When you become a spiritually active person (a spiritual activist—if you treat it as a political issue and do outer work as well as inner work) you start conceiving or reconfiguring reality in a different way. You begin looking at reality in a way that is different from the official way of looking at reality.… By expanding your "take" of reality, you make connections, not only to the physical, psychological and spiritual worlds via your symbology system, but also to political realities. The political connection is missing in the most contemporary spiritual practices in this country.
—Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1996, 2–3)

You seek allies and, together, begin building spiritual/political communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice. By compartiendo historias, ideas, las nepantleras forge bonds across race, gender, and other lines, thus creating a new tribalism. Éste quehacer—internal work coupled with commitment to struggle for social transformation—changes your relationship to your body, and, in turn, to other bodies and to the world. And when that happens, you change the world.
—Gloria E. Anzaldúa (2002, 574)

The position of the woman, the language and voice that comes from the Christian scriptures and the Catholic Church is very masculine and dogmatic. I am running from the voice of the whore asking for forgiveness of her sins and to be cleansed, and I do not identify with Eve, who is blamed for the sins of the world. I believe that these old paradigms no longer serve us well and these beliefs have broken our personal and spiritual relationship to our planet, Mother Earth. Our human consciousness is shifting and changing dramatically at this time. I believe that all creation is sacred and that we are all connected through Spirit.[1]
—María Elena Martínez

THE CULTURAL PRODUCTION OF SPIRITUAL ACTIVISMS: Gender, Social Justice, and the Remaking of Religion in the Borderlands

Brenda Sendejo

This essay explores the remaking of religion and the presence of a social justice ethic in the contemporary spiritual practices and beliefs of Tejanas of the post-WWII generation. This work draws on ethnographic research conducted in the Texas-Mexico borderlands with eighteen Tejanas involved in social justice causes since the late 1960s. Using the theory and praxis of spiritual activism as put forth by Gloria E. Anzaldúa, this essay examines patterns of spiritual change in the lives of three Tejanas. Such cultural change is reflective of women's social worlds; political acts tied to the material realities of women's experiences. By reconfiguring how they view and practice spirituality—which includes a shift away from organized Catholicism—women are critiquing and working to reverse gender hierarchies, patriarchy, and other social inequalities within and outside of organized religion. Today, women's activism takes the form of spiritualized activisms, whereby they do the inner spiritual work that gives them the strength to do the outer work of creating social change as spiritual healers, educators, and community activists.

The day María Elena Martínez entered our graduate seminar in the spring of 2004—I was both nervous and excited to meet the woman who had played such a significant role in the Texas Chicana feminist and Chicana/o civil rights movements.[2] The context of her visit was an oral history project we were conducting on women's involvement in La Raza Unida Party (RUP), the national independent political party that formed in Texas in 1970 to raise awareness of social and political inequalities affecting Mexican-origin communities in the United States. The Texas RUP was the most successful political organization at getting Mexican Americans into the political arena through local and regional elections, and women played a pivotal role.[3]

Martínez's political history was fascinating. Her participation in the Mexican American Youth Organization (MAYO) and role in advocating for Mexican American Studies at UT Austin, her support of women's issues through her contributions to the party's women's caucus, Mujeres Por La Raza Unida, her work in support of bilingual education and educational advancement for Mexican Americans, and her role as the first woman to lead a political party in Texas as a RUP state chairperson inspired me. Prior to meeting her, I had no idea that Texas Mexican women played such key leadership roles in America's political history.

During that period women also advocated for equal representation within RUP and for attention to women's issues, such as reproductive health, employment, domestic violence, and access to child care. Martínez was among those who spoke out against the sexism they endured within the largely male-dominated Chicana/o Movement and specifically, RUP.[4] They critiqued the hypocrisy of the fact that while women were organizing to fight racial and class discrimination in Mexican communities, they themselves were being forced to navigate gender and sexual politics within the movement.[5]

Coming to know this history was a powerful moment for this Tejana, and a turning point in my academic career.[6] But it was the emergence of Martínez's spiritual narrative and experience of religious transformation in her life story that spoke to me on that day and piqued my interest in questions around spirituality, social activism, and political commitments.

Martínez was raised in a devoutly Catholic home, but as she grew into adulthood she came to question the Catholicism in which she was raised. In her experience, Catholicism perpetuated discourses and social norms that silenced women's sexuality, which resulted in women feeling ashamed of their

bodies. The memories of having endured such experiences, coupled with her own interrogating of religion and the subsequent death of a dear friend who was questioning life after death, led Martínez away from Catholicism. In her mid 30s she was drawn to the earth-based, egalitarian practice of shamanism.[7] Perhaps inspired by an emerging Chicana feminist identity and my own spiritual journey at that time, I was taken by Martínez's conversion—her spiritual transformation from Catholicism to shamanism. The juxtaposition of the spiritual and the political aspects of her life and her move from electoral politics to the work of spiritual healing seemed significant. I have since come to understand that the shift from political activist to spiritual healer was, in fact, not such a big leap. Her rejection of institutional Catholicism coupled with the choice to help others and work toward creating a better world as a spiritual healer led me to understand that spiritual change, healing, and social justice were interrelated. Leaving electoral politics did not mean that Martínez removed herself from social justice causes; she continues to fight against gender inequality and other systems of oppression today. The methods for doing so have just taken different form.

The insights I gained from this and other early encounters with Martínez flourished into an ethnographic research project involving her and several of her contemporaries who were also involved in movements for social change from the 1960s to the present. My research examines how issues and experiences around gender oppression, racism, feminism, and other social justice causes have shaped Texas Mexican women's spiritual traditions, histories, and identities. My data indicate that the melding of the spiritual with the political and the emergence of new spiritual forms began with Chicana activists in the late 1960s and continue today.[8] The remaking of women's religious and spiritual practices—such as the cultural production of spirituality that at once questions and reconfigures Catholicism while

integrating Aztec/Mexica and mestiza spiritual and goddess traditions—can be attributed, in part, to women's involvement in the Chicana feminist and Chicana/o civil rights movements and spiritual histories of their indigenous ancestors, to which they had not been previously exposed.

I view spiritual transformation and the emergence of new spiritual forms such as those employed by Martínez as contemporary manifestations of Chicana feminisms born in the 1960s and 1970s. For Martínez and other women involved in social causes, the realms of electoral politics and community organizing are no longer the only avenues they use to work for social change. Spirituality and the healing of social and spiritual wounds have taken a central place in the lives of many of these women and their efforts to create a better world. In this essay I will examine the intersections of spirituality, issues of social justice, and healing through the theoretical frame and praxis of spiritual activism as put forth by Gloria E. Anzaldúa, who views spiritual activism as an inner call to create outer change in the material world. In "now let us shift … the path of conocimiento … inner works, public acts" (2002), Anzaldúa discusses what follows after coming into a new identity and way of knowing that is not a typical way of viewing the world: "You seek allies and, together, begin building spiritual/political communities that struggle for personal growth and social justice." She goes on to say that las nepantleras bridge difference across race, gender, and other lines, "Este quehacer—internal work coupled with commitment to struggle for social transformation—changes your relationship to your body, and, in turn, to other bodies and to the world. And when that happens, you change the world" (574). This is spiritual activism—the final stage of conocimiento. It is the action one takes after coming into a new consciousness. For Anzaldúa this involves garnering the strength—through meditation, prayer, and other resources—to do the outer work of activism. Anzaldúa reiterates this in "Spiritual Activism: Making Altares, Making Connections." She writes,

> When you become a spiritually active person (a spiritual activist—if you treat it as a political issue and do outer work as well as inner work) you start conceiving or reconfiguring reality in a different way. You begin looking at reality in a way that is different from the official way of looking at reality. To do this is seen as alien, deviant, especially to people in the University where theory is supposed to be very objective, verified and legitimated with objective research, which, of course, disqualifies spirituality other than as an anthropological study done by outsiders. (1996, 2)

This essay is my attempt, as an anthropologist, to present the theory and praxis of spiritual activism as religious and spiritual practices and beliefs and their intersections with issues of social justice and the material realities of oppression, subjugation, resistance, and agency. I employ Anzaldúa's concept of spiritual activism as defined above. As a scholar I analyze how the women in my study enact spiritual activism in their own lives and the significance of this generation's enactment. My research indicates that while the mothers and grandmothers of Martínez and others of her generation most definitely used their spiritual devotion and practices to help their families and, in many cases, their communities, the social justice activism and degree to which women engage in creating outer change is much more pronounced in their children. And, it manifests in the spiritual realm. The melding of the spiritual and the material worlds, infused with critiques of gender and other hierarchies of power, are this generation's expression of spiritual activism.

I will analyze the merging of the political and the spiritual and the meanings behind women's spiritual transformations by way of the lives of three Tejanas: Susana Renteria Almanza, Martha P. Cotera, and María Elena Martínez. From a very young age these women have looked at reality in a way other

than the official way of looking at reality. They have witnessed and personally experienced social inequality and have worked to challenge it in numerous arenas. Through these ethnographic portraits I will explore how these women have answered Anzaldúa's call for a "political connection in our spiritual lives" (1996, 2). Anzaldúa describes their take on reality via a feminist consciousness in her discussion of spiritual activism: "By expanding your 'take' of reality, you make connections, not only to the physical, psychological and spiritual worlds via your symbology system, but also to political realities" (1996, 3). There is a politic to the spiritualities of the activists whose lives I discuss in this essay. They make the connections between their material and spiritual worlds through their symbology systems—by invoking feminist articulations of Guadalupe-Tonantzin, for example.[9]

This notion of the political connection of which Anzaldúa speaks can be understood in terms of spiritual responsibility, for the spiritual activists in my study have exerted internal work coupled with commitment to struggle for the social transformation of which Anzaldúa speaks (2003, 574) Unlike conservative discourses of "personal responsibility," as Leela Fernandes (2003) states, spiritual responsibility entails "confronting the fundamental linkages between self-examination, self-transformation and individual ethical action on the one hand, and the transformation of larger structures of oppression on the other hand" (16). The interconnections of faith, religion, social justice, and politics are widespread and span nations, religious denominations, and political ideologies. In contemporary U.S. culture, the words politics and religion often evoke ideas of conservative Christian ideologies and the ways in which religious perspectives inform political positions. I argue that today women use spirituality in ways that bring it into the realm of social justice by critiquing gender oppression and power hierarchies within and sanctioned by the Catholic Church, including a critique of the sixteenth century spiritual

colonization of indigenous peoples by the Catholic Church. I argue this is a move away from the "public and politicized forms of spirituality [that] have in recent decades come to be associated with conservative, patriarchal religious organizations and movements" (Fernandes 2003, 9). The relationship between politics and spirituality examined in this study is significantly different from the forms of spirituality of which Fernandes speaks, which have co-opted spirituality as a means of reproducing hierarchies of power and promoting the exclusion of marginalized social groups. The ways spirituality is expressed and lived in the lives of the spiritual activists in my study link a demand for material transformation and liberation from oppression to spiritual practice and belief. The politics of spirituality as enacted by the women in this study, as previously suggested, takes on a very different meaning.

This further supports my argument that the spiritual is very much integrated into the material condition of the lives of its practitioners and those whose lives they touch. This is evident in the forms of spiritual activism in which these activists engage today. Each draws on spiritual resources such as spiritual community, ceremony, home altars, Guadalupe devotion, prayer, and meditation, to garner the strength to do the work; however, they extend this to the outer realm by actively working to promote social change (Anzaldúa 1996, 3)—a connection that goes beyond the personal.

I argue that the political connections in women's spiritual lives are contemporary manifestations of Chicana feminism, and take the form of spiritualized activism. As previously stated, what I am examining here are particular articulations of spiritual activism. In order to contextualize this, we must turn to other scholars who have also engaged with the theory and praxis of spiritual activism.

AnaLouise Keating has written extensively about spiritual activism. In "'I'm a citizen of the universe'": Gloria Anzaldúa's Spiritual Activism as Catalyst for Social Change" (2008), Keating discusses Anzaldúa's "radically inclusionary politics" that is spiritual activism (53). Keating reads Anzaldúa's spiritual activism as rooted in an "experientially based epistemology and ethics" focused on transforming the social world. Keating raises the important point that Anzaldúa's theory of spiritual activism offers strategies for meeting contemporary social needs, something important to consider for the contemporary manifestations of Chicana feminist thought I examine here. "Her politics of spirit demonstrates that holistic, spirit-influenced perspectives—when applied to racism, sexism and homophobia, and other contemporary issues—can sustain and assist us as we work to transform social injustice" (56). It is not a solely individual, personal spirituality, but one that actively works to transform social hierarchies and oppression.

Theresa Delgadillo (2011) examines spiritual transformations and their relationship to issues of social justice and oppression by way of her in-depth analysis of Anzaldúa's concept of spiritual mestizaje in *Spiritual Mestizaje: Religion, Gender, Race, and Nation in Contemporary Chicana Narrative*. The ways in which contemporary writers, scholars, and cultural workers employ spiritual mestizaje in their work is at the heart of Delgadillo's project in *Spiritual Mestizaje*. Anzaldúa states that if she had to name her spiritual practice, she would call it spiritual mestizaje, which she states is a mix of spiritual practices that helps her "deal with the anti-colonial struggle and resistance" that she is committed to as a "Chicana/Mexicana dyke from *campesina* origins in the United States." Her spiritual practice reflects her "alternative ways of coping" (Anzaldúa 1996, 1). Delgadillo lays out the foundation for her take on Anzaldúa's concept of spiritual mestizaje, discussing it as a theory and praxis that illustrates how spiritual forms,

identities, and histories are intimately linked to issues of social oppression. Delgadillo asserts that the material circumstances of such oppressions can be understood by way of analysis of spiritual transformation, symbolic for social transformation. As Delgadillo states,

> [S]piritual mestizaje…is the transformative renewal of one's relationship to the sacred through a radical and sustained multimodal and self-sustained critique of oppression in all its manifestations and a creative and engaged participation in shaping life that honors the sacred. (1)

Spiritual mestizaje is the articulation of this critique of oppression in spiritual form. The Tejanas in my study employ spiritual mestizaje in their spiritual practices and engage in the inner spiritual work and outer activist work that results in social transformation by way of their various engagements in spiritual activism.

Feminist theologian Jeanette Rodriguez (2002) posits a U.S. Latina feminist theology that illustrates how Latina women "live out their faith" and the role it plays in their activism, service, and leadership. Inspired by feminist and Latin American liberation theologies, it articulates a connection between spirituality and a commitment to "resist all forms of sustained injustices" (115), inspired by a personal relationship with God. Latinas' desires to serve their communities aligns with a commitment to social change and transformation that is at the heart of Anzaldúa's praxis of spiritual activism. However, it differs in that U.S. Latina feminist theology serves to create social change from within the structure of organized religion, where Latinas reject "any concept of salvation that does not affect the present and future reality," as Rodriguez notes (120). Furthermore, U.S. Latina feminist theology places

value on community and relationship and acknowledges a spiritual leadership that "shifts the male, Western enlightenment leadership paradigm" in the service of social justice (128). These articulations of spiritual activism are all important for contextualizing the particular forms I examine here. For Anzaldúa, spiritual activism is deeply connected to a shift in ways of knowing self and society. It can exist within and outside of organized religion, but as the work of the three preceding scholars show, spiritual activism is intimately connected to the project of creating social change and bringing an end to injustice—in theory *and* practice.

Spiritual Activism: Theory and Praxis

> The realities and the spirit worlds that I want to talk about are not abstract, they're both practical and theoretical, theoretical in that there is a philosophy and an ideology behind the practice. (Anzaldúa 1996, 3)

As a Tejana of the post-WWII generation, cultural theorist Anzaldúa is a contemporary of the women in my study. Her lived experiences and intellectual work provide the theory and praxis to understand the lives of the spiritual activists I examine here. Spiritual activism is the central theoretical lens through which I interpret the changes I have documented in women's religious and spiritual practices. AnaLouise Keating suggests that for Anzaldúa the theory and praxis of spiritual activism is a "holistic worldview that synergistically combines social activism with spiritual vision" (2006, 11). Anzaldúa articulates the key component of interconnection that characterizes a central goal of the spiritual activist, which parallels Martínez's reference to the importance of human interconnection in her opening quote:

> With awe and wonder you look around, recognizing the preciousness of the earth, the sanctity of every human being on the

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

For Anzaldúa, spiritual activism attends to how we use spiritual tools and resources to reconstruct how we make our ways in the world. It is far from solely a metaphysical experience, but rather, one deeply embedded in and reflective of the material circumstances of the social world. Spiritual activism attends to recreating these circumstances with a view toward justice and equality. I also view spiritual activism as a challenge to power structures. For instance, las mujeres reconfigure their spiritual practices—within and outside of institutional Catholicism—by incorporating devotion to Tonantzin and by infusing the symbol of Our Lady of Guadalupe-Tonantzin with meanings that reflect understandings of their current social realities and belief systems. I investigate such new meanings—such as feminist rearticulations of Our Lady of Guadalupe that include Tonantzin—and the everyday lived experiences that are linked to this symbolic action to understand the meanings behind such remaking, and the material conditions and histories that foreground such change. This kind of spiritual activism illustrates the dynamic, fluid, and historically contingent character of spiritual and religious practices in borderland lives. Anzaldúa's theories and praxis are relevant because she articulates similar lived experiences as the women in my study. She describes similar physical, spiritual, and psychological tensions and the necessity of new consciousness and ways of knowing. She articulates what it is that drove her to develop spiritual activism and other theories: the "material conditions of the

border and its inhabitants, the historical creation of the border, and the histories of marginalization embodied in that border" without which, as Delgadillo states, "there would be nothing requiring transformation and the kinds of consciousness that could bring it to fruition. The consciousness she proposes emerges from, rather than mimetically represents, the material conditions of the border" (179). The ethnographic narratives in this essay will examine the effects of spirituality on people's lives, and show women use their spiritual practices in connecting to and engaging with the realities of the material world.

Drawing from and building upon Anzaldúa's work, as well as that of other scholars who examine spiritual activism and spiritualized feminisms, I will show that today women are not only challenging hierarchies of power and reconfiguring their social worlds within the context of spirituality, they are doing so for others. As they did in their activist days of the past, las mujeres extend beyond individual change to create social change in the present. Through spiritual activism las mujeres are reconfiguring their spiritualities in ways that challenge gender oppression and hierarchies, which parallel efforts by the women's movement and the Chicana feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s to challenge gender discrimination in women's own communities and larger society. The spiritual realm is a contemporary arena for social change.

The experiences of these women illustrate that today activism manifests in various ways. It is not confined to political demonstrations and protests. Las mujeres exhibit a spiritually infused activism that emphasizes interconnections between people and a respect for and commitment to healing the earth. The different uses of religion and spirituality in which las mujeres are engaging are practices in many ways distinct from previous generations. As a theoretical frame, spiritual activism helps us to understand how spiritual practices and beliefs function in the lives of las mujeres and how and why their spiritual

and religious practices and beliefs have changed in form and function over the course of the women's lives. The realm of the spiritual has become both a site of resistance to hierarchies of power and a means through which women garner the strength and resources to move forward in their activist work.

Keating discusses how spiritual activism acts as both theory and praxis:

> Anzaldúa's theory of spiritual activism is designed to meet twenty-first century needs; it offers valuable lessons for feminists and other social justice activists. Her politics of spirit demonstrate that holistic, spirit-inflected perspectives-when applied to racism, sexism, homophobia, and other contemporary issues-can sustain and assist us as we work to transform social injustice. (Keating 2005, 56)

The ethnographic narratives presented here will show that women are putting spiritual activism into action, working to challenge hierarchies of power and heal environmental, racist, classist, and sexist wounds.

I view the contemporary forms of activism of the women in my study through this lens of interconnectedness and the "outer work as well as inner work" of which Anzaldúa speaks. Spiritual activism is a framework that illustrates how women such as Martínez project the political consciousnesses they developed and employed in their earlier years to social causes today. There is an interrelatedness that Anzaldúa articulates that is what so many of the women seek out in their spiritual and activist lives. As a theory, spiritual activism assists us in understanding what forms spirituality take among these women today. By changing their religious and spiritual practices to reflect their personal politics and values, women are challenging hierarchies of power and creating new ways of using spiritual practices and garnering the strengh to do

social change work. In this process of reinventing their spiritualities, women are in turn reinventing themselves.

This cultural change occuring in women's spiritual lives is significant in that it represents a social context and reality that women are actively reconfiguring for themselves. For Martínez, her rejection of Catholicism marks a rejection of patriarchy and of what she sees as the oppression of women and abuse of power within organized Catholicism. For her, shamanism is a more fitting alternative—an egalitarian, earth-based practice that aligns with her belief that all beings are interconnected. Through shamanism she found a way to help others as a healer. For Susana Renteria Almanza, this can be seen in the lessons about nurturing and honoring Mother Earth and a spiritual connection to la tierra—the land—that she was taught by her mother and which she incorporates into her Mexica/Aztec spiritual practice and her environmental justice work. Almanza draws on the spiritual legacy of her ancestors in her daily life and in her work, connecting her to her past while she works to better the lives of others in the present. Finally, Martha P. Cotera provides insight into a spiritual activism of a staunch feminist who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism in an effort make a connection to a faith that reveres female figures such as Our Lady of Guadalupe. Raised with a belief in the original teachings of Jesus Christ, with Christ as a social justice advocate, Cotera's spirituality is deeply intertwined with her feminism and activism. While a different trajectory, she too is questioning the Catholic faith today, but upholding the values of Christ and to her relationship with the Virgin of Guadalupe-Tonantzin, both deeply infused with an ethic of social justice and equality. Each of these three women's lives illustrates spiritual activism at work.

Context

The larger project from which this essay is drawn is an ethnography that explores the cultural production of religious and spiritual practices and

beliefs, and the ways in which, in the words of Rosie Castro, "the face of God has changed" (Sendejo 2011, 23) for Martínez and seventeen of her contemporaries, including Cotera and Almanza. Each woman has in some way shifted her spiritual practice from the predominantly Catholic religious traditions of her childhood. Like many of their peers involved in social justice initiatives, these activists continue to be active in social justice work in varying capacities: as spiritual healers, educators, scholars, community activists, artists, and in the political realm. My findings revealed a significant pattern of spiritual change among this group: of the seventeen Catholics, eight left Catholicism and those who remained Catholic-identified changed the way they practice their faith. One woman was a Protestant who converted to Catholicism in her twenties.

While the cultural productions of spirituality that I examine are in many ways different from the religious practices of these women's spiritual upbringings, they also recall religious rituals and traditions from engaged and imagined pasts; some women left Catholicism for other forms of spiritual fulfillment, including shamanism and Buddhism. Others engage in practices inspired by their pre-Columbian ancestors, such as danza azteca, temascal, and a devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe-Tonantzin.[10] Some have remained Catholic, yet altered how they practice Catholicism, infusing it with feminist principles, as in the study of Latina feminist theology.[11] Others elect not to practice institutionalized religion but rather exhibit an individual, personalized form of Catholicism. A number of women integrate Aztec/Mexica-inspired practices into their spiritual lives, and some employ a hybrid mix of various spiritual traditions, which reflect negotiations around identity, core values, and views on social justice.

My research indicates that considerations of gender equality are central to questions of social justice and spirituality for these activists. The material

experiences of gender oppression coupled with their activist and feminist sensibilities yielded new kinds of spiritualities. In some cases this stemmed from personal experiences of feeling shame around their sexuality as young girls and being disconnected from their bodies. Martínez, for instance, attributed this to discourses around virginal purity and silences around sexuality propagated by institutional Catholicism. In all cases these activists have severely critiqued the role of the Roman Catholic Church doctrine in denying women their right to choose and to have control over their reproductive health. Critiques of all hierarchies of power were the purview of these and other activists during the movement and continue to be today; they are more fully expressed in their spiritualities.

These hybrid spiritual forms are, in part, inspired by these women's exposure to the histories and indigenous heritage of Mexican Americans during the Chicana/o Movement. Such knowledge provided alternatives to a hierarchical Catholicism at the same time that the women were developing politicized and feminist consciousness.[12] Together these factors would all inspire feminist spiritualities—spiritualities that are developed with a conscious rejection of patriarchy and all forms of oppression. Numerous women in my larger study, including those featured here, exhibited such spiritualities, practices that I contend can be considered through the lens of spiritual mestizaje, whereby they renewed their relationship to the sacred, inserting into their spiritual practices a critique of oppression that, as Delgadillo describes of the characters in the Chicana literary productions she examines, "takes them to new understandings of the sacred, critical insight, psychic peace, and passionate commitment to social justice" (39).

While a social justice commitment is apparent in the lives of the three activists, I contend that this spiritual agency also reflects and reveals the

processes of self-making that occurs among the women (Ortner 1997; 1989). The spiritual transformations I observed were political acts tied to their material existences and histories, experiences that reflect their gendered and racial positions. For instance, research participant Sister Teresita stated that whereas she once associated Our Lady of Guadalupe with virginal purity and submission, once she came to know her as versatile and as Tonantzin, La Virgen's meaning shifted to that of female strength.[13] This shift was reflected in Sister Teresita's own self-perception. She stated that she felt empowered by her new understanding of La Virgen, which worked to instill self-love within Sister Teresita, replacing the negative self-image she possessed in her childhood. In this and other ways women's spiritual needs have shifted so as to require new forms of spiritual engagement (Sendejo 2011).

In examining such acts of spiritual change as representative and constitutive of the social world (Durkheim 1912 [1995]), I explore what this cultural change among these activists indicates about their social realities and why such cultural change is occurring within the spiritual realm.[14] In regards to understanding religious practices as symbols, as Emile Durkheim suggests, we must know how to reach beneath the symbol to grasp the reality it represents and that gives the symbol its true meaning. This essay seeks to understand the reality of women's social worlds that such symbols and their shifting meanings represent, and the historical forces that served as the catalysts for such change.

I explore these dynamics in the coming pages in order to understand what motivated Martínez, Almanza, and Cotera to gravitate to advocating for social justice through a spiritual activist framework. While their spiritual practices are somewhat distinct, in all cases these women's strong convictions regarding social justice and equality manifest in their choice of religious and spiritual practice, practices that are connected with las comunidades—the struggles of other

peoples (Anzaldúa 1996, 3). This kind of activism involves their individual, spiritual journeys of inner change combined with a commitment to creating outer social change in the lives of others and with regards to environmental causes and healing of Mother Earth. I argue that this commitment to outer as well as inner change is markedly different from the religious experiences of generations past, and is unique to this generation of Tejanas.

The Chicano Civil Rights Movement and Chicana feminist movement emerged during a tumultuous period in American history. The U.S. Civil Rights Movement and women's movement were in full force; across the country marginalized groups were fighting for their rights. This period marked a pivotal moment in the identity formation of many of the Chicana/o Movement's participants. And an aspect of this identity formation involved a spiritual element. Exposure to the history of Mexican indigenism and a Mexica/Aztec spiritual legacy—central to which was the emergence of the history of Tonantzin—coupled with historical memories of growing up as Mexican women in Texas during the Jim Crow period shaped the religious development of this generation of activists. I argue that the material experiences of growing up as racialized and gendered females during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s in Texas, coupled with their exposure to student civil rights movements, inspired women's personal and political development into activists and feminists. Furthermore, it would lead them to challenge power structures within institutional Catholicism and to use their spiritual and other resources to heal, recreate their material conditions, and to do so for others later in life.

Susana Renteria Almanza

Susana Renteria Almanza is co-director of the environmental, economic, and social justice grassroots organization People Organized in the Defense of Earth and her Resources, (PODER), which she co-founded in 1991. Almanza

was born and raised in East Austin with her two sisters and seven brothers in a home not far from PODER's current office, where she works with PODER staff and volunteers to address the environmental hazards and social and economic impacts of various industries on East Austin neighborhoods. PODER's Young Scholars for Justice (YSJ) program offers local youth opportunities to become involved in addressing pressing educational, economic, and environmental issues that impact them in their daily lives, while gaining leadership and program development skills.[15]

While her religious upbringing was Catholic, Almanza left the church as a teen and follows a Mexica/Aztec spiritual path today, which involves recuperating spiritual and cultural aspects of her indigenous Mexican heritage. Almanza's narrative shows the processes by which formerly Catholic Mexican–origin women have turned to the histories and practices of their indigenous ancestors in various aspects of their lives. Her spiritual journey also shows the ways in which some women are reconfiguring their Catholic religious practices to align with a path of spirituality and social justice. Almanza describes what led her to this path, and how her current spiritual path fulfills her. Living a spiritually infused life is central to Almanza's spiritual and political/activist development. The two are inseparable.

Through her Mexica spiritual practice, Almanza is able to integrate social activism into her spiritual life. Her spirituality is therefore holistic and all encompassing in that it aligns with her commitment to ending environmental racism and other injustices and helping to protect the earth and her resources. Our Lady of Guadalupe-Tonantzin is central to Almanza's spiritual life. Her mother modeled a deep reverence for Guadalupe that was evident throughout Almanza and her mother's lives, even until her death. At her mother's funeral,

Almanza and her siblings had a blanket with the image of La Virgen placed upon her coffin. Raised with this tradition of Guadalupe devotion, Almanza states that she does not really, however, have a relationship with Christ. She lives spirituality connected to the creation of the earth and its elements; an earth-based spirituality. Hence, the Mexica/Aztec earth goddess Tonantzin holds a special place in her life. While Almanza has retained the practice of honoring Guadalupe and is a devotee like her mother, Guadalupe signifies different things for Almanza than La Virgen did for her mother. This can be seen in the ways the women differently invoke Guadalupe:

> She's more than the Virgen…she's…the creator and so she's the Mother Earth. She is that of giving life and life and death and rebirth and so I think that might be the difference [compared to how her mother invoked her]…yes, she [Guadalupe] is a woman, but she is also the main creator, she symbolizes what the world is all about. It's all about life and death and birth and death and rebirth and so she symbolizes those things to me. So I think that would be the only thing…my mother never put it in those terms. She put it in the terms of a woman.[16]

My research shows that prior to the Chicana generation, Almanza, Martínez, and Cotera's mothers did not invoke Tonantzin, nor did any of the other mothers of the women in my larger group of research participants. Within this group, this indicates a kind of spiritual change that has taken place between Almanza's mother's and Alamanza's own generation. I contend that this change can be largely attributed to the reclaiming of Chicana/o indigenism during the Chicana/o Movement. Coupling Guadalupe with Tonantzin symbolizes the role of Guadalupe-Tonantzin as creator and guardian of the earth's precious resources, as well as her role as the blessed mother. This belief

in Guadalupe as Tonantzin and the creator guides Almanza in her work of protecting the earth and making its resources accessible to all.

Like Martínez and other contemporaries involved in the Movimiento, Almanza's early life experiences came to shape her activism. The beliefs that everyone should have equal access to the earth's resources, educational opportunities, and economic stability are informed by Almanza's early life experiences, which helped put her on her current path of social justice:

> I always think about all of those life experiences [that] helped…to put me…to work on…social justice issues, because…I remember all those things…growing up and some of them are very painful, there are things I haven't forgot, I put them in their place. But I do remember and I don't think any child or any person should have to go through all those indignities or humiliation, just because you are a different color or because you don't have money or…you speak another language. All of those things I think helped form me and led me to this path [of] activism…and [to] try to make change about things that are happening … today…[they] continue to be same issues… maybe coded in a different way but seems like the same issues.

Prior to becoming involved in the environmental justice movement in 1990, Almanza was involved in the Chicana/o Movement, about which she says, "[I]t was recognizing there was more than the church and that there was no equality in what was happening to our people…it was saying…we have spirituality, that we had a history before this conquest." Coming into knowledge of this history and the spiritual legacy of their pre-Hispanic ancestors has guided people such as Almanza toward a Mexica/Aztec-inspired spirituality today, one that originated during the movimiento, as with her participation in danza azteca. It is a history that privileges a symbology system comprised of female deities rather than the

kind of male-centered Chicano nationalist recuperation of indigenous Mexican spiritualities. Almanza's exposure to this history through her involvement in the Chicana/o Movement is therefore important for understanding how and why she chose a Mexica/Aztec spiritual path. It also drives her desire to share such knowledge with others. For instance, an important aspect of the YSJ program involves youth learning about the history of East Austin and of their cultural heritage. This history has been vital in Almanza's identity formation and in her work, and she is committed to sharing it with future generations, so that such histories are no longer silenced, but can work to empower youth and give them a sense of who they are and from where they came.

The mestizaje that occurred through indigenous and European racial mixing as a result of the Spanish conquest of the Americas resulted in Mexican-origin people. It also resulted in a spiritual mestizaje of indigenous and Catholic spiritualities. With the decimation of the Mexica came the loss of their spiritual traditions, widely replaced by Catholicism across the Americas; however Catholicism still retains some indigenous influences, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, the dark-skinned Virgin with her Aztec symbolism, and practices originating from Mexica/Aztec practices such as Day of the Dead. Today the spiritual mestizaje described by Anzaldúa in *Borderlands* occurs with Almanza. As with her relationship to Guadalupe-Tonantzin, Almanza once again takes aspects of her mother's faith and incorporates them into her own spiritual practice and commitments to social justice. Evidence of this is in the poem, "Sign of the Cross," which she has allowed me to share.

> ***Sign of the Cross***
> Why do I make the sign of the
> Cross as I pass in
> Front of the church?

My mother always
Made the sign of the
Cross when she entered
the church and when
She passed by the church

She gave thanks to God,
She acknowledged the house of prayer,
She gave thanks to life.

Why do I make the sign of the cross
As I pass the church—the catholic church?

I acknowledge the eternal flame
that burns inside the church.

The candles' lights that connect

with all the candle lights of the Universe

The place of prayers,
prayers that connect with other prayers.

The energies that flow through
the walls, to Mother Earth
to the heavens.

I acknowledge the Four Directions
I acknowledge the Four Elements.
I acknowledge Love.

> I acknowledge the love for my Mother.
> My connection to her. My prayers to her,
> my Love for her.
>
> I acknowledge the universe. I acknowledge my
> Mother and Mother Earth.
> I acknowledge the memories—stored deep within my soul
>
> I make the sign of the cross every night and every day
> When I pass by the church I make the sign of life
> I acknowledge the life my mother gave me.

Almanza goes on to draw a connection between the cross and the four directions:

> When you look at the cross what is the center point? It connects all of that and that's love. You know its love that connects them and the middle and keeps them together…it was about the directions and it was spirituality. Then you didn't have to be fighting with people about is this religion or that religion better…because it's just spiritually and…anybody can be spiritual.

She interprets the cross as a symbol of the energies and the four directions, which is central to her understanding of how the spiritual gives her strength to move forward in her work and the resources to create change in the material world.

For her, spirituality is about recognizing the sacredness of the elements that give us life—we cannot live without them. We honor our water or Mother Earth because, as she says, "… it's our spirit…it's our spiritual connection." Almanza differentiates this kind of spiritual connection from the religious framework of institutionalized Catholicism, about which she says:

> [You] don't have to worry, is this person going to punish me…in the church it was always about punishing and the saving, punishing and the saving…but in…spirituality it's just about the recognition…trying to make sure that you integrate yourself into these four elements so that you can sustain yourself—to me that's spiritually. To me it's about energies…keeping a balance inside of you and then outside of you.

Here Almanza distinguishes between organized religion and a personal spirituality. Through spirituality it is possible for Almanza to maintain a strong spiritual foundation internally while working to improve the material conditions of people's lives. She offers, "We really needed to be sure those elements were protected for the betterment of all the people." Her belief that every human has equal access to resources is infused with a spiritual activist intention, as her activist work is, as she told me, absolutely intertwined with her spirituality. Susana Almanza's current spiritual path allows her to maintain a connection with and to honor the earth, a practice her mother instilled in her early on, while allowing her to remain on a path of justice and to reconnect with an ancestral past that resonates with her, gives her life meaning, and inspires her to do her social justice work in the present. All of this is possible through her spiritual activism.

Martha P. Cotera

Martha P. Cotera is a historian, feminist scholar, community organizer, and political activist born in Mexico and raised in El Paso, Texas. She recalls being "raised in a household of feminists" where politics were constantly topics of discussion. Feminist ideals and intellectual prowess were therefore early influences in Cotera's life. Though her household was Protestant, she was raised in her early years with a lack of female religious figures. This would change in later years as she began developing her feminist sensibility.

Cotera has been involved in social justice causes, including local and statewide politics, for over fifty years. She was a key player in La Raza Unida Party (RUP). Running for the state board of education in 1972, she was co-founder of RUP's women's caucus—Mujeres Por La Raza—and she was involved in the Chicana feminist movement as well. Cotera has also been involved in education reform since that period, including helping to found Juárez-Lincoln University—the nation's first Mexican-American institution of higher learning—in Austin, Texas, in 1971. Cotera's body of scholarship includes over 100 articles and books, including *Diosa y Hembra: The History and Heritage of Chicanas in the U.S.* (1976) and *The Chicana Feminist* (1977). These groundbreaking works in Chicana Studies present historical analyses of Chicanas' feminist, spiritual, and political legacies. The exposure to these and other such foundational works in the 1970s was formative for Chicanas, many of whom were learning of the histories of their feminist and indigenous ancestors and heritage for the first time. Such works paved the way for new forms of spirituality and political activism that would impact future generations of Chicanas and inspire literary, spiritual, and various other Chicana cultural productions. Cotera's life and her spiritual and activist development provide insight into the ways in which spiritual and political transformation occurred among this generation. Importantly, Cotera's mother remained Protestant and did not convert, seeking out a feminine model, as did Cotera herself.

Cotera's life story speaks to Anzaldúa's assertion that the political is missing in much of contemporary spiritually—which I read as a kind of politics that overtly critiques social hierarchy. However, Cotera also shows how the spiritual is often missing in people's political lives. As she stated in response to reviewing a draft of this essay as well as speaking to Anzaldúa's opening quote, "In spirituality the political connection is missing…worse still, the spiritual is missing in the political connections." It appears that here Cotera

is talking about an egalitarian, feminist-infused spirituality that would serve to bring people together and galvanize them in the service of social change, rather than, perhaps, the polarization that characterizes our current political climate in the United States. In the following narrative, Cotera illustrates not only how the spiritual is political, but also how political activism must be a spiritual endeavor.

While Susana Almanza's experiences follow a pattern of growing up Tejana and Catholic and coming into spiritual transformation after her movement experiences, Cotera converted to Catholicism rather than from it. The seeds of this transformation were planted early on in Cotera's life. She was raised in a Protestant home in Mexico where she recalls many-a-political-discussion with her parents and grandparents around the dinner table. She states that she was raised in a household of feminists. She had no spiritual role models that were women, so she turned to Jesus Christ,

> [C]onsidering the way that as a little bitty child I saw Christ, you know…he was the only feminist in the spirit world, in the real world I had a lot of women and history around…in my spirit world he represented these feminist values for me…Christ was the one role model…he represented the feminine to me, because his values are feminine.[17]

In her twenties Cotera went through what she calls an "intellectual conversion" to Catholicism. She was driven to Catholicism in part by the respect, admiration, and reverence she imparted to Catholics for holding female figures such as the Virgin Mary/Our Lady of Guadalupe in high regard. She conducted a lot of goddess research, during which time she learned of the wisdom goddess Sophia and the connection between Sophia and values attributed to Christ. In her research she found a direct connection

between feminist values and values that were attributed to Christ. She states that while Christ was endowed with feminine characteristics he came forth as a masculine model. Imagine, she told tell me, "a whole section of Protestant women with no female role model!" Ancestral history of goddess devotion is not just present in the histories of Mexicanas that Cotera has uncovered in her scholarship, it manifested in her own spiritual and activist development, as evidenced in her response to my question when queried about who she prays to after I learned that Cotera is a firm believer in the power of prayer:

> When I have to think of something very specific, just to cover my odds, I pray to the grandmothers…because I think there's a connection, a direct connection from the grandmothers to the goddess. And, I pray to Jesus Christ because I think…he was a most fabulous prophet, I think he was just a fabulous representative of something very good.

Cotera's intellectual conversion to Catholicism, her form of Christianity, and practice of goddess devotion has taken the shape of an alternative Catholicism in which she selects those aspects of Catholicism which hold meaning for her and provide her spiritual fulfillment, while leaving behind those that do not serve her.[18] For instance, she is adamantly against what she views as a hierarchical system within the Catholic Church, where women are held in subordinate positions to men. Because she was raised in a feminist household, Cotera was raised with strong feminist values, which she states are human values. She vehemently believes in and promotes women's rights and women's intellectual and personal development in all spheres of life. The same feminist values that motivated her to seek out feminine spiritual role models and leave Protestantism inform her religious beliefs and a Catholicism that is characterized by negotiation, but not compromise. This entails reconciling

aspects of institutional Catholicism with her views on social justice and equality. Cotera chooses to leave behind those aspects of Catholicism that do not suit her spiritual needs, support her spiritual growth, or align with her core values. Instead, she chooses to retain those aspects of Catholicism that align with her core values.

Similarly to many Catholic and formerly Catholic women I encountered throughout my research, Cotera is in the process of reevaluating her relationship to the Catholic Church. In doing so, she is clear to note that it is the institution that she questions, not her relationship to the Christ-like values that she says are at the core of her spiritual practice and fundamental to her understanding of what Christianity originally was and should be. The life of Jesus Christ is a life, which deeply inspires this passionate social justice advocate. The compendium of attributes imbedded in Christ, as she said, were all female, "He's a beautiful model." In this way Cotera assigns feminine—and I would suggest feminist—attributes to Christ. He was a Christ that promoted equality and social justice; a Christ that Cotera knows and loves. This strong connection to Christ is unique; while Our Lady of Guadalupe is a constant in women's lives throughout this and my larger bodies of work, and, even though many of the women have a relationship to him, none do so in the same way as Cotera. Most have a more overt and evident connection to Guadalupe-Tonantzin.

Living these Christ–like values is itself a form of spiritual activism that connects the metaphysical with life's material circumstances. However, recently, it has not been easy for Cotera to continue to enact Christ-like values within the context of institutional Catholicism, as shown in the distinction Cotera makes between the social justice teachings of Christ and the institution of the Catholic Church:

> We [Martha and her husband] are really rethinking our relationship to the church, but it's not our relationship to Christian values or to human values because…he [Christ] was always speaking for human rights. His approach…to really embrace…difference and diversity and urging people to accept one another and to work and love one another…I really, really love that.

It is evident here that Cotera values the social justice orientation of Christianity, which she feels has gotten lost in the politics of the Catholic Church.

The core values that inform Cotera's religious and spiritual life permeate other aspects of her life. Cotera has publicly discussed the sexism and gender politics that she and other women in RUP experienced and were forced to navigate. She draws an insightful parallel between navigating patriarchy and male dominance within the Catholic Church and doing so during the Chicana/o Movement as an active participant of RUP: "La Raza Unida is like the Catholic Church: You don't have to like it all. You have to be able to see the real cause and issues—it's not about 'the boys.'" This statement is significant to my larger argument. It led me to consider that women such as Cotera employ the strategies they used to navigate gender hierarchies within the political realm in the 1960s and 1970s to navigate religious hierarchies today. Cotera uses similar tools of political negotiation from her past in her present. Spiritual activism involves drawing on resources in order to do the work of social justice. I contend that spiritual activism for Cotera entails calling upon and even honing tools she used during the movement to articulate and critique how structures of racial, gender, and class inequality function. She couples this with her knowledge of Chicana/o and Mexicana/o religious and cultural histories to once again challenge, navigate, and work to dismantle patriarchy. Today she does so in various realms, including the

religious arena, through her critique of the power structures within organized religion, particularly Catholicism. I argue that her critique is located in a feminist sensibility as well as an active resistance to institutionalized religion. One form this takes is not attending mass as regularly as before. By "it's not all about the boys," I think Cotera means that there are larger purposes, struggles that should not get overshadowed by patriarchy. For instance, Jesus Christ's messages of social justice being the "real causes and issues," and most importantly—of not letting that get overshadowed by sexism or gender oppression in the Catholic Church. This can also be likened to not letting the sexism that she and other RUP women experienced by male-centric leadership and efforts, and keeping the larger goals of the Chicana/o Movement and fight for racial, gender, class equality of the movements in mind. Compartmentalizing as such allowed Cotera and other Tejanas to stay within RUP at a time when women in other Movimiento groups were leaving and creating their own groups, like the Brown Beret women in East LA (Espinoza 2001). Instead of leaving, women like Cotera and Martínez were involved in Mujeres Por La Raza Unida, the women's caucus of RUP. Cotera was also involved in electoral politics with RUP and in her role with the National Women's Political Caucus. Furthermore, Cotera's gender critiques are evident and very clearly articulated in her scholarship—i.e. her early Chicana feminist texts as well as in her role in RUP during the movement, from co-founding the Chicana caucus of RUP to her role in the National Women's Political Caucus. This is both a mindset and action, as I mention. No, it does not refer to her being vocal in her parish, as this did not come up in the interview. So again, I think she articulates her critique of power structures in Catholicism through her own personal practice. By refraining from attending mass, and by doing spirituality in ways that she does not feel is happening all the time within Christianity. In this way, she is not only engaging in spiritual

mestizaje, but also moving toward Mujerista Theology, a theology that denounces patriarchy and sexism within the church and strives for a model of doing theology that is inspired by a philosophy of social justice that includes liberation from oppression for all, including women (Isasi-Diaz 1996).

In the following quote Cotera illustrates her contention that not only does the spiritual need to be critiqued from a political standpoint, but that political and activist positions should be informed by a strong spiritual foundation, "I think it would be very difficult to arrive at a feminist—an activist position—without a very strong spiritual and value space…you have to have that to begin with." This contention is linked to Cotera's idea of doing spirituality—the living of those spiritual values—the doing of the "outer work" of which Anzaldúa speaks. Cotera draws upon her Christ-based values to do so, as well as through a devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe, another symbol of the feminine divine and a role model for Cotera in her spiritual and activist work:

> To me the Virgen represents the divine in women…the way I see it is the way I see Jesus Christ—who, again, was the embodiment of the wisdom goddess, Sophia, and all these wonderful attributes…it's ok, I don't mind, I think it's good for men to have that role model. I think it's good to have a goddess as a role model. I incorporate goddess worship and the way I incorporate those values is by living…and not necessarily by worshipping in an institutionalized setting. It's by living day-to-day, minute-by-minute and by doing whatever I can do given my human resources and my human strength of all kinds.... I think it's just living, living to the best of your abilities and doing the best that you can with your resources and sharing those as much as possible.

Living spirituality requires spiritual resources to continue to move forward—garnering the strength to continue the work, even in the face of adversity. This is a critical component of spiritual activism that Anzaldúa articulated and which Cotera exhibits.

I contend that what Cotera is talking about can also be understood as spiritual conocimiento (Anzaldúa 2002), a way of knowing that is an alternative form of knowledge not generally valued as academic or other formal knowledges. Spiritual knowing comes from a place that is neither physical nor mental. For Cotera, spiritual activism relies on the living, the day-to-day actions that accompany a spiritual belief, in this case, of goddess worship and Christ-based values. Her way of knowing, her conocimiento, is key to her path.

Cotera viewed converting to Catholicism as a feminist act—in order to embrace the feminine face of God through a close relationship to Mary and Our Lady of Guadalupe and her subsequent questioning of a flawed Catholicism, Cotera is actively critiquing patriarchy. Like she did with RUP, Cotera is focusing on the aspects of social justice that inspire her in her life—she withstood and fought the patriarchy within RUP to fight for the larger cause of social equality and is doing the same in her religious life today—taking aspects of religion and spirituality that resonate with her and her feminist and humanist ethics, and discarding the rest. Martha Cotera's spiritual journey is characterized by the challenging of religious hierarchies and a deep commitment to a Christ-centered social justice praxis by which she lives her life—the doing of spirituality that can be understood as her form of spiritual activism.

María Elena Martínez

I will conclude this ethnographic section by returning to the life story of María Elena Martínez. Hers is the life that inspired me to ask broader

questions about Tejanas' spiritualities and their connection to issues of social justice, which led me to many of the answers.

Martinez has a master's degree in education from the University of Texas at Austin and has worked in private and public education for thirty-four years, specializing in bilingual education as an elementary classroom teacher and instructional coordinator. Since 1992 she has studied shamanism through the Foundation for Shamanic Studies and is a minister of the Circle of the Sacred Earth. Martínez's spiritual practice of shamanism involves conducting a variety of healing ceremonies and spiritual cleansings or limpias for people in her local community.[19] She hosts full moon and new moon ceremonies at her home and counsels people who are going through difficult personal experiences or who wish to heal from spiritual, physical, or emotional trauma. Martínez's current life path is the culmination of life experiences that began seventy years ago in a small North Texas town. Martínez and her family were the only Mexicans who lived in the rural town of Wylie. She grew up very cognizant of the racial discrimination in her midst. Martínez's parents worked as farm workers in Texas, and she and her siblings would eventually take part in it as well. Martínez recalls that she knew early on that she was "culturally different." As the only Spanish speaker in her all English-speaking first grade class, she withdrew, rarely interacting with the other students. She said that she was essentially mute the entire year because she did could not speak a word of English. Furthermore, as they did with her siblings, her teachers Anglicized her name. María Elena became Mary Helen. She and her siblings responded to such rejection of their ethnic heritage by switching from taco lunches to white bread sandwiches in order to fit in. Additionally, they lived with an overprotective, domineering father who was very strict with his daughters and allowed them limited opportunities to socialize outside of their Catholic youth group and select school functions. While other young people were attending parties at each other's homes, Martínez and her sister were

not allowed to do so. Such stories of living in a constant state of displacement between two cultures are common in her reflections on her life.

Martínez's life story parallels the religious experiences of many Mexican Americans raised in the Catholic Church. She spoke of growing up in a devoutly Catholic household and attending Catholic school. She completed all her church sacraments, including baptism, first communion, and confirmation, and was an active member of the Catholic Youth Organization in her parish. She attended mass regularly with her family and taught catechism classes as a young adult. Her mother was a member of the Guadalupanas and her father was a church deacon. When it came time to think about college, a high school teacher of Martínez's encouraged her to apply. As a World War II veteran her father was keenly aware of the benefits of an education and relaxed his traditionally strict rules to allow Martínez to leave home and attend the University of North Texas. College would come to open her eyes in many ways, including to the possibilities for social change. During that period she participated in the Poor People's March, which went through Denton.[20] She cited this period as a pivotal turning point in the development of her social conscious. As she stated, it put the class inequalities she was seeing among children she taught in the local Head Start Program into perspective.

Martínez left the Dallas area to pursue her master's at UT Austin. It was there that she continued her social activism, becoming involved with MAYO and RUP. She became an active participant in the Chicana feminist movement and worked with other women and men to get issues that affected women, such as childcare and reproductive rights, placed on the RUP platform. In addition to working for the rights and professional and personal development of women, Martínez was involved in education reform, working to raise

awareness about the need for effective bilingual education. Her decision to join in these social causes owes much to her early family experiences.

Martínez gives some indication of her feminist sensibilities and how she enacted them during her time in RUP in her response to the male contingent of the party who suggested she run for vice-chair of the party, rather than chair: "I said well, I really don't think we should automatically just say that we can only run for vice-chair, I want to run for state chairperson."[21] And she did. And she won. Martínez did not think it should be a given that women would run for vice-chair, but that they should be considered for the position of chair. She believes that coming from a home where her father was the "sole voice" made her want to break such patterns that limited women to secondary positions. She said that until then, neither men nor women considered the possibility that women could take the RUP chair. Martínez served as the last state chair of RUP from 1976–1978. The early experience of living under a patriarchal father shaped Martínez's views on gender equality in other ways as well, including, as I would come to learn, how she viewed women's positions in the Catholic Church.

In her twenties Martínez began questioning the church, which was followed by a period of what she called "spiritual dormancy." In her thirties she was introduced to shamanism, which provided her the spiritual fulfillment she was seeking. The Catholic Church, as I have since heard her say on numerous occasions, no longer meets her spiritual needs.

As I came to know Martínez in the years following our initial meeting in my early graduate school career, I often reflected upon her description of her attraction to the Chicana/o Movement. I wanted to know more about what drew her to it and the process by which she came into a Chicana political and feminist consciousness, which began at University of North Texas, followed

her into her MAYO years, continued to develop with her involvement in RUP, and which is still very present within her today. It became apparent that those earlier childhood and adolescent experiences would later inform her political and feminist development, as well as her desire to become a bilingual educator and to get involved in education reform and electoral politics during the Chicana/o Movement. I also learned that the early life experiences that informed her activist consciousness and desire to create social change in the world informed her choice to leave Catholicism and adopt shamanism.

While she left Catholicism, Martínez retained her relationship to the Virgin of Guadalupe-Tonantzin, who is a central figure in her practice and has a very strong presence in Martínez's life. Like both Almanza and many other women of her generation, Martínez learned Guadalupe devotion from her mother. The Virgin still retains some of the same meanings for Martínez that were passed down to her by her mother, such as protector of women and a symbol of Mexican ethnic and religious heritage. However, what is different are the ways in which Martínez draws on the Virgin in her spiritual practice—like Almanza, different from the ways Martínez's mother related to the Virgin. Martínez believes people should be able to create their own individual divinity; connect with their divine selves. She believes that women, in particular, have not been taught to explore this and that realizing our divine spirits is necessary in order to heal from low self-esteem, abuse, and trauma. The Virgen, however, can aid us in this:

> [T]he Virgin de Guadalupe spoke very strong to me…she has been the healing mother…she inspires me and teaches me how to use [my own spiritual] power for the good of all beings. Guadalupe-Tonantzín is an earth goddess…we as women have to heal the collective unconscious of women, find our own feminine divine. We

> have to heal the memory of physical, sexual, psychological, spiritual abuse that has been suffered by women over the thousands of years and present in the world today.[22]

Martínez is adamant that we must talk about such things, that we must "name it"—as in the sexual abuse—if we are going to put an end to such violence. She believes we should not be afraid to talk about it and let go of the shame; this is key to stopping it and to women's healing.

Helping others to heal and to cultivate self-love through talking through their trauma and through ritual and ceremony are ways that Martínez puts her spiritual beliefs into practice. She also does this through her work with Alma de Mujer Center for Social Change.[23] As a member of the women's council, Martínez works to produce a space where all women can do their work of social justice while connecting with one another, doing ceremony, participating in workshops and talks on various aspects of mind-body-spirit health. Her work with Alma de Mujer is another example of her spiritual activism, how she promotes the spiritual and physical well being of others—a commitment to the outer work.

The centrality of Guadalupe-Tonantzin in Martínez's spiritual life and work is exemplified by the idea of the feminine divine. Martínez believes all women should embody the power and divinity of Guadalupe-Tonantzín and promotes that idea through her spiritual healing and counseling. Much like Almanza, Martínez's invoking of Tonantzin signals her belief that the earth goddess preceded Guadalupe and the arrival of Catholicism to the Americas. Her devotion to Guadalupe-Tonantzin enables Martínez to maintain a connection to her ethnic heritage and aspects of her mother's devotion to Guadalupe that she holds dear, while also infusing her with egalitarian, feminist meaning.

The versatility of Our Lady of Guadalupe as a cultural symbol with the ability to at once signify a healing mother, the feminine divine, and a social justice ethic, is enacted symbolically through Martínez and her healing and community work. Martínez is once again directing her life toward helping others, much like she did earlier in life. Today she does so as a spiritual healer and spiritual activist. Embracing life and connecting with the divine made more sense to her than Catholicism. Martínez believes she is on this earth for a purpose, "to use my divine spirit to create a better world—honoring the earth and respecting life."

In Martínez's narrative, she shows the ways in which she enacts the belief that all living beings are interconnected and that her role as a spiritual healer, while different from her previous activist role, is nevertheless a way that she is committed to serving others:

> It is a different way of being a service to a community.… And it is an important one given where we are in our world today. I think it's an important piece that is missing…I think that all of us need to examine how we live our life each day, in terms of how we are as consumers, how we are in accepting ideas without questioning them…we each have to take that responsibility for our mental, our physical and emotional health…and of course our spiritual health… that is the only way that we can become better human beings and understand that our true nature is to be of service to others.

Conclusion

That initial meeting with María Elena Martínez and my relationship with her over the years have taught me that spirituality and social justice are mutually informing for her and for many of her contemporaries, as well as for subsequent generations of Chicanas.[24] Drawing on a history of Chicana

feminist thought, commitments to social justice, and a legacy of spiritual traditions passed down from their ancestors, mothers, and grandmothers, Tejanas involved in movements for social change show that today their politics and spiritualities converge.

As the narratives presented here have shown, Tejana women involved in social causes and the Chicana/o Civil Rights Movement have garnered strength from spiritual resources—prayer, spiritual community, and ceremony, for instance—in order to do their work of creating inner change and to find spiritual fulfillment and inner peace. They use their religious understandings, spiritual beliefs, and faith to make sense of their lived experiences, as their predecessors have done for generations. However, I assert that the functions of religion have changed with this generation of Mexican Americans, in that religious and spiritual spheres are now also sites where women actively work to promote social justice, creating outer change as well as inner change—in their communities and throughout the world, through spiritual activism.

While scholars have documented a history of religious activism and feminism among Catholic Latinas, little attention has been directed toward how spirituality, social justice, and personal politics intersect and manifest outside of organized religion.[25] The spiritual is at once a site where women have experienced gender inequality and a place where they can work to combat it. They can challenge religious patriarchy and formulate new practices while retaining their religious and ethnic heritage and relationships to aspects of their Catholic faith, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, that hold meaning for them. Women are reclaiming them, remaking them, and in turn, reclaiming and remaking themselves. While some of the practices in which las mujeres engage may be viewed as new-age or neo-pagan, there is a component of social change that is missing from much of traditional new age spiritual experiences

that is present in the spiritual activism I described here—a commitment to creating outer change in the social world.

I argue that the post–WWII/Chicana/o generation is a pivotal generation that marks a turning point in the cultural production of religion and spirituality among Mexican Americans. With this generation of Mexican Americans we see a continuation of a tradition of working to create social change among Mexican Americans that dates back generations. It continues today in ways that are connected and reflected in their spiritual lives: through community activism, spiritual healing work, social activism, and in acting as mentors to youth and young women. My preliminary research suggests that subsequent generations of Chicanas and Chicanos are exhibiting similar agency. I argue that the Raza Unida and the Chicano and Chicana feminist movements were key historical movements in this turning point for Mexican American spirituality in Texas. Through their involvement in RUP and other social justice initiatives during the Chicana/o Movement, women developed the framework to challenge gender, racial, ethnic, and class discrimination. They were able to articulate, and in many instances challenge, social inequalities for the first time. It afforded them the mechanisms by which to articulate their dissatisfaction with other oppressive social structures as well. In the cases of Martha P. Cotera, Susana Renteria Almanza, and María Elena Martínez, the Chicana feminist and Chicana/o movements helped them to garner the tools and histories to resist and later recreate gender roles and hierarchies through spiritual activism. Ironically enough, the structure that gave them the tools to articulate oppression was also the site of oppression. Women turned to address sexism within RUP, the very structure within which they worked alongside their male counterparts to fight racial and ethnic oppression. The feminist movement provided some guidance to Chicana feminists in articulating and challenging gender oppression. Almanza, Cotera, Martínez and their contemporaries fought for

women's rights and critiqued gender and racial hierarchies in the 1960s and 1970s. Such feminist consciousness would stay with them into their later years and manifest in various ways, including critiquing another power structure: the Catholic Church.

Martínez and her contemporaries work to transform such hierarchy and exclusion by way of spiritual activism. Premised on Anzaldúa's conception of spiritual activism, I assert that it not only allows people to garner inner resources to create outer change, but also for las mujeres and other spirituality entails spiritual activism, which involves countering, challenging, and outright changing the face of religion and Mexican American religious and spiritual beliefs in the United States.

Spiritual and religious practices are reflections of the social world. Examining the lives of las mujeres through a spiritual activist theoretical framework reveals a changing face of Mexican American religion and spirituality that parallels people's changing social and political needs. It reflects a questioning of flawed aspects of institutional religion and how one's faith can exist separately from the institution of the Catholic Church.

I argue that spiritual practices and religious institutions have changed in form and function in significant ways, including evolving into sites of resistance and reconciliation where people challenge hierarchies of power in recreating their social realities. Las mujeres create meaning in their lives through the interconnections they make with others as they go about "treating spiritual work as a political issue" (Anzaldúa 1996, 2). They have created strategies for living day-to-day that are in ways distinct from generations past and unique to the particular historical period and social circumstances of these spiritual activists. Spirituality and the desire to create social change are hardly

mutually exclusive, but rather one and the same. Cotera, Martínez, and Almanza treat spirituality as a political issue and approach their political work with spiritual intentions.[26]

In our last interview I asked Martínez a question regarding her participation in the Chicana/o Movement. "What did you get out of that experience?" I asked. She responded: "It showed me that we could change the world." This powerful statement, reminiscent of Anzaldúa's own words that in changing ourselves we thus change the world—exemplifies what Martínez took from her movement experiences, which she continues to draw upon as she works to change the world. She just does so in different ways, still motivated by a commitment to justice and equality. If the lives of María Elena Martínez, Susana Renteria Almanza, Martha P. Cotera, and other women engaged in the remaking of religion in the borderlands are an indicator, the next phase of creating social change for women of the Chicana generation and subsequent generations is upon us, and the arena is spiritual activism.

Notes

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[1] Email correspondence, María Elena Martínez, February 5, 2012.

[2] I refer to Martínez and the other research participants in my study as "spiritual activists," "activists," and "the women" interchangeably throughout the essay. I avoid terms such as "informants" and "subjects" because the relationships I have developed with the women and my view of them as contributors and collaborators make them more than "informants" or "subjects."

[3] For more on women's participation in the Chicana/o Movement, see Maylei Blackwell (2003; 2011), Dionne Espinoza (2001; 2006; 2011), and Alma García (1997). Both Blackwell and

Espinoza offer analyses of Tejana participation in RUP, Espinoza's being one of the very few treatments dedicated solely to RUP Texas (2011).

[4] See Espinoza (2011) for a discussion of the gender politics within Texas RUP.

[5] Blackwell (2011) discusses how Chicanas in the Midwest and California were forced to navigate similar gendered confines within Chicano nationalism. Women who advocated for women's rights by asserting feminist perspectives were accused by some of identifying with the Anglo women's movement and dividing the Chicana/o Movement. Alma García (1997) also documents this, discussing women in two camps: as loyalists and as feminists. Dionne Espinoza discusses this tension in her study of women's participation in the East Los Angeles chapter of the Brown Berets—another organization, much like RUP that espoused a commitment to social change, yet was accused by numerous women participants of being sexist and relegating women to domestic duties. Women in the Brown Berets went as far as to respond to male dominance by creating their own activist organization, "Las Adelitas de Aztlán," and leaving the Brown Berets (20).

[6] See Sendejo (2011) for an auto-ethnographic account of how meeting María Elena Martínez led me to change my dissertation topic and how my personal experience of loss and spiritual healing informed my research and provided deeper insight into the uses of spirituality and their intersection with issues of social justice.

[7] Shamanism is an earth-based spiritual tradition that is the oldest spiritual healing tradition still in general use today, dating back approximately 40,000 years to Siberia. It is practiced among indigenous groups around the world. Shamanism involves the use of herbs in spiritual and psychological healing and journeying, at which time the shaman travels to other dimensions where she/he receives messages from spirits that the shaman can use to create positive change in the material world (Tedlock 2005).

[8] Blackwell (2011) argues that women's involvement in the Chicana/o Movement was vital for the emergence of Chicana feminism. Blackwell discusses the complexity of its early emergence in her examination of the 1971 Houston Conferencia de Mujeres Por La Raza, a national women's convention of some 600 Chicanas. Ideological differences and tensions among Chicanas were made apparent during this significant event when some Chicanas walked out. It became "a rich site from which to understand the political fault lines of early Chicana feminism" (161). It was supposed to unify Chicanas from around the country and inspire discussions around the role of the Catholic Church in Chicana oppression, Chicana sexuality, motherhood, economic justice, and other issues. However, tensions arose and ideological division became apparent as a group left the conference over differences in understandings of feminism. Some women chose to fight oppression from within the party and others elected to leave. She states that RUP was an example of women who stayed and fought within Movimiento organizations. The conference was also significant because women openly discussed sexual politics and the role of the church in gender oppression (173). Blackwell discusses the "revolutionary potential of Chicanos organizing within the Catholic Church" to get the church to pay more attention to Chicana/o communities and take part in their liberation that participants addressed. Chicana nuns were part of this discussion. Women religious

leaders were also involved. See Sister Theresita Basso's (1997) discussion of the "existential conflict of identity and commitment" that many Mexican American religious women were experiencing during the late 1960s and early 1970s, at once dedicated to serving Mexican communities and going through her own ethnic awareness, and her quest for ethnic identity as a Chicana, leading her toward other like-minded religious women—in the project about working for the Mexican American communities. As Blackwell states, several Chicana nuns were involved in the conferences and in Chicana liberation theology via their new organization, Las Hermanas, an organization of religious feminists who organized in order to work to change the Catholic Church from within. See Lara Medina (2005) for an in-depth examination of Las Hermanas and discussion of their critique of patriarchy and racial discrimination within the church. They brought discussions of Catholic social justice to the Chicana/o Movement. As Blackwell states, members of Las Hermanas would go on to develop a Latina feminist theology. For more on this, see Yolanda Tarango and Isasi-Diaz (1988), Isasi-Diaz (1996), and Aquino, et. al (2002). Espinoza (2001) discusses the involvement of Catholic sister Gloria Arellanes in the Brown Berets.

I argue women exhibited and continue to exhibit Chicana feminisms in various forms, including in their religious and spiritual practices and beliefs. Theresa Delgadillo (2011) supports this contention, situating her treatment of Anzaldúa's concept of spiritual mestizaje and of *Borderlands* within Chicana feminist and queer Chicano literary works from 1969 to the present. She argues that Anzaldúa's work builds on the androcentric, early Chicana/o Movement's interest in indigenous cultures and the recuperation of female ancestral deities by Chicana feminists. Delgadillo states, "For that earlier generation of Chicana feminists, a confrontation with prevailing religious systems was necessary to the project of securing gender equality, and their efforts reverberate here and in other Latino/a feminist writing, art, theorizing, and activism" (5). Karen Mary Davalos also addresses this in *Yolanda M. López* (2008), where she discusses how the artist depicted herself, her mother, and grandmother as Guadalupe in order to "challenge and redefine representations of Chicanas" into empowering images, such as Tonantzin and Coatlicue. Davalos proposes, López's "manipulation of the iconography of the Virgen de Guadalupe allowed her to destabilize patriarchal and Catholic expectations of women (81)"

[9] As Irene Lara discusses, Guadalupe-Tonantzin's multiple meanings are emblematic of the desires of women to heal and to partake in a decolonial spirituality that connects them to a sacred indigenous/mestiza worldview while reconnecting them to a spiritual and cultural past (2008).

[10] The dance form danza azteca is inspired by "pre-Columbian choreographies and pedagogies" that can be found in contemporary Mexico. These folk dances or danzas meld pre-Columbian and Catholic influences whose format generally relies on a group formation. They are ceremonial, and have spiritual or religious connotations. The emergence of danza in the United States, while less prevalent than in Mexico, is said to have originated during the Chicana/o Movement as part of the act of self-determination and recovery of their ethnic heritage by Chicanas/os (Huerta 2009, 8).

Temazcales are ritual sweat baths that are considered part of the Southern Mesoamerican indigenous tradition, common in parts of Mexico including the Central Valley and Oaxaca. Based on surviving codices, the Aztecs are known to have used temazcales (1990).

According to my research, the inclusion of Tonantzin, the Aztec/Mexica earth goddess, in the devotion of the women in my study was greatly influenced by the reclaiming of Chicana/o histories and indigenismo that emerged during the Chicana/o movements. Castillo (1994), Delgadillo (2011), and Davalos (2009) acknowledge the availability of this ancestral history during this period.

[11] Jeanette Rodriguez's (1994) study on Our Lady of Guadalupe's empowering effects on Latina women and a rich body of scholarship on mujerista theology and Latina feminist theologies (Isasi-Díaz and Tarango 1988; Tamez 1989, Isasi-Diaz 1996, 1993) are very useful in documenting Latina feminism within the religious sphere and for understanding the complexities of these experiences and their intersections with issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality. While Cotera's spirituality could find alignment with some aspects of mujerista theology, due to its extolling of Christ-centered values, Almanza states she does not have as close of a relationship to Christ as to Guadalupe, leading me to believe she would not be drawn to mujerista theology in the same way. Though it's possible that this kind of interaction between women who are practicing Catholics and those who are not could be a productive and insightful exchange. Martínez's rejection of organized Catholicism leads me to believe that while she respects everyone's spiritual path, because Catholicism so deeply symbolizes patriarchy for her, I do not feel that she would be attracted to this religious tradition. Also see Lara Medina's work on religious women in Las Hermanas (2007) and Laura Pérez's (2007) work on the politics of spirituality in Chicana art for an excellent analysis of the political nature of spiritual forms, in particular Chicana artistic productions.

[12] The Chicana/o cultural arts movement influenced such spiritual transformations and the reclaiming of indigenous ancestry and feminist reinterpretations of religious figures. This included works by Tejana artists such as Santa Barraza, who depicts Our Lady of Guadalupe-Tonantzin and others deities of Aztec/Mexica cosmology, including Coatlicue and Coyolxauhqui (Barraza 2000), to reflect and reclaim her Tejana indigenous ancestry, as well as Yolanda Lopez (see Davalos 2009).

[13] Sister Teresita is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of this Catholic sister who participated in my larger study.

[14] While my study focuses on women, this is not to suggest their male contemporaries did not shift their religious and spiritual practices or question social hierarchies within organized religion. Indeed, some did both. However, the change is much more apparent among women in the research I conducted and in other scholarship that examines spirituality among this generation, research done primarily by scholars in Chicana Studies. See Lara (2008a, 2008b); Delgadillo (2011); Anzaldúa (1987, 2002); Castillo (1994); Medina (1998), and Cisneros (1996), among others. My research examines how gender differently informs spiritual experiences for women. For example, the Virgin of Guadalupe functions as an active symbol of self-making around body image for some women (Sendejo 2011). The extent to which males were affected by such discourses around sexuality has been underrepresented in the literature on Mexican American religious experiences and warrants further attention, for gender norms and ideologies situate religious experiences of both men and women, albeit differently. Chicana scholars have also self-reflected on their spiritual experiences; however, there is a noticeable absence of testimonios, autoethnography, and personal essays on the topic of religion and/or spirituality in the works of Chicano/Latino scholars.

[15] From PODER's website: http://www.poder-texas.org/ysj_program.html.

[16] Interview with Susana R. Almanza conducted by the author in Austin, Texas, March 18, 2008.

[17] Interviews with Martha P. Cotera were conducted by the author in Austin, Texas between May 2007 and June 2010.

[18] This is a term that Norma E. Cantú used to describe her own Catholic faith to me—the idea that one chooses the aspects of Catholicism that resonate with them, rather than a blanket acceptance of all of Catholicism and its doctrine and tenets (see Sendejo 2011). I believe it is a fitting term for Martha P. Cotera's experience with Catholicism as well.

[19] Limpias, or spiritual cleansings, are a folk medicinal practice. Those who perform them generally use a variety of herbs and/or incense to rid the client of a variety of spiritual and physical ailments. See de la Portilla (2009) on South Texas folk healing.

[20] The Poor People's March on Washington, D.C., took place in early 1968. Its leaders were Martin Luther King Jr. and Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Reverend King appointed Chicana/o Movement leader Reies López Tijerina to coordinate a Mexican American delegation in the Southwest. Leaders of the marches and participants advocated for improved jobs, housing, and educational opportunities (Meier and Gutiérrez 2000).

[21] Interview with María Elena Martínez was conducted by Rebecca Snow in Austin Texas, April 7, 2004.

[22] Unless otherwise indicated, interviews with María Elena Martínez were conducted by the author in Austin, Texas between April 2005 and May 2009.

[23] Alma de Mujer means "Soul of Woman." Alma de Mujer located in Austin, Texas. It is the educational center of the Indigenous Women's Network (IWN), a national nonprofit organization established in 1985 by a group of prominent and leading indigenous women activists, including Alma's founder, Choctaw-Chicana artist-educator and environmental and community activist, Marsha Gomez. IWN's board functions out of Canada and is comprised of native women from various parts of Canada and the Americas. Alma de Mujer has a local women's council comprised of a diverse group of women, many of whom have been supporters of Alma for several years. Alma de Mujer was founded in 1988 and is located on twenty-two acres in the beautiful foothills of Lake Travis on an endangered species habitat and wildlife refuge. Its mission is to provide resources for the revitalization of our connection to Mother Earth, the elimination of all forms of oppression, self-sustainability, and the protection of Mother Earth for future generations. It serves as a space for the creation of new models of education, healing, leadership, decision-making, and development. Alma's facilities are the site of an ongoing process that envisions and supports holistic, healthy, and sustainable communities. Alma de Mujer provides educational programs, training programs and resources, including publications for the local Latina community, indigenous, and non-indigenous peoples. Alma offers youth workshops and summer camps to help youth build self-esteem, community awareness, and leadership skills. Alma staff and volunteers involve youth in activities in the cultural arts, structured reading and writing, community activism, team-building skills, physical sports, and ecological conservation. Workshops and programs taught by local experts address issues

around sustainable agriculture, composting, land mapping, pond and waterway care, and herbology (L. Wilson and M.M. Navar, personal communication; http://indigenouswomen.org).

[24] My research suggests this is the case, as does my personal experience with spirituality and that of my peers. My college-aged Chicana students have also indicated that the political and spiritual are intertwined for them. I attribute this to decolonial knowledge production that occurred with the reclaiming of Chicana/o indigenismo during the movement. Access to such histories has shaped Chicana Studies and in turn impacted subsequent generations of Chicanas, who are engaged at varying stages in processes of cultural production via remaking religion.

[25] See Lara Medina's (2000) study on Latina religious activism within Las Hermanas, work on feminism within liberation theology (Berryman 1987), and literature on seventeenth century Mexican feminist scholar and poet, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz (Arenal and Powell 1994; Paz and Peden 1990).

[26] Some scholars who have examined the new age and feminist spiritually movements have characterized these movements as individualistic, focusing almost solely on personal goals and desires (Keating 2000; Fernandes 2003). The type of spirituality the women in my study enact more closely relates to a form of spiritual activism that Anzaldúa exhibits, where she "anchors her metaphysics in her deeply held desire for personal, social and global transformation" (Keating 2000, x). For Anzaldúa, spirituality is "a highly political, always embodied endeavor that has nothing in common with conventional forms of religion" (x). I suggest that las mujeres enact spiritual activism in ways similar to that of Anzaldúa.

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