long as they remained in their place—the home.

The rhetorical strategy implemented to reinforce sexism also perpetuated homophobia among the revolutionaries. Again, a linguistic shift singles out these revolutionaries and excludes them from the new nation-state. Mama Sal and Savannah continue their history lesson and indicate the beginning of a gothic discourse that vilifies others in order to assuage the anxieties and fears of a homophobic state:

SAVANNAH: And then en masse, all the colored countries—

MAMA SAL: Threw out their jotería.

SAVANNAH: Queers of every color and shade and definition.

MAMA SAL: Y los homos became peregrinos...como nomads, just like our Aztec ancestors a thousand years ago. (Moraga 2001, 23)

Chac-Mool's history lesson alerts him to the repetition of inequality when a disenfranchised group becomes powerful. When Aztlán came together as a nation, they constrained the women within the home, and rejected "queers of every color and shade and definition." This overt act of segregation upon acknowledged statehood demonstrates the always-fraught relationships within any nationalist movement. As the *Afterward* suggests,

The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea functions as a prophetic cautionary tale about the complexity of power. Moraga's consideration of intra-cultural oppressions based on gender and sexuality problematizes foundational narratives of Chicano Nationalist ideology in provocative ways even as her artistic production attends to the discourse of Aztlán's symbolic viability. (Mayorga 2001, 160)

The articulation of "intra-cultural oppressions based on gender and sexuality" in the play is also present in the language of Otherness. While the terms *jotería* and *queer* have been reappropriated as empowering terms for homosexuals and their political/cultural allies, they are still utilized as derogatory terms that distinguish *one* type of love/desire as normal.

Despite Chac-Mool's knowledge of the "unofficial" history of Aztlán and their exile, Medea is anxious about his entrance into his father's sphere of influence, and she responds violently to his desire. But his refusal to join his father without properly quitting his mother indicates that Medea *has* taught Chac-Mool to be another type of man—one who will hold to the principles

of his youth. In fact, Medea may not see what her son has learned because she has not been his only teacher. In addition to Mama Sal and Savannah, Medea's lover Luna has been instrumental in Chac-Mool's development. Luna's relationship with Chac-Mool provides an alternative perspective of manhood. Instead of affirming the patriarchal thinking of Aztlán, Luna offers Chac-Mool the traditions of that space without infusing him with qualities that would hurt him or reify abuse of the earth or of his fellow humans. She is comfortable embracing and practicing Chicana/o and indigenous traditions without associating them with the specific national space of Aztlán or the nationalist politics espoused within it. Luna's tutelage strengthens Chac-Mool's desire for a cultural association with Aztlán while maintaining a strong love and respect for the life he has lived outside those borders.

Regardless of this excellent tutelage, Medea does not recognize Chac-Mool's ability to differentiate between the ideological differences battling for his allegiance. It may be that she is blinded by Jasón's desire to "take" Chac-Mool from her. Whatever the case, Medea's contradictory behavior, her use of violence to counteract the injustice she perceives in the patriarchal and homophobic Aztlán, indicates that she is caught in the cycle of violence which ultimately shades her perception. When Chac-Mool attempts to assert how he is different from his father and how he has learned another way of being from Medea, he is confronted with his mother's ambiguity. Medea wants to challenge the status quo, but she remains bound by the hateful ideology perpetuated by those who currently occupy Aztlán. Chac-Mool pities his mother and her inability to live with these contradictions.

Medea's violent reactions to Chac-Mool's desire are manifested verbally and physically. Mama Sal is the only one who seems to understand Medea's actions, albeit not with a wholehearted conviction in her methods of operation.

Mama Sal eventually enters the scene and tries to dissuade Medea from what she suspects is Medea's plan to hurt herself or Chac-Mool. In a surprising gesture, Mama Sal hesitantly discloses the amount of herbs it takes to create a poison strong enough to kill a person, providing Medea with a plan to save Chac-Mool from his father and a "normal" life in Aztlán. Again, the violence enacted in this murder is complex: it results from pressures outside of the counterrevolutionary space of Phoenix/Tamoanchán, where Medea lives in exile, but it is shocking because it positions mothers against children. However, as we shall see, these characters might not oppose each other at all. Instead, these violent acts can be considered gifts of death.

The Gift of Death

Jacques Derrida's treatment of moral and ethical responsibility in Western philosophy and religion is provocatively titled, *The Gift of Death*. In this work, he ties the notion of responsibility to an analysis of religious practice or theory. He does this to show that history is affected by the sense of responsibility—or the abdication of responsibility—that Judeo/Christian religions effect through "the Gift of Death." This "gift" hinges on the idea that there is a higher power—whether God or some ideological replacement—observing one's actions and/or ideas, and that individuals will be held accountable upon death for these actions/ideas. This "higher power" awards the "obedient" individual "salvation" in exchange for death or as a result of a death sacrifice. Within this belief system, one is not supposed to murder. Yet these secret acts are justified through the (often secretive and illusive) mandate one has to a higher god, ideology, concept, or to "the people." Somehow death achieves something—it gives something—that is used to justify the violence of the act (Derrida 1995). While Derrida uses this notion to deconstruct the illogical and unethical justifications for war and violence, it is also useful for understanding Medea's sense of purpose and what can be understood as her violent "operation of love."

Medea's higher mandate is her antagonism toward the politics of Jasón and Aztlán as a whole. While this might be the case, Medea's violence is not overtly discussed with Mama Sal or Luna. She enacts it silently, as in the Judeo-Christian example of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. This act is certainly not ethical according to Derrida's reading of philosophy and religion. Nevertheless, there remains an element of love in the act—parental affection—that makes this act a sacrifice, albeit a horrific one. While it is not an exact parallel to Abraham and Isaac, there is a sense that Medea is sacrificing her son and her motherly affection in order to maintain her radical position against the ideological foundations of Aztlán. Medea's relationship to her son, Chac-Mool, seems ambivalent if one looks at the volatile confrontations they have about his return to Aztlán. Nevertheless, Medea's attitude toward Chac-Mool is predicated on her love for him—on her fear of relinquishing him to an ideology that will kill his spirit. Moreover, by ending Chac-Mool's life, she is killing a part of herself—making a sacrifice that resonates with the words of Moraga's friend: "Infanticide is not a homicide,' she told me, 'but a suicide. A mother never completely separates from her child. She always remains a part of her children'" (2000, 146).

At the moment when Medea kills Chac-Mool, it is clearly a sacrifice of love, much like that which Abraham and Isaac (almost) experience. In Derrida's reflection upon the idea of sacrifice and love, he notices the absence of women in the traditional narrative:

It is difficult not to be struck by the absence of woman in these two monstrous yet banal stories. It is a story of father and son, of masculine figures, of hierarchies among men (God the father, Abraham, Isaac; the woman, Sarah, is she to whom nothing is said...). Would the logic of sacrificial responsibility within the implacable universality of the law, of its law, be altered,

inflected, attenuated, or displaced, if a woman were to intervene in some consequential manner? Does the system of this sacrificial responsibility and the double “gift of death” imply at its very basis an exclusion or sacrifice of woman? (1995, 76)

It is interesting that in Euripedes’ Medea story, a woman makes a sacrifice, but her actions are not interpreted as one, because of the assumption that her violence is not a response to a higher call. It is simply an act of human failing. Perhaps Moraga’s version of the tale, and the countless other feminist revisions, can illuminate the inability to hear the “silence” in Medea’s act—the ideology behind the “monstrous” story of sacrifice and vengeance and hunger. Medea’s actions certainly defer responsibility, but in this context, they are comparable to Jasón’s unethical exile of his family.

Yet Medea’s actions can be construed as much more loving than Jasón’s. For Medea, death *is* a sacrifice. And Moraga does present Medea communing with a higher power throughout her decision to kill her son. In this way Medea achieves what Gloria Anzaldúa has described as the Coatlicue State—the entrance into the depths of one’s soul to commune with the deity marked by violent sacrifice, but offering rebirth. According to Saldívar-Hull, Coatlicue is “an alternative to la Virgen de Guadalupe: the indigenous mother of all gods” (2000, 64). Anzaldúa describes Coatlicue as monstrous:

Coatlicue da luz a todo y a todo devora. Ella es el monstruo que se tragó todos los seres vivientes y los astros, es el monstruo que se traga al sol cada tarde y le da luz cada mañana... Coatlicue is the mountain, the Earth Mother who conceived all celestial beings out of her cavernous womb. Goddess of birth and death, Coatlicue gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of cosmic processes. (1999, 68)

Coatlicue's dual nature is important here because while this goddess is the primary giver of life, she also swallows and devours. Again, as Anzaldúa states above, she is the monster that swallows the sun every evening and gives birth to the light every morning. Moraga uses Coatlicue as the central goddess to whom Medea articulates her ambivalence about the sacrifice she must make of Chac-Mool:

Coatlicue, / this is my holy sacrifice. // I would have preferred to die a warrior woman, / like the Cihuatateo / women who die in childbirth / offering their own lives / to the birthing of others. // How much simpler things would have been. / But what life do I have to offer to my son now? // He refuses my gifts and turns to my enemies to make a man of him. / I cannot relinquish my son to them, / to walk ese camino triste / where they will call him / by his manly name / and he goes deaf / to hear it. // But the road I must walk is sadder still. (2001, 88)

Medea's supplication is also her confession. She will perform this deed, but it is only the goddess Coatlicue who understands why—who hears and accepts the silent contract with Medea, because it is a form of death she also recognizes as a first step to regeneration into another existence. Medea here turns to Coatlicue to work through the sacrifice she must make. By linking the goddess to Medea, Moraga implies that like Coatlicue, Medea must do something monstrous in order to give life or perpetuate the cycle of life that the patriarchal order would attempt to diminish. At this point in the play, Medea contemplates the “sadder” path she must take. Her preference would have been to have died upon Chac-Mool's birth—a noble and “simpler” end. Nevertheless, we see that the reality of the situation is much more complicated; it is a battle concerning whose ideology will mold Chac-Mool as a man. Medea's monstrous sacrifice, then, can be seen as a gift to her son, an act that will save him from the ravages of patriarchy.

The final death scene is both poignant and highly symbolic in its visual and aural references to sacrifice and grace. But it is also quite contradictory as Medea inhabits both the position of murderer and maternal ideal. The evening before he is to join his father in Aztlán, Chac-Mool enters the scene after Medea finishes her prayer/confession to Coatlicue, and they reconcile their differences:

MEDEA: (*After a beat*) Forgive me, hijo.

CHAC-MOOL: Mom, I—

MEDEA: Ya. Tal vez no vale mucho after so many words, harsh words, pero...could I bless you now, before you go?

CHAC-MOOL: Now?

MEDEA: I got the copal burning.

CHAC-MOOL: Okay.

[*He goes to her, opens his hands in front of him. She brings the smoking resin to him, wafts his body with it.*]

MEDEA: Our ancestors are watching, mijo. They pity us. They know what is in our hearts.

CHAC-MOOL: I'm...sorry.

[*She prays over him softly, then returns the burning copal to her altar.*]

(Moraga 2001, 88–89)

This tender moment is a cleansing for both characters, even though Medea and Chac-Mool have different interpretations of the event. The blessing that Medea offers from the burning copal signifies a preparation for an entrance into another world, while Chac-Mool understands this to be his entrance into Aztlán. When she states, “Our ancestors are watching, hijo. They pity us. They know what is in our hearts,” Medea acknowledges their acceptance of what she

must do while simultaneously preparing Chac-Mool to join them. In her eyes, Medea is sending Chac-Mool to be with the ancestors instead of the corrupted Aztlán. At least in her imagination, Medea's offering to Chac-Mool is a gift of death—salvation from the path he seeks in Aztlán.

Despite Medea's final calling out to Coatlicue, however, Moraga's play ends in a sense of reflection of Catholic imagery syncretized with Aztec ritual. This is best illustrated in Moraga's stage directions for Chac-Mool's death:

He passes out. It is a pietà image, MEDEA holding him limp within her arms. Then, with much effort, she tries to drag CHAC-MOOL's body into the small field of corn. She is unable to. The CIHUATATEO enter, dressed in the traditional Aztec [costume]. They lift CHAC-MOOL and take him into the center of the field. Meanwhile, MEDEA starts pulling up all the overgrown corn stalks in the field, piling them into a mound higher and higher. She becomes frenzied, a frightening image, her white nightgown flowing in the sudden wind. The pile of blue corn stalks have formed a kind of altar. The CIHUATATEO heave CHAC-MOOL's body on top of it. (Moraga 2001, 91)

The syncretism of religious imagery in this scene replicates traditional Western religious visual vocabulary, especially that found in Renaissance art, while evoking indigenous religious burial and harvest practices. By their very nature, these poses evoke the innocence of “virginal motherhood”—the very kind that Medea indicates is impossible when she attributes innocence to the “sleep of the childless.” Nevertheless, they connect Medea to the Virgin Mother in an uncanny way—making her a perverse symbol of maternal love and one that is appropriate for the gothic reversal of traditional symbols and ideological perspectives that Moraga ultimately enacts in this play. Mary had to give Jesus

up for the good of mankind; Medea had to sacrifice Chac-Mool because of the bad of mankind. Chac-Mool is the sacrifice for the sins of restrictive nationalist thinking not only of U.S. ideas about citizenship and national identity, but also of the Chicano movement—the sins of the fathers, if you will.

The operation of love—a “movida” as Sandoval describes one of love’s functions—illuminates the sacrificial pain underlying the murder. Traditional views of successful mother-son relationships are thwarted in this play. Instead of the idyllic version, we get a horrific tale of murder. But there is a slippery shift in Medea’s depiction that can be understood in a more generous light than past versions, precisely because it is created from the perspective of the originally silenced monstrous mother. Like other versions of the story, Medea is a mother made from scratches. More important, however, is Medea’s disappointment in her love of Aztlán as an imagined community and “motherland.” Medea is not a jilted lover here. She actively leaves her husband for a better love with Luna, and a better life after Aztlán disappoints her. As such, Medea signifies love as a movida that shifts the ways she behaves and the ways she believes. These disappointments do not hinder her love for Chac-Mool. But when she is left with only one way to love him, to “save” him from becoming a man in Aztlán—a fate worse than death—in true gothic fashion, she does not hesitate to offer the gift of death.

Gothic Ghosts and Spiritual Gifts

While the gothic may not be the only way to discuss madness, murder, and monstrosity in depictions of Chicana motherhood, I would argue that ignoring the gothic tropes in *The Hungry Woman* makes it very difficult to locate and identify a hopeful feminist message in this violent depiction of mothering. Others have read this play and grappled with the violent ending as a sign that the entire play is simply a mad episode. However, in the revision of the

Medea/La Llorona myth, Moraga moves to exchange the value of the gothic horror presented in the tale; she moves it from abhorrence of the protagonist, to a more sympathetic view. If the audience still feels Medea's monstrosity after she murders Chac-Mool, at least it also understands the monstrosity of Jasón and the Chicano nationalist sympathizers within and outside of Aztlán. If *The Hungry Woman* simply ended with murder, Medea would remain abject without challenging the existence of the technologies that would make her a monster. However, Moraga does not leave the story here. In fact, she manipulates time to *begin* the play after Medea kills Chac-Mool—when she is in the psychiatric ward of the penitentiary—in order to deemphasize the importance of the murder. This resonates with Pérez's use of time in the construction of a Chicana history: "My history of Chicanas, a feminist history, has been written inside a decolonial time lag, with a third space feminist critique, between what has been, what is, and what many of us hope will be. All at once we live the past, present, and future" (Pérez 1999, 127). The simultaneity of experience within a decolonial imaginary creates an interesting space from which to read the role of death in *The Hungry Woman*. At the end of the play, Moraga creates a "third space" emphasizing that "all at once we live the past, present, and future." Curiously, the moment with the most potential in Moraga's play is the most gothic moment—Chac-Mool's posthumous apparitional return:

[CHAC-MOOL suddenly appears in MEDEA's room]

MEDEA: Are you a ghost?

CHAC-MOOL: No.

MEDEA: You're mistaken. You are a ghost. You're the son I mourn, the one I pray to, that his heart may soften when I join him on the other side.

CHAC-MOOL: It's me.

MEDEA: Daily, I try to join him and my hands are always emptied of the instruments of death. They steal my fingernail file and pantyhose and yerbas. They give me no yerbas here, just pathetic pastel pills that numb me, but won't kill me. They're useless. (2001, 97)

Chac-Mool refuses death as a limiter of life. He is not a ghost, because death did not evacuate him of life. Yet, he returns to his mother after his death, not as a ghost of himself, but as himself—a living apparition that verifies and validates Medea's gift of death. It is an extension of what Moraga writes in her memoir: "Life and death. Beginnings and endings. Spirits become flesh, then give up the ghost of the body" (1997, 92). The return to the spiritual is a giving up of the "ghost of the body." Medea then, is the ghost in this scenario, Chac-Mool the spirit that continues after he has given up the body. Medea does not immediately understand this point, reiterating, "You are a ghost. You're the son I mourn, the one I pray to." Reading Chac-Mool through attention to gothic tropes of ghosts and haunting offers the space to imagine a radical *movida* of love. As we can learn to sympathize with Amenábar's Grace in *The Others*, we can learn to do so with the "monstrous" mother because, as ghosts, her children can forgive her. In Medea's case, redemption is complete when Chac-Mool takes her "home," indicating that she has done the right thing—however unethical and horrific it may seem.

Also important to note is that Medea has trouble understanding Chac-Mool as anything other than a ghost. In gothic traditions, ghosts have often denied their ghostliness because, in fact, they are so alive. Moreover, many theorists have discussed the importance of this trope not in light of the ghost itself as a character, but instead, the haunting of the live person by some traumatic

past (Brogan 1998). That is what Chac-Mool represents for Medea. Whatever distinction Chac-Mool decides to make, he clearly provides Medea a sense of redemption, especially when he finally gives her the sense of home she failed to find in Aztlán and with Luna. Chac-Mool has returned to reciprocate the gift of death his mother provided him and create a family from the violence inflicted upon them both:

MEDEA: Oh. (*Pause*) Why have you come here?

CHAC-MOOL: To take you away.

MEDEA: Away...where?

CHAC-MOOL: Home...Come look out the window, Mom. See the moon...Watch the moon. By the full moon, you'll be looking at saguaros. You're going home.

MEDEA: How will I get there?

CHAC-MOOL: I'm taking you.

[He leads her by the hand back to the bed. He holds a handful of powdered herbs and puts them into a small paper cup of water.]

MEDEA: Mijo?

CHAC-MOOL: Here, drink this. It'll help you sleep.

[CHAC-MOOL holds MEDEA's head while she drinks. She is instantly drowsy. CHAC-MOOL gathers her into his arms as she falls into a deep sleep. It is a pietà image.] (2001, 98–99)

The repetition of the mode of death, this time in a reverse pietà position, indicates that now Chac-Mool provides the gift of death. He has become the man-child offering his mother relief and comfort. He takes her to the window

and shows her the moon—La Luna—and the saguaro cacti that populate the desert regions of the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. In this way, the apparitional return of Chac-Mool represents Medea's return to the desert. But it is a different space—a geographic border—and, if this is understood as a gothic tale, a border between life and death. Or better, it is a space that can only be invented in death.

In this gothic scene of apparition and death, Moraga transforms this play of monstrous motherhood into a site of potential and regeneration. In death there is reunion and a "future hope" that is part of all "movidas" of love (Sandoval 2000), of disaffirmative practices (Pérez 1999), and of many Latina/o gothic texts. While death may not seem like a positive "beginning," Moraga's play asserts that it can be a place to start imagining the world from a decolonized perspective. By telling history from that "future space," she is able to imagine another future without disappointment and disillusionment—a real place organized by love, but only reachable through death.

This dramatic enactment provides the perspective of a monstrous mother. Moraga has forced readers and audiences to imagine and witness the intricacies of a woman's experience of rejection from her nation-state and homeland as well as the effects of patriarchy on those who are exiled because of their difference. What is unique about Moraga's Medea play is the use of sacrifice and redemption through death and haunting that can only be seen as movidas of love and of decolonial being if read as a (gothic) gift of death. Moraga's play provides insight into the injustices women experience daily, but also into the violence these injustices provoke. The desire for something more—for another mode of existence in another world—explains both the real and fictional mothers (Andrea Yates, Grace, and Medea) as women hungry for a better existence for their children and themselves. In *The Hungry Woman* Moraga

suggests that whatever difficulties we have comprehending these mothers, they are important to recognize if we are going to see the difficulties women have as activists, mothers, and lovers in *this* world.

Notes

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¹ Euripides' tragedy presents an angry Medea tortured by the fact that her husband, Jason, has left her alone with the children in order to marry a Corinthian princess. By the end of the play, Medea murders the princess, the king of Corinth, and her own two sons in order to wreak vengeance upon Jason's betrayal. The Medea story is, regardless of its presentation, seen as horrific. But it is important to note that it also plays with the idea of otherness—of not belonging in some way. Euripides' tale emphasizes the way Medea—an ethnic other—must deal with her lack of rights and her “barbaric passions.”

² Ana María Carbonell (1997) is the only other critic who has overtly made the connection between the gothic and Chicana feminist writings. Her dissertation connects African American and Chicana writings on the mother to the gothic tradition.

³ Lisbeth Grant-Britton (2000) has an interesting reading of this play as an example of Chicana science fiction. But Catrióna Rueda Esquibel misreads the play's ending: “Finally, the play refuses/confuses the outcome, as we see that Medea is not in prison for the murder, as it first appeared, but in a mental institution. Chac-Mool comes to take her home, suggesting that Medea never really killed him but certainly did some kind of violence to their relationship that has landed her in the institution” (2006, 36). This would be an extremely viable reading except that Moraga's “Playwright's Note and Setting” states, “Medea is an inmate in a prison psychiatric ward” and has been there incarcerated (2001, 6–7). It is more probable that a murder has occurred and the ending can be better understood via gothic criticism.

⁴ Mothers are often idealized in the Western imagination. Julia Kristeva examines this phenomenon, especially as it relates to the Virgin Mary, challenging the ways “motherhood” stands in for love in the cultural imagination of many writers and critics (Kristeva 1987). Instead of reinforcing the idealized versions of this figure of feminine virtue and love, however, Kristeva challenges the reader to “approach the dark area that motherhood constitutes for a woman” (1987, 256). She draws attention to the experience of mothering by articulating the need to “listen, more carefully than ever, to what mothers are saying today, through their economic difficulties

and, . . . through their discomforts, insomnias, joys, angers, desires, pains, and pleasures” (256). Misrepresentations of motherhood—the automatic assumption that all mothers are like the (male) representations of the Virgin Mother—are ubiquitous.

⁵ While Catrióna Rueda Esquibel presents a fascinating and highly relevant discussion of La Llorona and the myths of Mexican and Chicana women that contribute to this discussion of motherhood, many others have developed these ideas. See particularly the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), Rosa-Linda Fregoso (2003), Cherríe Moraga (1997, 2000), Sonia Saldivar-Hull (2000), and Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (1991, 2001).

⁶ Emma Pérez argues that Chicanas must intervene in the narratives/histories that are proposed in their name: “And time, in all its dialectical invention and promise, its so-called inherent progress has not granted Chicanas, Mexicanas, Indias much of a voice at all. We are spoken about, spoken for, and ultimately encoded as whining, hysterical, irrational or passive women who cannot know what is good for us, who cannot know how to express or authorize our own narratives. But we will. And we do” (xv).

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