

Ana Castillo as *Santera*:
Reconstructing Popular Religious Praxis

Gail Pérez

*Storytelling: her words set into motion the forces that
lie dormant in things and beings.*

—Trinh Minh-ha

Introduction

In June of 1997, an item appeared in the *San Diego Union Tribune* that recounted the miraculous appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City's Hidalgo Subway. Spotted by a 15-year-old girl who was mopping the floor, the Virgin has attracted hundreds to the site, who come bearing candles and flowers to Our Lady. Their responses to this people's miracle replay the contestation of meanings, both hegemonic and counterhegemonic, generated not only in Mexico since the original apparition in 1531, but in subsequent apparitions throughout the American Southwest. Of the "Metro Miracle," working women said, "This is telling us that there is divine light, that we are not alone" and "She is here....You can see her if you have faith." A student was more skeptical, "Let's see what the government has invented for us now." Rather predictably, the Archbishop gave the final word: "It is not a miracle." The history of Our Lady of Guadalupe demonstrates that her cult was initially opposed by the Franciscans as obvious indigenous atavism, until her image was later recognized by the hierarchy as a useful instrument of conversion. However, her apparition continued to grace indigenous revolts throughout 18th-century Chiapas, the Yucatan, and Morelos, often in highly syncretic forms. It was on the foothills of the volcano Popocatepetl that Antonio Perez in the 1760s found an image of the Virgin that inspired a millennial movement to rid local peoples of a corrupt clergy and Spanish *hacendados*, all in the name of the Christian Virgin. "God," Antonio announced, "is the ear of corn, and the three ears of corn,

the Holy Trinity" (Florescano 1994, 161- 5). Indigenous revival movements were motivated by the deep sense that both Christians and their own gods had abandoned them. So profound is this legacy of both political and ironic hermeneutics that locals in Mexico City interpreted the eruption of "El Popo" on the eve of the 1997 elections as a sign that the god/mountain was angry with the PRI.

I am indulging in precisely the amused, faithful, political interpretive practices of popular religion/folklore that is the subject of Ana Castillo's *cuento* (or better, *metacuento*), *So Far from God*. Published at about the same time as her book of prose, *Massacre of the Dreamers* (1994), the novel recounts the miraculous doings of a poor, female-headed household in the old Penitente town of Tomé, New Mexico. Four hundred years ago Juan de Oñate made his *entrada* into New Mexico, then a distant outpost of New Spain and later of Mexico. The legacy of Franciscan missions, Indian enslavement, and cultural syncretism provides an ideal site for the reimagining of Chicano(a) culture from a feminist (or Xicana) perspective. (Of course, isolation and the neglect of church and state have played and still do play a role in Chicano/Hispano cultural production; thus, (Chicanas(os) are so far from God.) As Castillo relates in *Massacre of the Dreamers*, miracles still have their place within our 500 years of struggle; in 1992 the Virgin appeared on an oak tree during the mostly female-led cannery strike in Watsonville, CA:

The response of the *Mexicanas* to the apparition of the Virgin's image on the oak tree is, to my mind, an indication of a need for spiritual consolation and material relief. Again, it is not so much a manifestation of the Church but of the women's culture and ethnic identity. Above all, I see the Guadalupan Cult as an unspoken, if not unconscious, devotion to their own version of the Goddess. (Castillo 1994, 48)

The novel, then, is embedded in a long tradition of voicing struggle and oppositional consciousness in the language of miracle and popular religion. Whatever the "real" status of the

Metro or oak tree miracles, Castillo's concern (and ours) should be the social and political struggles motivating each community of interpreters: in this case, the plight of contemporary Chicanas. The women in Mexico City interpret the sign as showing they are "not alone," not abandoned; just as indigenous leaders felt their apparitions testified to their suffering under the ontological abandonment of the conquest, just as the cannery workers struggled, often abandoned by the men who should have supported them. While *Massacre of the Dreamers* proposes a serious Xicana spirituality, in the vein of Luisah Teish's *Jambalaya* (1985) or Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), the novel is about the process of interpretation and the invention of culture and ethnicity within the praxis of the everyday lives of working-class Xicanas. Because Castillo has done such a meticulous job of research, each allusion in the allegorical narrative tends to endlessly reverberate with historical/mythic meanings. The text forces us to enact its theme—recovery through recovery and rememory of the past. Reconstituting female power relies on an act of cultural memory that excavates the untold story of female agency, indigenist revolt, and woman-centered spirituality.

Given Castillo's subject matter—the possibility of Chicana resistance to the interlocking systems of late capitalism, religion, and family—I hope that it is clear why this discussion must be wide-ranging. One system of oppression inevitably leads us to another. Concerning family, Cherrie Moraga complains, in her comments on the 1990 CARA exhibit, that Chicano art has not really engaged in the "breakdown and shake-up of La Familia y La Iglesia" (Moraga 1993, 72). Castillo bravely takes this on in light of the current debate about the "Latino" family as the new "model minority" with strong family values. This discourse erases the reality of the exploitation of Third World women in a restructured economy, and feeds the cultural defensiveness of Chicanas(os) who seek to counter racist discourse with our traditions of family and spirituality, but who also are thereby reluctant to spill the beans about sexism and abuse within the family. Carlos Vélez-Ibañez's commentary on Hispano/Mexican

households in the Southwest outlines the crucial role of family and kin networks in economic and psychic survival: "At the household level, the main struggle of the members is to defend themselves against repeated attempts by the state and/or market to exert complete control over their labor and productive capacities" (Vélez-Ibañez 1996, 137). "Thick" or multiple kin relationships, clustered households, especially around the grandparents, and ritual cycles of exchange help families share knowledge, resources, family history and cultural practices. Baptisms, *quinceañeras*, Tupperware parties, and holidays ritualize relationships and keep alive cultural practices. Most crucially, within the households occur cultural conflicts; children are being socialized in the values of mainstream individualism and consumerism, while being asked to participate in cooperation and sharing at home. These positive values may not be viewed as such by children indoctrinated into Anglo values of "self-serving vertical mobility": "These deny the cultural efficacy of the population by framing them within derogatory stereotypes" (180). Children exist in a world which they simultaneously deny, and this alienation from one's own sources of power is one of Castillo's important themes. Obviously, as Vélez-Ibañez points out, "*Mexicanas* are the primary agents of change and stability," although he leaves it at that. Even more surprising, he finds that after an initial period of individualistic social mobility, the young tend to return to the family and maintain the religious and cultural rituals even into the second and third generations. Given this absolutely critical role of social relations, Vélez-Ibañez asks that we not deny patriarchy, but that we view it within the broader context of survival.

It is precisely this role of "survival," however, that really prevents the question of gender from ever arising. Castillo foregrounds the role of women as cultural producers, demanding that we interrogate the religion and the definition of motherhood that is being "transmitted." By not unmasking gender inequality as we unmask the racial/cultural stereotyping Vélez-Ibañez refers to, we are maintaining the family as the refuge in a heartless world, instead of transforming the world. This, I'm afraid, is what he refers to as "gender posturing" in "academic hallways."

Castillo makes the point in *Massacre of the Dreamers* that women create children but they do not create the world they go into: "If we believe in a value system that seeks the common good of all members of society, by applying the very qualities and expectations we have placed on Motherhood to our legislature and our social system—to care selflessly for her young, to be responsible for her children's material, spiritual and emotional needs—we are providing for the future" (Castillo 1994, 187). If we focus on survival, we never need ask what creates the evil we survive, in this case the global capitalism and competitive individualism that are bolstered by traditional gender roles. Vélez-Ibañez's sample also ignores the fact that overall the number of female-headed households went up during the 1980s and he cannot account for the social forces behind this.

Patricia Zavella (1996) has studied the electronics and garment industry in the Rio Grande Valley (the site of Castillo's *So Far from God*) and argues that the employment boom there for Chicanas came at some cost. Relying on gender divisions of labor already in place throughout these industries worldwide, Chicanas were the preferred labor force. As traditional male-dominated industrial jobs declined, women did move up as some men moved down. Gender analysis here is not "posturing" but absolutely central to understanding why women are the preferred labor force in nonunion, often paternalistic and exploitative assembly plants worldwide. The Albuquerque *Mexicana* Zavella profiles briefly participated in the "boom," but her "traditional values" (the very ones Vélez-Ibañez celebrates) include "deference to her wealthy Anglo benefactors, repression of her anger toward her ex-spouse, and reliance on self and kin rather than on institutional support" (380). In other words, she has no public power to demand that institutions meet her needs, in spite of the help that her kin offered.

As for "Iglesia," Chicano culture and Catholicism, so intimately intertwined, are situated within the household space where these social/economic transformations occur. Social mobility for Chicanas, of which Castillo is herself an example, must reveal the contradictions within the "ritual cycles of exchange" as their

experiences in the workforce and in higher education conscientize(2) them. Furthermore, I think that Castillo's artistic representation concerns a certain group of Chicanas; *Massacre of the Dreamers* focuses on working-class women and the canneries, factories, and fields that are the sites of their struggle. It is within the context of their praxis that cultural reinvention and interpretation occurs. In *Sunbelt Working Mothers* (1993), the authors emphasize the new anthropological view of culture as not simply static, but as a site of improvisation and agency within existing norms. These improvisations are driven by survival: "We see women as active agents who develop strategies for managing their everyday lives" (Lamphere *et al.* 17). The problem we've noted in terms of positive cultural norms (Vélez-Ibañez) and female agency (Zavella) is that these behaviors, because of sexism and racism, are not always viewed as positive, as oppositional, as empowering.

Castillo's revisionist Catholicism, as interpreted within the praxis of working-class Chicanas, initially seems to fix her thought within the emerging body of work by Latina Theologians. Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz radically reinterprets Catholic tradition in light of the survival practices of Latinas, including their naming of their own reality, their understanding of God, the saints, of liberation. Like Castillo, she insists on solidarity with working-class women. Only by creating a society that gives them actualized being and not simply existence will true social transformation occur: "This option (for the poor) is grounded in the belief that from their marginality, the poor and oppressed can see a different future, a better future for themselves, and, in the long run...a better future for all" (Isasi-Díaz 1993, 179). Noting the extreme marginality of Latinas, both within the Church hierarchy and socially, Isasi-Díaz acknowledges the power of popular religion to contribute to theology and the liberation of Latinas. Their insights are to be judged not according to doctrinal scrutiny, but according to the broader Gospel message of "Justice and Love" (Isasi-Díaz and Tarango 1988, 70). The importance of this movement is that it gives (or purports to give) the woman in the Mexico City subway the authority to reinterpret the sacred, according to

her needs, and in the woman's voice that the Church labors to exclude.

All of this introductory discussion speaks to the special significance of the home and of women as cultural agents. Rowe and Schelling's *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* (1991) provides an analysis particularly relevant to Castillo's project. In the ongoing conquest of the Americas, the clash between Indigenous and European worldviews continues, just as it does in contemporary New Mexico (Gutierrez 1991). While church and state promulgate official history and memory, there remain sites of alternative cultural memory. Cultural memory is a practice that occurs within social spaces; eliminating such spaces creates a kind of public amnesia, eradicating other political and cultural alternatives. In colonial Mexico, the space that best eluded the destruction of native practices was the home, especially concerning matters of healing, love problems, birth, and the general amelioration of misfortune. While the total Amerindian world view behind such magical practices tended to disappear, it was women who passed on this "counteracculturation." In the home altars of women, the Church's monopolization of the sacred (we recall the Archbishop's pronouncements in Mexico City) was broken. This cultural transmission, Rowe and Schelling argue, occurred "between tactical obedience and pragmatic evasion: *obedezco pero no cumpla*" (23). Latina theologians such as Isasi-Díaz embrace the Indian and African strands of popular religion as long as it is "good and life giving," but they cannot do what I believe to be the project of writers like Castillo, Cherrie Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa. And that is to pull out the subversive "forgotten" memories of another worldview, the suppressed countervalues of women and Native peoples. A final function of the home, then, is to provide the social space that articulates indigenous values, chiefly in the healing practices of *curanderismo*.

Castillo's tale of a multigenerational family of women is also a way of confronting her own Catholic mother and all the attendant anxiety about gender, culture, and identity. In an interview with Marta Navarro (1991), Castillo expresses her deep ambivalence, on the one hand admiring her mother's labor and

suffering (survival), and on the other realizing that her mother's religion and investment in traditional roles would condemn her own quest for wholeness. In the essay "La Macha: Toward a Beautiful Whole Self," she castigates the misogyny and antisexuality of the Church and prefigures the theme of *So Far from God*; practices such as the cult of the saints send repressive messages: "What kind of convoluted message do we give young Catholic women when we teach them to be obedient and submissive and yet to protect their virtue even on the pain of death?" (1991, 33). Castillo's literary/cultural project, I argue, is not that of the new Latino(a) theologians. With great respect, she will reject the Catholicism of the mothers for the *curanderismo* of the grandmothers: "Although the Catholic Church as an institution cannot for a number of reasons guide us as Mexican/Amerindian women into the 21st century, we cannot make a blanket dismissal of Catholicism either. Rejecting the intolerant structure of the church does not automatically obliterate its entrenchment in our culture" (1994, 96). One could argue, as I think Castillo's art exemplifies that Mexican Catholicism is also the cultural space (especially in the figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe) in which the indigenous world view survives.(3) The spirituality of the *abuelas*, then, is potent for its indigenous strand of curing and unconditional love: "So certain feminists of that form of activism, are recalling the folkways of their grandmothers while altering the Catholic Faith of their devout mothers" (Castillo 1994, 153). This revisionism is very movingly stated in a recent essay in the anthology *Goddess of the Americas* (1996). There, Castillo recounts how her grandmother, a *curandera*, cured her of a devastating childhood illness—malnutrition. As a wounded child who has been healed, Castillo, within shamanic tradition must, in turn, heal. As intellectual and artist, her first step must be in recovering the female power of creation embedded in Our Lady:

"When Our Mother is seen only as the one-dimensional Mary of modern times, instead of the great dual force of life and death, She is relegated to the same second-class status of most women in the world. She is without desires of her

self-less and sexless except for her womb. Because of our humility, we call upon her privately, quietly in prayer, from our kitchens and bedrooms, as if she had more important matters to attend to besides those of a mother, of all mothers, beside those of any ordinary woman—when no woman born who knows herself could ever be ordinary” (Castillo 1996, 78).

As Maxine Baca Zinn’s work on Chicanas within the family revealed so long ago, stereotypes of Chicanas as long-suffering mothers are lies: “Chicano families are mother centered, and...Chicanas have developed alignments with other women which nurture a collective sense of their own worth” (Zinn 1976, 280). However, patriarchal values in both dominant and Mexican culture alienate Chicanas from their own agency, so that they view their own power as “ordinary” and not as potentially revolutionary. As I’ve noted, the home is also the site of indigenous practices that can be recuperated into an alternative spirituality. This is very much in line with the earliest Chicano(a) cultural projects such as Luis Váldez’ Teatro Campesino. In her brilliant book on the *teatro*, Yolanda Broyles-González quotes Váldez on the “brown face beneath the white mask”: “Frijoles and tortillas remain, but the totality of the *Indio*’s vision is gone. *Curandera*’s make use of plants and herbs as popular cures, without knowing that their knowledge is what remains of a great medical science” (1994, 87). Castillo’s allegory, I argue, uncovers alternative world views—precisely non-Christian—to serve as utopian, oppositional standpoints. As a work like the Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil’s *Batalla’s México Profundo* (1996) makes clear, our *mestiza* grandmothers might not fully understand their own practices, but they are part of a different world view which is everywhere alive in Mexico, if we have eyes to see it (especially in collective community practices). This alternative vision defines our relationship with nature in a very different way: “In this civilization, unlike that of the West, the natural world is not seen as an enemy. Neither is it assumed that greater human self-realization is achieved through separation from nature” (27).

The other deeply non-Christian element of popular religion is the notion of immanence, the effective presence of the divine in the image of the saints (or gods!); in other words, magic. As Rowe and Schelling point out, popular religion rejects Christian notions of “moral perfection” for the more important everyday “livelihood of self and family for whose benefit the assistance of the saints is sought” (70).

Castillo’s time in New Mexico has allowed her to locate her “vision in which brown women refuse to work for a system that renders us ineffective and invisible except to serve it” in a site that recapitulates the conquest of indigenous peoples by the Spanish, the Mexicans, and the Anglo-Americans. The contemporary unholy mix of New Mexican culture from *La Conquistadora*, the Virgin who presided over the reconquest of New Mexico’s Indians in 1692, to New Age vision quests—provides a final theoretical challenge for Chicana(o) artists. The historian Ramón Gutiérrez refers to the conscious use of pageantry in 1598 by Juan de Oñate in the conquest of New Mexico, who went so far as to restage the conquest of Tenochtitlan for the benefit of the Pueblo Indians (1991). The question has always been how women and other subaltern peoples have staged their own resistance within the imposition of Christian forms. Yolanda Broyles-González demonstrates how the Christian Shepherd’s play, the *Pastorela*, was staged by indigenous performers to parody Christian theology. “Traditional” Southwestern cultural forms—*dichos*, *dramas*, *cuentos*—are all too often taught in a way that erases their subversion. Why not view the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe as the Indian’s first countermiracle? Instead of viewing the miraculous as a sign of mystification, one could view it in the way the critic Michel de Certeau does: “He conceptualized miracles as an affirmation of a utopian space full of possibilities, as a counter discourse and counter memory in the life of the oppressed” (Broyles-González 1994, 65). Castillo’s artistic problem is to deploy the fantastically overmediated and commercialized remnants of contemporary Indo/Hispano culture in the name of her Chicana agenda. Will her novel take its place next to the turquoise coyotes of Santa Fe boutiques, or will it

illustrate a process of cultural reappropriation, giving Chicanas the last laugh?

The Miracles in Tomé

So Far from God opens with the death and resurrection of Loca, the fourth daughter of Sofi, a single mother who runs a *carnicería* (butcher shop) with her three other daughters—Fe, Esperanza and Caridad. Tomé, a former stronghold of the Penitente brotherhood whose history permeates the novel, has run on hard times, being a little too far from the tourist industry and too close to the high tech boom of the Rio Grande valley. Much of New Mexico has been poor, and as the land grant revolt of Reies Tijerina in the sixties reminds us, the memory of losing the land is an enduring one. For Sofi, the loss of her child is just one more “punishment” in the martyrdom of her life martyrdom being especially enforced by the notorious Penitente flagellations on Good Friday. To everyone’s surprise, the baby rises from her coffin, floats to the church roof and gives, in a bilingual rendition, the story of her Christ-like journey to hell and back. When Father Jerome suggests there might be something devilish in all this, Sofi stands by her interpretation of the miracle. Somehow the words of the 18th-century Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, come to her: “And this is a miracle, an answer to the prayers of a broken hearted mother, ‘*hombre necio, pendejo...*’” (23). Sor Juana’s poem—“*Hombres necios que acusáis/a la mujer sin razón/sin ver que sois la ocasión /de lo mismo que culpáis*” (1994, 156) - points out that the frightful image of woman that men fear is itself a male construction. So the church’s devils, as we shall see, are patriarchal reinscriptions of female and indigenous wisdom. If popular religion has always been a site of resistance, with this first domestic miracle, female spirituality has begun to evangelize the church. As the resurrected little Loca says to the priest: “Remember, I am here to pray for you.” And we do remember. We remember that in 1531, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to an Indian, whose task it was to evangelize the church, turning it, according to Virgilio Elizondo, away from the urban center to

the impoverished barrio of Tepeyac (1980, 117). This hermeneutic struggle always resonates with the ongoing historical conquest of America.

Early reviews of the novel, like Ray González’s in *The Nation* (1993), demonstrate a lack of understanding of Castillo’s project. He charges her with “reckless fantasies” in a novel full of “stories told by too many characters who fade in and out of the vague plot.” “Predictable figures like mother Sofia and her daughters...are too ‘ethnic’ for their lives to be believable, even in the supernatural world Castillo sets in New Mexico” (772). González is free to dislike the novel, but it is deeply ironic that he accuses Castillo of “reckless fantasies” in just the way that Father Jerome accuses Sofi. Sometimes I think that people haven’t any sense of humor. Castillo is not writing a realistic novel; her literary sources are the lives of the saints, the New Mexican *cuento*, and the discourses of contemporary Chicanas, whether as *chisme* or tales from the Oprah Winfrey Show. In a press release for the novel, Castillo describes her inspiration: “I read the *Dictionary of the Saints* as research for the novel...when I finished reading it, I wrote the first chapter of the novel in one day.” This generated the character La Loca Santa. “With great care I attempted to bring together and retell in my own way many of the stories I learned concerning New Mexico, historical, legendary, mythological and contemporary, a collapsing of realities that exploded in my imagination like fireworks at the fiesta. I do believe that while we are laughing and crying when hearing stories we are being given lessons which we may choose to heed or not.” Américo Paredes has written an ethnographic essay about all-male joking sessions concerned with the magic/trickery of *curanderos* (1993). The humor reflects both skepticism and cultural pride in the wit of *curanderos* even if it omits the fact most of the jesters were probably cured at home by women. He notes that the joking both mocks and continues the tradition of *curanderismo*. The jesters cling to Mexican American culture “in great part because Anglo-American culture rejects part of themselves” (62). Similarly, Castillo creates a community of female storytellers who revise patriarchal attitudes in the saints’ lives and in traditional

figures such as La Malinche, La Llorona, and other figurations of motherhood and martyrdom. Their telling is admittedly ironic, but it also performs a kind of resistance to cultural assimilation.

We should view the novel as invoking oral traditions in the spirit of *relajo*, defined by Broyles-González as “disruptive group cheekiness,” as parody and joking that can “magically subvert the existing order, that could open up new vistas of freedom for the Chicano(a) collective” (1994, 29). As she points out, the use of an occasional miracle in such burlesques, say the appearance of an indigenous deity, could “question and challenge the established order” (30). Laughter has a utopian function because it is based on seeing the familiar in a new way and is thus a “rehearsal of freedom.” This is precisely the quality of the novel and it in no way obscures the serious analysis. Perhaps the most important quality of storytelling is the emotional effect, the attitude towards life it creates in the listener/reader. As was said of the sacro-profane spectacles of Amerindians: “With the solemn the Indian always unites the frivolous, in loving harmony, as in life itself” (Garibay qtd. in Broyles-González 1994, 68).

The plot of the novel, then, is extremely allegorical, a quality evident in both the traditional *cuento* and the saint’s life. Besides Loca, there are Fe, Esperanza, Caridad and various men who wander through their lives trailing fragments of Chicano history. Fe, like someone who walked out of *Latina Magazine*, is the believer in the American Dream and her own “Spanish” heritage. She dies a cruel death in one of the new military-industrial plants and “stays dead.” Caridad, nurse’s aide and *puta*, is miraculously healed by Loca after an attack by the mysterious *malogra*. Drawing on elements from St. Clare’s life, Castillo reconfigures her as a *curandera* (traditional healer) who finally undergoes not a Christian but a Native American assumption back into Mother Earth. She is loved by Francisco Penitente and their story symbolically comments on the interactions of Christianity and indigenous religion. Esperanza is a survivor of the Chicano Movement, politicized but wounded by the ongoing sexism not only of the movement (through her boyfriend Ruben, *aka* Cuahtémoc), but also in her journalistic profession; she is martyred

as a correspondent in the Gulf War. Tomé itself is losing its children to “better lives” and is slowly giving in to poverty and gossip. The core story, however, is Sofi’s, the wisdom of the mother that must discover its own wisdom. Invoking important groups such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the Mothers of East LA, and women within such organizations as The Southwest Organizing Committee in Albuquerque, Castillo locates the salvation of the community in Sofi’s ability to reconfigure the martyrdom of her children. Sofi’s central act is to *reremember* her own history; she is not *La Abandonada* as the neighbors and her own indoctrination would have it. Long ago it was she who got rid of her husband Domingo (a compulsive gambler), and by recalling her own agency she is able to renew her community. Obviously, it is patriarchal history and Christian myth that revises our female creativity. Castillo quite explicitly intends to revise yet again this initial Christian revisionism. She describes her project in *Massacre of the Dreamers*: “We must take heed that not all symbols that we have inherited are truly symbolic of the life-sustaining energy we carry within ourselves as women; so even when selectively incorporating what seems indispensable to our religiosity, we must analyze its historical meaning” (1994, 145).

The quality of compassionate laughter in the novel is very close to the spirit of the New Mexican *cuento*. Collections of these stories (Nasario García 1987; Vigil 1994) emphasize the wit, common sense, and magic that made survival possible in lonely Hispano villages. Dichos (proverbs) and cuentos bind communities together to this day and keep alive the spirituality of communities that have been notoriously neglected by the clergy (hence the rise of the Penitente Brotherhood). All such stories are didactic, but most of all they embody the life-affirming values of the community (Vigil 1994, xx). Castillo updates this tradition in her tale of contemporary small-town Chicanas.

If she misses anything here, I think it is what Vélez-Ibañez points to in his discussion of family as a defense against oppression. Some of the Penitente stories such as “Doña Sebastiana” are deeply subversive. Like all systems of popular religion, the

cuentos insist on a personal and reciprocal relationship with the saints. A *cuento* like "Parading a Santo" shows a happy mixture of indigenous magic with the Christian procession, as the local Indians use an image of the Baby Jesus to bring rain and then send out the Virgin Mary to dry things up (Nasario García 1987). In "Doña Sebastiana," a poor farmer refuses to share his meal (which he has stolen!) with both Christ and Mary because: "You have created an unjust and unfair world....On the one side are those who are wealthy and beyond all worth and justice, and on the other are the poor and miserable beyond all compassion and understanding" (Vigil 1994, 27). But when Death (Doña Sebastiana) asks for a share, he complies because death treats all equally. For this sensible response, the farmer is made a healer, a *curandero*. While there are no direct analogues to this tale in the novel, the symbolism of its plot is everywhere. Those who stand up to the Church, call the priest a *pendejo*, and voice injustice are given the gift of healing (on the condition that they do not use it for selfish ends). Castillo castigates the logic of martyrdom of the Penitentes, but her characterizations of men don't seem to acknowledge that women's traditions are embedded in broader communal traditions of resistance. The Penitentes, in fact, cooperated with groups like *Las Gorras Blancas* in resisting Anglo encroachment on communal grazing lands in the 1880s and enforced an ethic of cooperation and respect vital to the survival of local communities (Weigle 1976). While the Penitentes are noted for dragging Doña Sebastiana's Death Cart in their Good Friday Processions, their subversive tale is not so well-known.

The brilliance of Castillo's family allegory has a more localized focus. In the opening of the novel, the women exist within the ideology of the church and traditional roles. Within this interpretive frame, Sofi (wisdom) is not wise, but simply a sad case. Doña Felicia's healing powers are confined within the acceptable role of *curandera*, and she herself has long since stopped challenging the church. Her hard life is not, of course, *feliz*. Loca is simply crazy and not holy. Fe and Esperanza live out the narrative of the American Dream, surpassing their mother professionally and economically, and yet are devastated by its destructive

logic. This martyrdom will inspire the reevaluation of the "backward culture" of Tomé. After all, if the American Dream can't save us, what can? Sofi runs a *carnicería* (meat market), but under the social rules of patriarchy has been "abandoned" by her husband. In "La Macha," Castillo argues that it is just those women who are single, lesbian, or female heads of families who point the way to "transformation of our culture" (1991, 45). First, stereotypes about traditional roles within Chicano families belie our own history; as the historian Richard Griswold del Castillo (1984) has found, 31 % of households in Los Angeles in 1880 were female headed. This was largely due to the migratory labor open to men. In spite of traditional roles and family values, "the figures are equally dismal today: in 1991 28% of all Hispanics were poor and 23% of Hispanic families were headed by women" (Isasi-Díaz 1993, 22). Second, constructions of motherhood in Mexican/Chicano culture define the role as sexual, as essentially that of nurturer and mediator for males. It is no coincidence that the "bad" mothers of Chicano culture, *La Llorona* and *La Malinche*, were women who acted on their own behalf. To transform culture, the *mujeres solas*, including nuns and virgins, must be given power and voice to articulate an existence outside of the male gaze, but first they must be conscientized to understand that their power is always already there.

Without foregrounding gender and what Castillo defines as the Amerindian world view that "all things created in the universe are sacred and equal," patriarchy and capitalism cannot be changed. Chicano families will continue to produce exploited workers. Thus, her novel is a profound antimobility myth. The "Decade of the Hispanic," Raul Izaguirre's misnomer for the 1980s, actually produced very uneven development; marginal labor participation increased for Chicano workers in spite of gains in the professions (Acuña 1988, 413). What especially concerns Castillo is that the hypocritical rhetoric of family values is accompanied by the massive exploitation of Third World women in the new global factory. Fe's martyrdom to toxic poisoning in a Sunbelt munitions factory recalls Annette Fuentes' and Barbara Ehrenreich's expose, *Women in the Global Factory* (1984). In

the early 1980s, 40% of electronic workers in the U.S. were immigrant women, and the multinationals demonstrated a preference for a work force that was "docile, easily manipulated and willing to do boring, repetitive assembly work" (12). Fuentes and Ehrenreich also noted the continuity between the patriarchal family and the preference of factories for young women willing to take orders from men. Here "private" and "public" oppression coincide in a way that refutes the corporate myth that work will liberate women. One corporate executive enthused: "The benefits and freedom to be gained by these women from their employment in these new industries are almost always to be preferred to the near slavery associated with the production of classical goods such as batik" (15). Economic power has clearly benefitted some women and has clearly challenged gender roles at home (see Lamphere *et al.* 1993), but corporate logic still prefers female workers precisely because of their historically subordinate status. We must get over the notions that insistence on gender is "posturing" and that the Holy Family is somehow innocent of the workings of capitalism and the state. As Patricia Zavella (1996) makes clear, "Latino family values" are used as an alibi by policy makers to ignore the needs of poor families and to mask the economic restructuring that underemploys men and sends women into the service economy. Third World women are now the surplus army of labor.

Contrary to the assimilationist mythology of capitalism, capitalism itself creates the very marginality that makes mobility a joke; it also keeps alive notions of gender and ethnicity for its own purposes. Castillo insists on gender and ethnicity as sites of oppositional consciousness precisely because (and in spite of the postmodern insistence on the instability of identity) "the ethnicization of capitalism on a global scale" (Appelbaum 1996, 308) continues to maintain a racial and gendered hierarchy of labor. Since global capitalism continues to "reinvent ethnicity," it is vital that women of color create an oppositional culture. As Norma Alarcón puts it, we must "work with literary, testimonial, and pertinent ethnographic materials to enable Chicanas to grasp their 'I' and 'We' in order to make effective political interven-

tions" (1990, 254). The new interest in popular religiosity (4) teaches us (Espín 1997; Rodriguez 1994; Isasi-Díaz 1993) to view popular miracles as interventions and not merely as the opium of the people; such a so-called enlightened view itself continues the "imperial gaze." Fuentes and Ehrenreich explain how eruptions of the magical among workers can be resistance: "In Malaysia, a woman may suddenly see a hantu or jin, a hideous mythological spirit, while peering through a microscope.... Within minutes the hysteria spreads up and down the assembly line. Sometimes factories must be closed for a week or more while the evil spirits are exorcised" (28-30).

For Castillo the process for Chicanas of grasping the "we" must begin with a reformulation of family (the novel only implies reformulation of society in general). How can the family move from being "mother-centered" to the very different notion of "woman-centered"? How can *comadres* cease commiserating, especially over men (a real miracle), and begin empowering each other? How can children dying to leave home not return as the dead, martyred to a larger world the parents do not understand? Only a reformulation of mothering can accomplish these ends by 1) making nurturing reciprocal so that women, too, are nurtured; and 2) by establishing a new relationship between the woman-centered home and society at large. Like a loving *santera*, Castillo *resemanticizes* the existing logic of martyrs and saints, not as ways to dignify female powerlessness through Christian suffering, but to reveal the goddesses beneath such images who are capable of exerting agency. Ultimately, we need activists and not martyrs, but hopefully one can lead to the other in the conscientization of our Catholic mothers. For these reasons, the novel must ultimately be about mother Sofi (wisdom) and Loca (principle of female creativity).

A brief explanation of the martyred sisters reveals the logic of this social reformulation. Fe (faith in the American Dream) and Esperanza (hope for political change) illustrate the lingering post-Chicano Movement structures of exploitation. Esperanza has been silenced not only by the sexism/racism of the "system" but also in Tomé where the *comadres* consider her a *mitotera* (goss-

who probably got what she deserved for making trouble. Significantly, Esperanza sends *La Llorona* to tell *Loca* of her fate in the Gulf War, and the allegorical resonance is dazzling. Esperanza's political message simply cannot be heard by the community; a sighting of *La Llorona* is more believable than the logic of the Pentagon (!). But as Chicanas come to understand systems of exploitation in the dominant culture, they will not simply abandon "quaint" figures like *La Llorona*: they will also rehabilitate them as they come to see that the merely "mythic" is also the language of suppressed history. *Llorona* is both *Malintzin* (Cortez's Amerindian translator/lover) and the archetypal lower-caste *mestiza* of the folktale whose act of infanticide was more than simple revenge against her upper-class betrayer. *Llorona* dared to appropriate male property—her children.

The question of betrayal must be at the center of Chicana cultural revisionism. The reconstruction of *Malintzin/Malinche* has been so extensive that it need not be gone into detail here (del Castillo 1977; Alarcón 1983; Rebolledo 1993). As Adelaida del Castillo argued so long ago, she was certainly the mother of *La Raza* and possibly prophetic of a new world order under the more peaceful aegis of Quetzalcoatl. All women who speak their resistance are potential *Malinchistas* (traitors); of course, it is Castillo's thesis that it has been female wisdom that was betrayed. Even the "Spanish" Fe believes that by following the standards of Anglo culture, rejecting her "Indian flat butt" and her "dysfunctional family," she can make it. Jilted by the convenience store manager Tom, Fe finds happiness with Casimiro ("almost sees"), who is perfect except for the congenital bleating (5) he shares with his sheep herding ancestors, and in her new job in a very toxic military parts plant. Castillo uses Fe's horrible death by cancer and her shift from *gritona* (victim of love betrayed) to *macha* (resister) to express the plight of all women in the global factory. In 1984-86 there was in fact a cancer suit brought against Southwest Electronic, where women like Fe were poisoned by a gluing operation (Lamphere *et al.* 1993). Her voice, damaged by the great *grito* (scream) over lost romance, still has the strength in the end to express her outrage. In the allegory of the plot, Fe's

faith in work, consumerism, and the "Dream" is utterly betrayed because of the contradictions in the Dream itself.

Unless we are in solidarity with working-class women of color, what Isasi-Díaz (1993) calls the *proyecto histórico*, a plan to transform oppressive situations for all will not occur. The ideology of the Dream—that any hard-working individual can succeed *within the present order*—obscures structural practices of exclusion. The destruction of the *agringada* Fe in the new Sunbelt industries factory demonstrates how the equation of race, gender, and exploited labor simply moves around, rather than being confronted, in this postindustrial and postmovement era. Fe's quest for material success and romance are cleverly linked to the folktale of Juan Soldado's mine. To the degree that she partakes of the conquistador's love of gold and loves men "also lost in the mine," she will lose her soul in materialism and "stay dead." If her family is *loca*, it is less so than the "incomprehensible world that Fe encountered that last year of her pathetic life" (Castillo 1993, 172).

Fe's fate is in marked contrast to Caridad, who lives through her heart (Corazón is her horse) and whose martyrdom comes through abortion, betrayal by men and, finally, assault by the *Malogra*, a creature straight out of Hispano lore: "an evil spirit which wanders about in the darkness of the night at the crossroads. It terrorizes the unfortunate ones who wander alone at night, and has usually the form of a large lock of wool" (Cobos 1983, 104). Castillo rewrites the creature to represent the conquest, placing Caridad in the place of the raped earth and indigenous woman: the monster is "made of sharp metal and splintered wood, of limestone, gold, and brittle parchment. It held the weight of a continent and was as indelible as ink....It was pure force" (77). The gold and parchment suggest the bitter struggle over land grants in New Mexico, heavy as history itself, which oppresses Caridad but is only available to her as myth.

Caridad has another aspect that is also deeply rooted in New Mexican history and myth: she is the counterpart, the St. Clare, of Francisco Penitente's St. Francis. Her role, as the feminine has always been throughout history, is to be the whore of his

sexual fantasies and the virgin guiding his own personal salvation. Francisco practices the artistic traditions of the "Brotherhood of Light," including the making of wooden *santos* and the singing of *alabadas* (hymns). Castillo explicitly rejects the *morada* (meeting house) and its female auxiliaries sites of cultural renewal. By the time Francisco begins his pursuit of her, Caridad has been healed from the *malogra* by the prayers of Loca and is deep into her vocation of *curandera* under the guidance of Dona Felicia. In the relationship between Caridad and Francisco, the battle of the saints really takes place. As Barbara Walker (1983) points out, early Christian saints were themselves transformations of pagan deities. Santa Barbara, "the Divine Barbarian," was originally a goddess in her sacred mountain before she became yet another martyred virgin murdered for refusing to renounce Christianity. Santa Barbara was invoked to provide protection from lightning and perhaps this led to her association with Shango, the West African *orisha*. Amusingly enough, Caridad's own "conversion" experience at the sacred site of Chimayó has to do with falling in love with a Keres Pueblo woman. Redemption, we are to understand, involves loving her indigenous self in the person of Esmeralda. Caridad retreats to a cave for a year, like a divine mountain goddess, to think things over. There, she performs her first local miracle and indeed comes closest to sanctification, even if as a distinctly Indian goddess.

The Penitentes who stumble upon Caridad in the mountains literally cannot budge her, a miraculous act that places her in the weighty company of saints such as Lucy and Clare. An explosion of local theologizing ensues. Although our narrator/*comadre* won't say it, the Penitentes are in the mountains during this Holy Week to perform their forbidden acts of flagellation. Catholics and Indians alike refuse to go to Easter Mass; they make a pilgrimage to *La Armitaña*, interpreting her in light of their needs and cultures. The Indians believe she is Lozen, Spirit Woman of the Apache, who "vowed to make war against the white man forever"; and one Hispano claimed she was the Virgin of Guadalupe who "relieved him of his drinking problem" (90). Our coy narrator ventures an opinion: "Yes, perhaps this mountain

woman was not the one the Penitente brothers thought her to be, but a spirit memory, and that was why she was not overcome by them" (88). Like the European goddesses, perhaps Caridad is prior to Christianity. Every saint embodies layers of meaning and history that do not speak until we remember; and in Caridad, Castillo asks us to recall our indigenous selves.

Francisco tracks down Caridad and her beloved Esmeralda to Acoma Pueblo. Francisco hides in a crowd of tourists, resembling a "coyote" and "vulture." What drives the two women over the edge (literally, and like Thelma and Louise) is also a conversation Esmeralda has with her Grandmother and a secret she knows about Francisco. We are never told what this is, so I am going to make something up, because the whole point of the novel is to force us to be creative interpreters of the miracle of existence, just as women have always been. Perhaps Francisco told Esmeralda of his time in Vietnam and of his feeling for Caridad, whom he loves like a virgin, in other words, his own sad, sad story. On her way to sanctification, this is Caridad's "Last Temptation": to pity this man and fulfill her role. Perhaps the Keres grandmother told Esmeralda what happened to Acoma in 1599 under the Spanish and Franciscans, when a Spanish force murdered 800, enslaved the survivors, and cut off one foot of all men over 25 (Gutiérrez 1991). Perhaps she remembered that the Franciscans used flagellation as part of the spectacle of superior "magic" that kept them in power, and that one memorable medicine man jeered "You Christians are crazy" (Gutiérrez 1991, 89), just as the Indian Sullivan jeered at Francisco for not fulfilling his all too evident sexual desires. Perhaps the cross on Francisco's back at Easter represents the weight of historical contradictions of the church in the Americas, at once the voice of social justice, and the institution that refused to create a female or native clergy and, indeed, wrote women and Indians out of theology and history.

At any rate, the women take one look and jump over the side of the *mesa*, not to death but back to earth where they "would be safe and live forever" (211). Tsichtinako, the Keres creatrix, has called them and they have resisted the virgin/whore dichotomy

that disallows Chicanas from reclaiming their sexual and intellectual power. The Virgin of Guadalupe, of course, best illustrates the initial reinscription of the Aztec Goddess Coatlicue as Our Lady, a mediator and not a creator. As the critic Tey Diana Rebolledo explains, Coatlicue was "independent, wrathful, competent; her power to create and destroy was autonomous, as was that of most of the Nahuatl deities; it was a power not emanating solely from a central male figure" (1993, 190). The Keres Pueblo are remarkable for their all-female trinity who represents a recognition of the female principle that embraces the earth and woman as both intellectual and biological creatrix (Allen 1986). Caridad and Esmeralda remember, as we are supposed to, female wholeness in a world where capitalism and patriarchal religion dismember the feminine (and actual women). This world cannot be fixed by being good workers and good girls. Because the indigenous world lacks a notion of sin/evil, even Francisco could assume a place in it, as coyote/trickster, the haphazard but necessary agent of creation. Unmasking the indigenous identities of Caridad and Francisco might also reveal them to be sacred twins (both were "raised" by Doña Felicia). Their conflict could be reinterpreted as the more indigenous notion of continual transformation through opposing forces, and not as a dualistic clash of good and evil.

In Sofi's conscientization, however, and in the creative wisdom of La Loca lie the unexpected answer to social transformation, right in the domestic space where the children left it. Sofi's liberation is an act of memory; she is not "abandoned" but kicked Domingo the Gambler out. This awakening, though, must be preceded by her activism in Tomé; she has "forgotten" because the culture has no name for her agency, her empowered role, just as it has no name for her outspoken daughter, Esperanza, but *mitotera*. One must literally create a new language for the female repressed, and certainly all the new *santas* of the novel are precisely that.

Capitalism, as noted, depends on the underdevelopment of some social sector, especially female labor; therefore, radical change can only come from empowering those left at the bottom

of the socioeconomic ladder. Tomé represents the homes and communities of those "left behind" but also the very real attempt of small New Mexican towns to revitalize their economies and culture, especially through the manufacture of folk art. These are just those "classical goods" our corporate executive related to systems of slave labor. By fixing the screen door that Domingo never does get around to, Sofi is inspired to become "mayor" of Tomé and creates a weaving cooperative that educates and socializes the community in ways from which they can actually benefit. The mothers of Tomé replicate all the revolutionary mothers of the past decade from Argentina to Chile to East LA. In all these cases, the educated, visionary and acculturated children were martyred (though not to the same degree), and their very sacrifice radicalizes the mothers. As the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Argentina) put it: "Our children begot us. You stop being a conventional mother when you give birth to children who think and work for something beyond their narrow personal goals" (Bouvard 1994, 179). Like Sofi, these women were forced into seeking to transform social institutions as their children were "disappeared" during the Dirty War in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. This violation of the "public" and "private" spheres reveals the reality that the home is not private and is in fact deeply embedded in broader social structures. Marguerite Guzmán Bouvard explains: "The Mothers have transformed themselves from women seeking to protect the sanctity of the mother-child bond within the existing political system to women wishing to transform the state so that it reflects maternal values" (187).

Similarly, Castillo argues in *Massacre of the Dreamers* that the home culture and not assimilation into the dominant culture provides the source of "an alternative social system" (220). Only when Sofi extends her housekeeping into the community—creating a new weaving cooperative, revising the Penitente Easter procession into something a little closer to an Eco-Xicana protest march, and instituting MOMAS (Mothers of Martyrs and Saints)—does she begin to create a world where her children might be safe. Under the spiritual guidance of her dead or *loca* children, she does these feats in culturally specific ways. Through

death, the daughters fulfill their names of Faith, Hope, and Charity by incarnating Xicana power (not Christianity): popular culture, indigenous spirituality, and activism. Of course, the martyrdom, sanctification and the general destruction of the children could have been avoided if the generations had communicated in the first place. The first cultural/political intervention must take place within the Chicano family. And as Norma Alarcón (1990) insists, women must be foregrounded: "The lure of an ideal humanism is seductive...but without female consciousness and envisioning how as women we would like to exist in the material world, to leap into humanism without repossessing ourselves may be exchanging one male ideology for another" (188).

The Holy Friday procession that closes the novel demonstrates the complex cultural reinscription that is, I argue, the real subject of the novel. The very use of the fantastic, the comic, and the magically real calls all beliefs into question. It is not simply what we believe that is relevant, but how beliefs are deployed, how they are constructed around the liberatory praxis of women. Dean MacCannell (1994), whose work addresses the challenges of Native American artists working within the intense co-optation of the Santa Fe art scene, defines tradition in a way that might suggest how agency and culture among Chicanas(os) might be maintained: "Tradition is the challenge to the living by the dead to keep on living" (1994, 176). Processions in New Mexico (and the entire Southwest) are enduring sites of cultural contestations, from the highly problematic annual fiesta and procession of La Conquistadora in Santa Fe, to the yearly Easter pilgrimage in Chimayó, traditionally hosted by the Penitentes. Marta Weigle (1994) describes how the handsome young man bearing the cross at Chimayó has been fully reconstituted in the media's gaze: "At that moment, amid much dust and noise, the Sky 7 helicopter arrived, and the reporters. . . asked him to pick up the cross and step across the entrance once more" (219). For this moment, however, the people of Tomé capture public space to stage their own understanding of oppression. The 14 stations of the cross reinscribe the body of Christ as the people and as the earth: "Nuclear power plants sat like gargantuan landmines among the

people, near their ranchos and ancestral homes. Jesus was nailed to the cross" (243). This demonstration is less for the benefit of the outsider than it is for the community itself. As a prelude to political action, the contradictions and fears within the community must first be resolved. Loca, not a handsome man carrying a cross, leads the way in her jeans with the patch pulled off (probably referring to the protests in San Antonio against Levis for shutting down a plant that employed 1500 women). Political transformation here occurs within the existing religious vocabulary; interpretive communities abound, both in terms like "*La Loca Santa* and her Sisters Tarot Deck") and in terms of the conscientization of *Tomé* itself. All products and artifacts are haunted by history and by lost social relations that it is our job to restore. Commodification of radical spirituality is simply inevitable.

Loca is the key here. In the novel's allegory, her life most clearly parallels Christ's, and in the procession she will be crucified by AIDS (which she has mysteriously contracted). But she is not Christ, and throughout her short life the community has sought to interpret her. Is she a devil as the church insinuates, or is she a *loca* in the sense that the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo were called *Las Locas*? Without any "education," Loca excels in all aspects of female culture, and "for a person who had lived her whole life within a mile radius of her home. . . she certainly knew quite a bit about this world" (245). She has no fixed stigmatization for two reasons: first, there is no social inscription for a working-class Chicana intellectual; and second, she is the spirit of Xicana creativity itself. Thus, after her second and final death, she is commemorated as the Fool, the 0, of the "*Loca Santa Tarot Deck*." As Castillo defines *La Xicanisma* in *Masquerade of the Dreamers*, it creates "a synthesis of inherited beliefs with her [La Xicana's] own distinctive motivations" (1994, 11). If she is a reinscription of the holy spirit, she embodies the principle of survival within the historical unmaking of women by the structure of their labor, subjectivity, and sexuality. I am reminded of Paula Gunn Allen's words: "We know this: in the void reside the keepers of wisdom....It is we, perhaps because we are nothing our-

elves who stalk the void and dance the dervish of significance that is born through our parted lips and legs" (1995, 35).

Our survival depends on our ability to reinvent ourselves, a process impossible without the recovery of all aspects of the *Santas* and the history encapsulated in the myths we seem to prefer. Loca is La Vida Loca itself—improvisation and intuition. Beautifully stated in the novel, the fool walks "without fear, aware of the choices she made in the journey of life, life itself being defined as a state of courage and wisdom and not an uncontrollable participation in society" (250). It is not a coincidence that as Loca dies of AIDS, she is visited by the Lady in Blue, a Franciscan nun from New Mexican lore who is said to have catechized the Indians before the arrival of the official clergy (Weigle 1986). Allegorically, this makes the point of the novel which is that the marginalized—women and indigenous peoples—have their own *sheroes*, saints, agency, and especially dispensation of grace outside of patriarchal institutions. Most beautifully, Loca parades through Tomé wrapped in Esperanza's blue bathrobe, the color of the mantle of Our Lady of Guadalupe, but also of the Aztec creator Omēteotl, "mother-father of the Gods and the origin of all the natural forces end of everything that was" (Elizondo 1980, 83). The image conflates the hope for justice in ordinary life with the principle of the divinity of life itself.

Any good saint's life must end with canonization, and the MOMAS convention is the final spoof. Historically, groups like the Mothers of East LA have challenged local government. In this case, a parish in Los Angeles was the base for a coalition of activists and women who protested the construction of a prison in their neighborhood. Father Moretta's naming of the group was directly inspired by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Acuña 1996, 66). Why Castillo focuses on the religious society of the women of Tomé and not on social renewal is hard to say. Perhaps she is showing how the mechanism of institutionalizing religion inevitably perverts its message, thus pointing to the limits of our mothers' Catholicism. Or she might be asking whether or not female-dominated institutions would be an improvement, and is taking her final shot at the supportive (and subordinate) role of

women in the church. First, only a group of empowered working class Chicanas, with the support of a female clergy and corporate sponsors, could institutionalize the suffering of Latinos through new saints and martyrs (thus creating the MOMAS convention). Given the fact that Latinos are 30% of the Catholic Church and only 3% of the clergy, this isn't likely. Then there is the question of whether or not the Mothers would run things any differently; the closing joke about the legendary Pope Joan (AD 854), whose existence prompted a test to show that all papal candidates had testicles (Walker 1983), suggests that women would not perpetuate such dualisms and simple-minded inversions. The marketing of candles and T-shirts at the convention indicates that we have come full circle: the voices of the *santas* have fallen silent again in the reified object. Next, the women begin to fight over whose child is the real saint. Perhaps Castillo is making a final dig at Catholicism. The whole need to prove anything—that one is a saint, Chicana, woman—is ridiculed, essentially undermining the whole logic of martyrdom. The martyrdom of children can cut two ways: we can give meaning to their sacrifice and act, or we can confirm our masochistic role as suffering mothers. Again, what will determine if women's spiritual practices are hegemonic or liberatory will be praxis; and given that "local or federal government" greet the advice of the martyred children with "skepticism," their political efficacy is open to doubt.

The Artist as Healer

Whenever I discuss *So Far from God* in public, Chicanos often complain that "this isn't my culture." Stifling a comeback like "What, none of your relatives speak with *La Llorona*?" I try to explain that the novel is about the process of cultural creation, especially since women are the transmitters of culture in the Chicano household. Such questions also point to the position of Chicana artists themselves within the "boom" of writing by women of color. As one of the stars of the Susan Bergholz agency, Castillo is well aware that her own works will be consumed by

up-and-coming critics and by university bookstores. In other words, her literary practice is caught within the same web of capitalism, appropriation, and identity politics that vexes the women of Tomé. After all, the weavings that renew their economy will be consumed by an absent Anglo elite and by tourists. In this global economy, where Brazilian peasants parade the community-based radio station like a saint in a procession, notions of cultural purity and authenticity won't get us very far. Dean MacCannell (1994) argues that "authenticity" itself is the colonizer's category, used to up the price of artifacts and to decide which subaltern peoples are "real." Are the Brazilian peasants "authentic"? Notions of authenticity based on being "free of external influences" do not apply to many artifacts or people; they yield really insidious formulations that define most ethnic art as inauthentic and determine "that most formerly traditional peoples live inauthentic lives" (162). American ethnic artists are thus ensnared by a hegemonic authenticity game, dooming them to "historylessness" and endless self-reproduction for others.

Critics like Ray González and my other Chicano respondents are, I think, insinuating that Castillo is playing into the authenticity game. This debate surfaced at the PEN's 1996 Latino Literature Festival where Dagoberto Gilb complained that publishers demand certain stereotypes about Latinos: "There had to be a *curandera*" (Moore 1996, 106). The debate, with strong undercurrents of sexism, seems to have degenerated into whether or not it was okay to write about "rice and beans." It is sad to see artists playing this game, when the more important issue might be the social and economic relations surrounding Chicano(a) literary production. In an interview with Judith Moore, Susan Bergholz said that it was precisely the community spirit of Latino writers, "of the deep understanding of the preciousness of the word" that distinguished their spirit from the usual competitive individualism. As I've tried to convey, Castillo is arguing in her novel that culture is not static and pure; it will endure as long as it is reinvented according to the needs of specific communities. The limit of her critique is that she does not go on to point to the transformation of broader social institutions, perhaps because she

doubts they are possible.

Castillo has said in an interview that she writes for "women like myself." However one views her art, she is telling tales about the family and religion, especially as they destroy Chicana sexuality and intellectual freedom. The hostile social pressures Vélez-Ibañez speaks of still make *Malinchistas* of those who speak to such issues. As Castillo points out, she may have had some literary success, but she still cannot land a job in the very universities where her work is taught. Within the labyrinth of marketing and cultural appropriation, the question of whether or not the subaltern can speak is a very real one. Ironically, the laws of the market make it more likely that Chicanas will read Castillo if she is a success. Given the in-jokes of *So Far From God* and the digs at "white women's self-help books," it is hard to believe that the feminist message panders to an Anglo audience. Rather, it should provoke Latina(o) readers to view the daily culture of the home in a new light, to treasure the *dichos*, *cuentos*, and ways of knowing the family members, and to "remember" through them a better future. Within the bourgeois art form of the novel-requiring literacy, leisure, and money-can exist a simulacrum of oral culture. At least in imagination we, like the educated (and martyred) daughters, can encounter our Mexicano/Hispano working-class foremothers in a new way and thus dream a better resolution to the conflicts of assimilation and capitalism that still divide us.

Readers might also recognize in this artistic debate and in the themes of the novel a continuation of the debates concerning Chicana feminism that began in the 1970s. Within the Chicano Movement, many asserted traditional cultural values—*familia* and traditional roles—against the racist stereotypes held by the members of Anglo culture. Castillo's project confronts the charges against Chicana feminists that they are "white" or *malinchistas* by demonstrating that culture can be reinterpreted to eliminate sexism. This is *Xicanisma*. To accuse Sofi and her childless daughters of being "nontraditional" is exactly the absurdity Castillo lampoons. The myth that poor and/or single women are "bad mothers" enables both the Chicano community and broader

social institutions to rationalize their abandonment of women. The various meddling *comadres* in the novel reflect the complicity of women in each others' oppression. During the Movement, one such "loyalist" to so-called Chicano culture exclaimed: "And since when does a Chicana need an identity? . . . The only ones who need identity are the *vendidas*, the *falsas*, and the opportunists" (García 1995, 368). Twenty years later, Chicanas must still insist on the right to split the Chicano subject and inscribe a female image within social institutions. Castillo's reinscription of Chicano culture and history is also, of course, not a new idea. As early as 1977, Marta Cotera wrote: "We as women also have the right to interpret and define the philosophical and religious traditions beneficial to us within our culture, and which we have inherited as our tradition" (qtd. in García 1995, 366).

The work of Rowe and Schelling (1991) and Nestor García Canclini (1993) on Mexican popular culture (6) should encourage us to define culture not in terms of authenticity (and who determines that?) but in terms of the social relations that produce it and in terms of the attitude that surrounds its exchange. I think that Castillo foregrounds this in her own use of popular forms. Canclini makes the point: "The popular, therefore, cannot in my view denote a set of objects (crafts or Indian dances), only a position and an action. We cannot narrow it down to a particular type of goods or messages, because the sense of one or the other is constantly altered by social conflict" (106). Whatever the status of her novel as a commodity of a New York publishing house, its message is clear: culture is a process and the endless reflections of capitalist reproduction can only be halted when it is deployed by community agency. Fortunately, according to Canclini, the homogenizing pressure of capitalism can only go so far, given its inability to provide "work, culture and health care for everyone" and the resulting resistance of ethnic enclaves. Traditional stories and healing arts can improve urban communities when cooperatives and unions convert the "traditional" into "emergent challenging expressions" (84). In other words, the key to the survival of contemporary ethnic art is not content, but the social relations that produce it—who controls the object and who

will consume the object. This idea prompts an amusing analysis of the popular by Canclini:

Let us add a paradox: earthenware from Tlaquepaque... produced by Jalisco artisans inspired by archaic designs but working in workshops owned by American business executives, where they submit to their stylistic modifications and lose economic and symbolic control of the work through selling to tourists, does not constitute popular art. On the other hand, a masterpiece by Goya, undertaken by Indian and mestizo peasants...to make a mural that addresses community problems from their perspective, does. (109)

When we reflect on Castillo's experiment with the novel, we understand how she is attempting to use the form as a way to access oral traditions, collapsing the oral and written in a way that also replicates the generational and educational differences among Chicanas. She is *santera*/novelist, obliged to tell healing truths just as she herself was healed by her *abuela*. The meanings of *santera* are multiple—priestess of the *orishas* in Santería, and maker of sacred images in New Mexico. Castillo is thinking of both as she excavates the feminine repressed in popular religion and in the domestic sphere. Like our own female power, the goddess Tonantzin/Coatlicue, *curanderismo*, and the general invention of domestic arts (Sjoo 1987) are latent in our lives and sacred images. Unfortunately, women's culture has been created within the vicious circle of domination: 1) traditional healing and spirituality enabled those abandoned by social institutions to survive, yet 2) the same creativity is stigmatized as superstitious or inferior by dominant culture institutions, thus justifying further domination. Her novel represents what is happening to the popular expressions of subordinate ethnic groups—"mixing" with elements of dominant culture does not necessarily defeat them. As San Diego activist Mary Lou Valencia says, tradition is what ever contributes to survival, and thus survival will continually redefine value. *Santera* also implies that a woman now controls the creation of sacred images (and perhaps has some clout with

New York publishers), and these counterinterpretations of traditions are bound to offend. Women who reinterpret the spiritual and who call the priest *pendejo* now have the social power to begin to make their interpretations heard. The point is that the essence of the popular is its effective deployment by subordinate groups. Clearly, Castillo is implying the Xicana art demands more than "making it." Viable art will depend on more than scholarly reclamation of culture; it will depend on the survival of self-identified communities.

Finally, the most recent news on the Virgin of the Mexico City Metro is that the city has agreed to construct a *nicho* (chapel) around her astonishing image.

Endnotes

1I use the term Chicana to refer to women of Mexican descent who reside in the United States. Xicana is Castillo's term for a new feminist consciousness. She explains it best: "The search for a term which would appeal to the majority of women of Mexican descent who are also concerned with the social and political ramifications of living in a hierarchical society has been frustrating. In this text I have chosen the ethnic and racial definition of Mexican Amerindian to assert both our indigenous blood and the source, at least in part, of our spirituality... I introduce here the word, Xicanisma, a term that I will use to refer to the concept of "Chicana Feminism" (1994, 10; my italics).

2Conscientized refers to Paulo Freire's notion of *concientizacão*: "The term refers to learning to perceive social, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (1970, 19).

3Rebolledo and Rivero's anthology *Infinite Divisions* (1993), gives endless examples of excavating the indigenous "goddess" as a site of a female power."

4Popular Religion (and Catholicism) does not refer to the production of mass culture. Among Latino (a) theologians such as Jeanette Rodríguez, it has the following meaning: "When I speak of Catholicism in relationship to the Mexican-American culture, I am not referring to the institutionalized version of Catholicism, handed down through generations by the laity more than by recognized and/or ordained clergy" (1994, 144). Such a tradition emphasizes the spontaneous expressions of faith by a particular ethnic group.

5For the bleating shepherd, the *jornada del muerto*, and other references to New Mexican folk culture, see Marta Weigle, *The Lore of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

6 My definition of popular culture is derived from García Canclini (1993) and Rowe Schelling (1991). Both emphasize the shifting boundaries of the popular in its constant refashioning of cultural signs. It clearly interpenetrates mass culture, but just as clearly has a counterhegemonic function. In their discussion of Gramsci and hegemony, Rowe and Schelling comment: "One way of developing his insights is to take popular culture not as a given view of the world but as a space or series of spaces where popular subjects, as distinct from ruling, are formed" (10).

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Debi Cooper, New Hope, Redwood City, California.
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"IT'S HER BODY; IT'S DEFINITELY HER RIGHT": CHICANAS/LATINAS AND ABORTION

Beatriz Pesquera & Denise Segura

"God, this is so touchy—it's so difficult! But, it's her body; it's definitely her right. If she doesn't want to carry the baby, she shouldn't have to."

Professional/Managerial, age, 37

Abortion is one of the most controversial social issues in American society; it calls into question normative values surrounding gender, sexuality, and reproduction. The debate on abortion underscores the contradiction between normative expectations and the changing realities of women's lives, and provides a symbolic focus for both reaffirmation and challenge to traditional cultural values.

The discourse on abortion, while rich and varied, rarely integrates the concerns of racial-ethnic women. This absence is particularly pronounced for Chicanas and Latinas,² women whose interpretations of the meanings of gender and reproduction are intertwined with their historical marginality in American society. Chicana/Latina absence from the literature reflects one or more of the following: (1) the lack of data on their attitudes toward abortion and gender ideology, (2) their lack of representation in the ranks of pro-choice or pro-life activists, and (3) the ill-articulated "sense" among abortion activists, researchers, and society-at-large, that Chicanas and Latinas are not "interested" in reproductive rights issues or unusually resistant to gender role change because of their Catholicism and cultural norms defining motherhood as women's primary role. Such propositions are based on a unidimensional understanding of Catholicism and familism (family solidarity) often associated with Chicano and Latino cultures. These suppositions, untested and problematic, beg for further analysis particularly since Hispanic women are, by some accounts, 60 percent more likely to have an abortion than non