

Please don't. I have a family.

—Gwen Amber Rose Araujo¹

TRANSGENDER CHICAN@ POETICS: Contesting, Interrogating, and Transforming Chicana/o Studies

Francisco J. Galarte

The paucity of literature available in Chicana/o Studies about and by transgender Chicanas/os contributes significantly to the marginalization of this community. This article addresses institutional, epistemic, and quotidian violence experienced by transgender Chicanas/os; these violences result from misconceptions that exist about the complexities and nuances that comprise transgender identities, embodiments, and practices. The essay discusses key debates related to transgender Chican@s in Chicana/o Studies and posits the category of “transgender” as a critical frame for attending to the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality.¹ Attending to transgender as a category in the Chicana/o Studies context has the potential to enliven and enrich pedagogical approaches while contesting heteronormative patriarchal disciplining and institutional violence furthered by the exclusion and marginalization of transgender Chican@s in our classrooms, scholarship, and everyday lives.

Key Words: transgender, Chican@, queer studies, violence, pedagogy, gender non-conforming

I begin this essay by conjuring a scene of literal, corporeal violence, the epigraph above is reportedly the last words uttered by Gwen Amber Rose Araujo, a transgender, Mexican American teen brutally murdered in 2002 by a group of young men.² Araujo's story has accompanied me along my trajectory in academia, in my aim to point to the necessity in addressing transgender phenomena within Chicana/o Studies.³ Araujo and Angie Zapata, and the countless number of Mexican and Mexican American transgender women who have been killed, are indeed the specters and ghosts who haunt Chicana/o Studies at its current juncture. Avery Gordon reminds us that, specters and ghosts appear "when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view" (Gordon 2008, xvi).

In order to write an essay that addresses institutional violence against trans/queer folks in Chicana/o Studies, it is imperative to begin with the staggering realities of violence faced by transgender and gender non-conforming *jotería*.⁴ The lives of transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s are structured by regulating regimes maintained by institutional, epistemic, and quotidian violence. These three types of violence are sustained by an unwillingness to engage, understand, and see transgender Chican@s. There is an assumption that through the use of *queer* or LGBT that there is a place at the table for transgender issues, politics, and subjects; however, this is not always the case. Such affinities are presumed but not necessarily honored in practice, especially in the realm of mainstream LGBT politics.⁵ The question remains: are transgender Chican@s part of the imagined community of *jotería*? As a transgender Chicano and scholar committed to the pedagogical aims of Chicana/o Studies, I want to help define *jotería* as a familia to which transgender Chican@s belong.

It is important to note that the term *Chican@s*, and Chican@ Studies should be understood to be different from Chicana/o and Chicana/o Studies. It is imperative that Chican@ is recognized as more than shorthand for *Chicana/o* or *Chicana and Chicano*. Simply regarding Chican@ as a shorthand alternative to get around post-1980s gender-inclusive formulations is quite possibly the resurgence of heteronormative patriarchal disciplining. According to Sandra K. Soto, Chican@ as a queer performative “at first sight looks perhaps like a typo and seems unpronounceable,” and “disrupts our desire for intelligibility...and certain visual register of a gendered body” (2010, 2). Chican@ then has the possibility to function as a visual citational code for racialized gender outside the regularized categories of male and female as well as a direct resistance to heteronormative patriarchal disciplining.

Just as Chicana feminists demanded and fought for paradigmatic shifts in Chicano Studies that were attentive to gender and sexuality, the time has arrived to interrogate the field once more in terms of transgender inclusion. In this essay, I argue that “trans-” has the potential to provoke the kind of paradigmatic shift necessary to critically engage gender and sexuality in such a way that disrupts the heteronormative patriarchal authority and conformity with which Chicana/o Studies is currently entangled. At the end of her book, *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire*, Soto asks, “What responsibilities does the younger Chican@ scholar have to the ethnonationalist ethos of Chicano Studies as elaborated in ‘El Plan de Santa Barbara’ and to the feminist platforms launched in response to those foundations” (Soto 2010, 126)? As a young transgender Chican@ scholar, this question deeply resonates and identifies a core issue that must be faced when considering the place of transgender phenomena in Chicana/o Studies: how can we expand existing Chicana feminist lexicons currently attending to gender and sexuality to include gender non-conformity and transgender people? When Chicana

lesbians initially responded to Chicana feminisms' elision of queer issues, they created what Emma M. Pérez describes as a "sitio y lengua" for attending to the intimate dimensions of racialized, gendered sexuality.⁶ The challenge that 'transgender' presents is that it cuts across sexuality; therefore, transgender Chican@s further complicate and destabilize approaches to theorizing gender and sexuality in the current Chicana/o context. Do the varied sexual and gender practices and narratives of transgender Chican@s have a place in the theoretical space envisioned in Cherríe Moraga's "Queer Aztlán?" The failure to signify in the queer Chicana/o imaginary, paired with the proliferation of masculinist ideologies in the Chicano cultural historical imaginary, creates a precarious position for transgender and gender non-conforming Chican@s who are marginalized both within and outside their communities. This relegates them to a subordinate position wherein discourses of transphobia, homophobia, and racism enact themselves upon transgender bodies, repeating the violence of disavowal.

As it was important to define the term *Chican@*, in an effort to expand its definition, it is important to identify and define the use of *trans*. According to Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, trans- is "not necessarily under the optic of the unstable, or in between, or in the middle of things, but rather at the core of transformation—change, the power or ability to mold, reorganize, reconstruct, construct" (La Fountain-Stokes 2008, 195). Transgender Chican@s must not serve as merely "a tropological figure that point to a crisis of a category and the category of a crisis," or simply a stand in for "in-betweenness" (Namaste 2000, 14). This essay does not presume that transgender throws categories into crisis, but rather argues that transgender transforms our reading practices. To trans- our approach to Chicana/o Studies is to invite change and transformation and perhaps spark a moment of reflexivity in the field that is attentive to the "sensuous intersectionalities that

mark our experience” (Muñoz 2009, 96). “Sensuous intersectionalities” are perhaps more appropriately described as the “manifold ways that our bodies, our work, our desires are relentlessly interpellated by unequivocal social processes” (Soto 2010, 6). To trans-Chicana/o Studies is to “acknowledge the implications of an enforced sex/gender system for the people who have defied it, who live outside it, or who have been killed because of it” (Namaste 2000, 14). There already exists a vocabulary within Chicana lesbian feminist thought to attend to such material, discursive, and institutional violence: much of this work was done in the early 1990s, around the same time as the emergence of queer studies and the increased use of ‘transgender’ as a term with utopian possibility.

Chican@ Studies should have as a central concern, a methodology for theorizing the “related yet distinct” systematic operations we know as ableism, racism, homophobia, misogyny, and transphobia (Keeling 2009, 566). Centering trans- and exposing the faltering present, as noted by the ghosts whose presence remind us that, “what’s been concealed is very much alive and present, interfering with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression directed toward us” (Gordon 2008, xvi), is a reminder that Chicanas/os have not heeded Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s call to “listen to what your *jotería* is saying” (2007, 107). Araujo’s last words not only remind us of the asymmetries of violence that affect transgender women of color, but provoke us to assert through our methodologies and pedagogies in Chicana/o Studies that indeed, she does have a familia. As Luz Calvo and Catriona R. Esquivel (2008) have noted in their vision of a queer kin, and through Richard T. Rodriguez’s critique and refashioning of *la familia* away from its essentialized, nationalistic tendencies, there is a strong desire among queer Chicanas/os to “embrace queer communitarian subjectivities” (Rodriguez 2010, 201). What must be noted, however, is that it not fully clear as to whether transgender

Chican@s are part of such a vision. Rodriguez (2009) reminds us that while “‘queer familia’ as a chosen family might contest the heteropatriarchal stronghold on communitarian thought in Chicano/o cultural politics,” such “‘queer’ reconfigurations are always provisional” (166).

The normalization of violence against transgender women of color is an example of the contingent nature of queer familia. In an important essay by Linda Heidenreich—notably one of the few essays on the death of Gwen Araujo—she argues that there are “shades of queer,” or a queer spectrum, noting that there are definitely embodiments of queerness that are much more valuable than others in terms of societal recognition. The essay compares the value placed upon the death of Matthew Shepard versus that of the death of Gwen Araujo; for Heidenreich it is evident that some bodies matter much more than others, especially when one considers race alongside gender⁷. Heidenreich notes, “Clearly there are shades of queer. In the lives of transgender Latinas/os and Chicanas/os, the shades are magnified by the functions of structural racism, which marks some queer bodies as less valued than others, and in the continued reconstruction of young white males as ‘the boy next door’” (Heidenreich 2006, 66). Heidenreich’s compelling essay makes a case for using a “Queer Chicana methodology,” a method that “reads against the grain” and is disloyal to “conventional disciplinary methods” for reading this scene of transphobic and hate-motivated violence (Heidenreich 2006, 53). When discussing the lives and experiences of transgender women of color, especially when the topic is violence, “‘transgender’ increasingly functions as the site in which to contain all gender trouble, thereby helping secure both homosexuality and heterosexuality as stable and normative categories of personhood (Stryker 2004, 214). Heidenreich’s “Queer Chicana methodology” resists this stabilization, and what is most important is how she mobilizes Chicana and Latina feminist writings as the starting place for

writing about gendered and sexual violence directed at transgender Chicanas and Latinas. In doing so, Heidenreich theoretically locates Chicana feminism as a starting point carved out by “this first generation of overtly queer Chicana and Latina writers; Anzaldúa, [Cherríe] Moraga, [Ana] Castillo, [Carla] Trujillo, [Juanita] Ramos, and [Norma] Alarcón,” whose writings created a space “where we could imagine ourselves, in the flesh, and then move on to critique those other spaces in the dominant society and our own communities that would make us invisible” (Heidenreich 2006, 54–55). Heidenreich’s methodology and attentiveness to understanding transphobic racial violence effectively demonstrates how we can mobilize Chicana feminist paradigms to attend to gendered and sexual violence as enacted against transgender folks. Araujo’s story and the stories of many other transgender women of color who have been brutally murdered elucidate the critical observations made in the work of early Chicana feminists that, “contemporary gender systems cannot be separated from race and economic status but rather must be understood as mutually intersecting to produce the poor woman’s circumstance and experience” (Taylor-Garcia 2012, 112).

A Trans Chicana Interlude

As pointed out by Pérez in her monograph *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History*, in Chicano history there is a desire to correlate Chicano history in relationship to grand events, and a desire to narrate history in relationship to heroes (who are always men). In my desire to illuminate how the contributions of transgender Chican@s have been elided in the narration of Chicana/o history, as well as queer Chicana/o recuperative projects, I will offer a preliminary reading of the short film *Felicia*, directed by Mark O’Hara, that features Felicia Flames Elizondo, one of the women featured in Susan Stryker’s documentary *Screaming Queens*. *Felicia* features the story behind the 1966 riot and protest against police repression by transgender

women in the Tenderloin district in San Francisco.⁸ Felicia Flames Elizondo, is a figure to be remembered and acknowledged as part of Chicana/o history.⁹ In analyzing this film, I demonstrate the complimentary affinities of queer, trans- and Chicana feminist approaches to contesting institutional violence through our reading practices.

O'Hara's short film features Felicia discussing the realities of aging alone, and the first few minutes of the film captures her narrating her day-to-day routine. She notes, "We never think of getting old until we get there." Felicia also comments that she refuses to conform to what she describes as dominant notions around aging: "In my time, when you get old you were useless and nobody cared about you, so I made it a point that I have a group of friends...it is important to have friends." Felicia is letting us know, and quite possibly reminding herself, that she indeed does have people who care about her and witness (as we are witnessing) the rhythms of her everyday life: her routine of walking her dogs, keeping up with world events via television, and checking in with her friends. The director then transitions the film into a montage of old photos of Felicia; the last photo is Felicia in her Navy uniform, marking the "reveal" that Felicia is not the person the viewer presumed her to be. The director's surprise to the viewer both informs them that they are not just watching a film about aging alone, but a film about a transgender woman aging alone, and violently exploits Felicia's vulnerability and loneliness. We see this, too, at the end of the film, but not before the trope of transgender women as "deceiver" is reiterated through the reveal that Felicia is a Vietnam War veteran. At the end of the film, the camera frames Felicia's hands showing her jewelry and then pans across what are presumably Felicia's performance costumes, but all the viewer can make out are sequins and glitter. Finally, as Rocio Dúrcal's recording of "El Día Que Me Acaricies Llorare" plays in the background, we see Felicia lying on her bed, pensive and

as melancholy as the refrains of the ranchera in the background.¹⁰ Felicia's gaze is fixed upon something above and soon the camera position moves so that our gaze becomes Felicia's: We see that she is looking up at a mirrored disco ball hanging from the ceiling in her bedroom. As the song continues to play, the frame of the disco ball fades and is replaced by a much more modern club light fixture with spinning neon lights. We first hear, and then see, Felicia center stage, dressed in a glittering dress, with sorrow and dolor consuming her face as she is singing along with Rocio Dúrcal:

Estoy acostumbrada a tus desprecios/
Que el día que me acaricies llorare/
Te quiero tanto y tanto que aunque quiera/
Dejarte y olvidarte no podré.

The film ends with the sound of scattered applause from a crowd; however, we are not able to see who, besides the film viewers, is Felicia's audience. The film's final scenes are much more remarkable than the transgender reveal; the end of the film leaves effective traces of queer temporalities that are disjointed, out of sync with the time-anchored, ethnonationalist ethos that underpins Chicana/o Studies. This moment is a temporal interruption, a moment that calls into question the ways "people are bound to one another, engrouped, made to feel coherently collective, through particular orchestrations of time" (Freeman 2010, 3). The pedagogical intervention from this temporal interruption challenges institutional violence by showing viewers that it is imperative to acknowledge the presence of a transgender Chicanas in proximity to and/or alongside historical moments and spaces that align with Chicano ethnonationalist narratives of community, resistance, and liberation. For example, as a survivor of a place and time that sparked the first well-documented mass trans resistance to police surveillance, repression,

and discrimination, Elizondo bears witness to Chicana participation in this important act of resistance and liberation, yet we continue to invest in the forgetting and erasure of such struggles because they do not neatly align with the masculinist ethos of Chicano cultural nationalism. Perhaps this disjointing or disrupting of normative time can help us rethink and or reconceptualize what constitutes Chicana resistance and liberation.

Testifying Dolor en Aztlán, Trans Chicana@ Poetics

In many ways I developed my transgender identity via exposure to Chicana lesbian feminist writings. I am a transgender-identified Chicana@, and I am not a threat, nor am I a deceiver. Chicana feminist politics has guided my identity development through the recognition that my freedom is intrinsically connected to the freedom of my hermanas. My survival has depended on the ways in which I saw my experience reflected in the words of Chicana lesbian feminist writings, and now, to my chagrin I feel as though I am no longer a part of that community. At the moments in which I decided to transition, I never thought such a decision was at odds with the Chicana lesbian lineage I so powerfully felt a part of. I envisioned myself part of a queer familia because of my Chicana butch identification at the time. The debates regarding trans-inclusion in *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS)*, in email conversations I was not a part of and chisme about who of my longtime feminist heroes stood on what side, and in recent writings by Cherríe L. Moraga, have increasingly alienated me from the community and familia I assumed would always be there for me.¹¹ I saw myself as one of the “butch daughters” lost to a transgender identity Moraga mourns in her 2011 essay “Still Loving in the (Still) War Years.” In some ways the loss I’m experiencing feels violent and in others it foments a strong desire to theorize from that place of loss. My training in Chicana feminist paradigms that emphasized “productive contradictions,” the “salience of sexuality” and encouraged the

critique of Chicana feminist discourses that elided queer issues, led me to believe that changing my body did not change my ability to enact, transform, and participate in Chicana feminisms (Yarbro-Bejarano 2007, 402–403). At the time, I was naive to believe that the so-called “Ftm/Butch Border Wars”¹² were over; however, now I realize that such debates are necessary and that there is just not enough written about the Transgender Chican@ experience.

I return to one of the questions guiding this personal and academic scholarship: when scholars committed to theorizing gender and sexuality in Chicana/o Studies say “Chicana/o queers,” are we/they including those who are transgender? Given the ways in which ‘queer’ is mobilized within Chicana/o Studies, could we even include ‘transgender’ under that framework? Just as the first edition of Carla Trujillo’s edited volume, *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, was published in 1991, as Chicana lesbian feminists were waging the war against Chicano nationalists and homophobia among Chicanas at the then National Association of Chicano Studies (NACS) and MALCS, that ‘transgender,’ as well as ‘queer,’ were being taken up in academic and activist circles as terms with significant political promise. As a result, transgender and transsexual and queer became entangled (Stryker 1998, 148). Chicana lesbian feminists such as Anzaldúa and Moraga, for example, mobilized ‘queer’ in very different way. Anzaldúa describes her queerness in a 1993 interview with Jamie Lee Evans as “not just White, but Indian, Mexican, Chicano, a regional queerness, a working-class queerness of my growing up in South Texas” (Evans 2000, 203–204).¹³ Moraga’s essay, “Queer Aztlán: The Re-formation of Chicano Tribe,” also published in 1993, envisions a queer Aztlán that addressed the limitations of the “anglo-centricity” of “Queer Nation” and the elisions of gays and lesbians in Chicano Nationalism (Moraga 1993, 147). Moraga’s “Queer Aztlán” would be a “Chicano homeland that could embrace *all* its people, including its *jotería* (queer folk)” (Moraga 1993, 147). Moraga’s vision in this essay is a capacious one:

Chicana lesbians and gay men do not merely seek inclusion in the Chicano nation; we seek a nation strong enough to embrace a full range of racial diversities, human sexualities, and expressions of gender. We seek a culture that can allow for the natural expression of our femaleness and maleness and our love without prejudice or punishment. (Moraga 1993, 164)

While not explicitly naming transgender folks, perhaps we can claim that they are included within the vision under the subtle nuance “expressions of gender.” Transgender Chican@s are the absent presence and the audible silence. As noted by Karen Mary Davalos, “Chicana feminism looks differently at silence, examining what is said, what is not said, and what is said by the silences (2008, 154).

In her recent and controversial 2011 essay, “Still Loving in the (Still) War Years,” Cherríe Moraga breaks the silence of discussing transgender issues among queer communities of color. The first half of the essay is a critique of gay marriage, and points to the inequities inherent in the institution of state-sanctioned marriages, while the second half of the essay takes up the silences around transgender issues. It is important to note that the impetus of this essay is Moraga’s desire to remind us that we must “keep queer queer,” and in doing so questions what constitutes queer resistance in the time of mainstream LGBT political agendas that are centered around recognition in heteronormative, neoliberal institutions such as “marriage, military and the market” (Duggan 2012). Pairing a critique of gay-marriage with fears and anxieties around the fashioning of transgender identities by youth of color to reinvigorate discussions about what constitutes queer resistance implicates transgender as an identity category invested in recognition, visibility, and legibility in a normative framework. Moraga notes that the

“political agenda of the transgender movement...may preempt young people from simply residing in that queer, gender-ambivalent site for as long as and deeply necessary” (184). In this statement, Moraga is insinuating that transgender politics are not queer politics—or resistant—conjuring second wave feminist arguments that transsexuality reasserts patriarchal standards of femininity and masculinity.¹⁴ As Moraga fleshes out her concerns, staking her connection and approximating her role as queer elder to this younger generation of queer and trans- folks of color, she explicitly laments, “I do not want to keep losing my macha daughters to manhood through any cultural mandates that are not derived of our own making” (186). In the essay, it would be too easy point and identify Moraga’s anxieties, and name them as wrong, hurtful, and transphobic. This type of approach does not aptly attend to what is the seemingly more important issue at hand in this essay.¹⁵ The reaction of many transgender folks (myself included) was one of hurt feelings, defensiveness, a desire to be heard, and most importantly, the desire to be invited to a dialogue. I appreciate Moraga’s effort to break the silence caused by “in-house censorship wherein questioning any aspect of the identity one risks being labeled transphobic” (184), and I admire her commitment to a Chicana feminist and U.S. third world feminist politic that she as a key figure has championed, and subsequently bequeathed, to generations of Chicanas and Chicanos. Her essay, in its aim to incite consciousness and invigorate discussions around what constitutes queer resistance in the time of neoliberal LGBT political organizing that further marginalizes queers of color, implicates transgender folks of color within such politics of conformity. She does this by explicitly pairing the discussion of transgender folks of color with a critique of the politics of respectability, recognition, and visibility that underpin the homonormative aims of gay marriage. Moraga’s anxieties clearly concern folks who are assigned female at birth and chose to transition and

live as male and will further the work of heteropatriarchy and heterosexism, should they construct their masculinity through a rejection of femaleness. This is most evident as she reminds her “daughters and granddaughters of color” that:

Should you choose to transition to a man’s body, you must still hold on desperately to your womanhood in the shaping of that masculinity. You must know that there is something in being born female from a female in a female-hating world that still matters.
(Moraga 2011, 189)

This section, when read in relationship to the context of the larger aim of the essay, reiterates Yabro-Bejarano’s assertion that Moraga has created a “public voice for Chicana lesbian identity politics, making demands for entitlement as ‘citizens’ in multiple arenas of historical exclusion and marginalization” (128). In her 2011 essay, Moraga seeks to protect and re-center the Chicana lesbian feminist politic she and others struggled and fought vehemently to articulate in theory and in practice (Yabro-Bejarano 2001). Moraga is not eschewing the presence and contributions of transgender folks of color to queer politics and struggles; rather, she is one of the few (in the Chicana/o and Chicana/o queer context I have been writing about) that actually *sees* transgender Chican@s. As Sandra K. Soto has noted, Moraga’s style of writing places a “high premium on the public elaboration of private feelings of anxiety, guilt and fear” and thus the fear she expresses in this essay is potentially a conduit for “both individual and political transformation” (33). While at the conclusion of the essay Moraga concedes to the invitation of a young transman to be seen and she accepts him as a member of her queer nation, Moraga’s text forces transgender folks to bear the burden of proving loyalty to a nation as well as being the figure that is the exemplar of race, sex, and gender abjection and

liberation. In the aim to take up the question of queer resistance in the time of homonormativity, the essay renders transgender folks of color as a nodal point for discussions of inclusion, exclusion, and marginality. My reading of Moraga's essay echoes La Fountain-Stokes's question: "What does it mean for this subject position to be raised to the status of an absolute embodiment of difference" (2011, 64)?

On Chican@ Futurity

The thing that remains certain for me is that I still wholeheartedly believe that Chicana/o Studies is a collective project, through which our pedagogy and criticism "impart knowledges that students take with them as they graduate to become professionals, artists, and activists, helping to develop a new social imaginary that extends beyond the university" (Yarbro-Bejarano 2007, 404). I have met transgender Chican@ students at undergraduate institutions who long to see themselves represented in the texts they read or even remotely represented in a pedagogy that does not naturalize heteronormativity and binary gender systems. It is our responsibility to teach our classes so as not to advance the violence of heteropatriarchy through transphobic and homophobic pedagogies. Changing our pedagogical practices can only lead to transformation and the necessary interrogation of the categories of male and female, which is not something new for Chicana and other U.S. third world feminists. As noted by Chela Sandoval (2000):

US third world feminists argued that feminists of color represent a third term, another gender outside the regularized categories of male and female, as represented in the very titles of publications such as *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave*, *Ain't I a Woman?*, *This Bridge Called My Back*, and *Sister Outsider*. These books proposed that the social space represented by

these “third-term” identities is that place out of which a politicized differential consciousness arises. (70)

We must be committed to creating such social spaces for our students so that they are much more generous in how they understand varying categories of gender. It is through our students that we can combat the type of violence enacted in face-to-face relations at the intersections of racism, transphobia, homophobia, and sexism. We must teach our students to engage in what Daphne Taylor-Garcia (2012) has identified as a “dialogical ethics,” integral to enacting decolonial politics. She describes this as “being willing and committed to take seriously many different perspectives and, in particular pay special attention to those perspectives that are seen as dispensable, irrelevant, and/or insignificant” (110). Contesting contemporary gender systems in relation to race, sexuality, class, and ability furthers the decolonial project set forth in the work of Pérez, who notes that “the decolonial is a dynamic space in which subjects are actively decolonizing their lives. Unlike the colonial imaginary, which is a narrow, binary, ‘us’ versus ‘them’ standpoint, the decolonial imaginary instead is a liberatory, mobile frame of mind. The decolonial is a deconstructive tool” (Pérez 2012, 195). If we take Maria Lugones’ proposition that gender is a colonial construct defined by patriarchy and heteronormativity seriously, then we must assume that gender is a decolonial feminist project and commit ourselves to dismantling systems of heteropatriarchy and heterosexism (Lugones 2007, 186). Pérez’s “decolonial imaginary” remains relevant to a queer and feminist politic that is inclusive of transfolks. The decolonial imaginary is the interstitial, in-between space; the transgender body is not. In the decolonial imaginary, transgender Chican@s are also actors and part of the project of re-writing and disputing what is written in history. The decolonial imaginary allows for the unraveling of binary gender categories and relations we have inherited from historical

circumstances that have rendered the transgender Chican@ impossible, unseen, or adrift in a sea of discourse.

I began with Gwen Araujo's last words, "I have a family," and then proceeded to ponder the question of whether or not transgender Chican@s are indeed a part of the notion of *jotería* and a part of a larger queer familia. To some Chican@s, the answers to these questions are a given, but there is little critical engagement related to transgender phenomena within Chicana/o Studies. I argue that transgender Chican@s are a part of Queer Aztlán to the extent that our presence marks a moment of de-anchoring and transformation of *la lengua y el sitio* from which we can critique and deal with the varying asymmetries of violence to which our community is continually subjected. In José Esteban Muñoz's recent work on queer futurity, he notes that, the "way to deal with the asymmetries and violent frenzies that mark the present is not to forget the future," and he notes that "queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough" (2009, 96). Our definition of *jotería* must be capacious, but must also remain committed to the disruption of heteropatriarchy and conformity; it must be guided by the mandate that "the here and the now is simply not enough" (96). Queer and transgender need not be mutually antagonistic terms under the rubric of *jotería*; we must do the work to prove that this is so and actively assert and define *jotería* as a family to which transgender Chican@s belong. To return to Soto's question: "What responsibilities does the younger Chican@ scholar have to the ethnonationalist ethos of Chicano Studies as elaborated in 'El Plan de Santa Barbara' and to the feminist platforms launched in response to those foundations?"

The responsibilities are twofold: to continue to resist the heteropatriarchal and heterosexist disciplining of the ethnonationalist ethos of Chicano Studies

and to cultivate a politicized Chican@ Studies that bridges epistemological feminist platforms with renewed commitment to a heterogeneity of voices and embodiments we can recognize as queer, trans-, or some other iteration not yet known. Invigorating the field with such a commitment to transformation galvanizes our intellectual and political aims to impart upon our students new paradigms for conceptualizing community, identity, and subjectivity.

Notes

¹ Araujo's last words are dramatized in the Lifetime television movie, *A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story*. This film was based on testimony from the two trials of Michael Magidson, Jose Antonio Mérel, and Jason Cazares.

² I use Chican@ with the arroba to symbolically gesture a rejection of the imposition and implied male/female binaries of "Chicana/o". The essay takes up the use of Chican@ in Chicana/o Studies in further detail.

³ For more on the death of Gwen Araujo and the politics of remembrance see the essay, "Siempre en Mi Mente: On Trans* Violence."

⁴ A note on terminology: "transgender phenomena" is a term commonly used in Transgender Studies. Transgender in this essay can be understood as, "not to refer to one particular identity or way of being embodied but rather as an umbrella term for a wide variety of bodily effects that disrupt or denaturalize heteronormative linkages constructed between an individual's anatomy at birth, a non-consensually assigned gender category, psychical identifications with sexed body images and/or gendered subject positions, and the performance of specifically gendered social, sexual, or kinship functions (Stryker 1998,148). I also use "Chicana/o Studies" as well as "Chican@ Studies," which are not meant to be synonymous.

⁵ "Gender non-conforming" refers to persons who may or may not identify as transgender but do not embody, identify or present as either male or female.

⁶ There is a sustained elision of transgender issues in mainstream LGBT political platforms and advocacy, an example being the Human Rights Coalition's refusal to support a trans-inclusive version of ENDA (Employee Non-Discrimination Act).

⁷ I borrow "sitio y lengua" from Emma Pérez's essay, "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor," which appears in *Chicana Lesbians: Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, edited by Carla Trujillo (Berkeley, Calif.: Third Women Press, 1991).

⁸ For an invigorating critique of hate crimes legislations and the workings of the neoliberal state's deployment of (institutional) violence against peoples perceived as non-normative, see Chandan Reddy, *Freedom With Violence: Race, Sexuality and the US State* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁹ In addition to the Chicana lesbian writings in *This Bridge*, see Alarcón, Castillo, and Moraga, eds., *The Sexuality of Latinas* (Berkeley, Calif.: Third Woman Press, 1983); Juanita Ramos, ed., *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians* (New York: Latina Lesbian History Project, 1987); and Carla Trujillo, ed., *Chicana Lesbians: Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About* (Berkeley, Calif.: Third Women Press, 1991), which contains writings by Castillo, Moraga, Anzaldúa, Emma Pérez, and others.

¹⁰ The work of Horacio N. Roque Ramírez is central to this recuperative project, specifically his works that center the oral histories of transgender Latinas in San Francisco. See Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, “A Living Archive of Desire: Teresita la Campesina and the Embodiment of Queer Latino Community Histories” in *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, edited by Antoinette M. Burton (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005) and “Sharing Queer Authorities: Collaborating for Transgender Latina and Gay Latino Historical Meanings” in *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, edited by Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹¹ For more information on Felicia Flames Elizondo see: <http://www.screamingqueens1.com/>. The Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship (AJAAS) recently awarded Felicia Flames Elizondo the “Jotería Lifetime Achievement Award” at their inaugural Conference on October 19, 2012.

¹² “El Dia Que Me Acaricies Llorare” was written by Juan Gabriel, which is important to note given Gabriel’s inimitable and notorious queer performances of the canción ranchera .

¹³ For more about debates held within MALCS regarding “women only” spaces, see Francisco Galarte (2011) “Notes From a Trans* Chican@ Survivor” (<http://mujerestalk.malcs.org/2011/10/notes-from-trans-chican-survivor.html>). Also see Marie ‘Keta’ Miranda (2012) “TransGenderInter” (<http://mujerestalk.malcs.org/2012/10/transgenderinter.html>).

¹⁴ FTM/butch border wars refers specifically to an exchange between Judith Halberstam and Jacob C. Hale in their respective essays, “Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum” and “Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/FTM Borderlands.” For a discussion of Ftm/butch border wars that is relevant to a Chican@/Latin@ context, see the film *Mind If I Call You Sir?*, directed by Mary Guzmán.

¹⁵ Gloria E. Anzaldúa is critiquing what becomes known as “Queer Studies” after the publication of Michael Warner’s *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (1993), which discusses queer politics and ideology in social theory. Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano has also made similar critiques of queer studies for its elision of race in her 2007 essay, “Reflections on Thirty Years of Critical Practice in Chicana/o Cultural Studies.”

¹⁶ Janice Raymond made this argument in her book *Transsexual Empire*. David Valentine (2007) notes that this text remains one of the most reviled in transgender studies (149).

Works Cited

- Alarcón, Norma, Ana Castillo, and Cherríe Moraga. 1993. *The Sexuality of Latinas*. Berkeley, Calif.: Third Woman Press.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria E. 1987. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
- . 2000. *Interviews / Entrevistas / Gloria Anzaldúa*, edited by AnaLouise Keating. New York: Routledge.
- Calvo, Luz and Catriona Rueda Esquibel. 2011. "Our Queer Kin." In *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez, 105-112. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Davalos, Karen Mary. 2008. "Sin Vergüenza: Chicana Feminist Theorizing." *Feminist Studies* 34, no. 1 and 2 (Spring and Summer): 151-71.
- Duggan, Lisa. 2012. "After Neoliberalism? From Crisis to Organizing for Queer Economic Justice." *Scholar and Feminist Online* 10, no. 1 and 2 (Fall 2011 and Spring 2012): n.p.
- Freeman, Elizabeth. 2010. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Felicia*. 2007. Dir. Tim O'Hara gdffilms.com and [frameline](http://frameline.com).
- Galarte, Francisco J. 2012. "Siempre En Mi Mente: On Trans* Violence." *The Feminist Wire* (October 10). <http://thefeministwire.com/2012/10/siempre-en-mi-mente-on-trans-violence/>.
- . 2011. "Notes From a Trans* Chicana@ Survivor." *Mujeres Talk: A MALCS Discussion Site*. <http://mujerestalk.malcs.org>.
- . 2011. "El Sabor del Amor y del Dolor: Affect, Violence and the (Trans)Body in the Chicana@ Historical Imaginary." PhD diss., University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana.
- Gordon, Avery. 2008. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hale, Jacob C. 1998. "Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/FTM Borderlands." *GLQ: Gay and Lesbian Studies* 4, no. 2: 311-48.
- Halberstam, Judith. 1998. "Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM Border Wars and the Masculine Continuum." *GLQ: Gay and Lesbian Studies* 4, no. 2: 287-310.
- Hames-García, Michael. 2011. "Queer Theory Revisited." In *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Javier Martínez 19-45. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Heidenreich, Linda. 2006. "Learning From the Death of Gwen Araujo?—Transphobic Racial Subordination and Queer Latina Survival in the Twenty-First Century." *Chicana/Latina Studies* 6, no. 1: 50-86.

- Keeling, Kara. 2009. "Looking for M—. Queer Temporality, Black Political Possibility and Poetry from the Future." *GLQ: Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 15, no. 4: 565-82.
- La Fountain-Stokes, Lawrence. 2008. "Trans/Bolero/Drag/Migration: Music, Cultural Translation, and Diasporic Puerto Rican Theatricalities." *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 3 and 4: 190-209.
- . 2008. "Gay Shame Latina- and Latino-Style: A Critique of White Queer Performativity." In *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader*, edited by Michael Hames-Garcia and Ernesto Javier Martinez, 55-80. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Lugones, Maria. 2007. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." *Hypatia* 22, no. 1 (Winter): 186-219.
- Mind If I Call You Sir? A Discussion Between Latina Butches and Female-to-Male Transgendered Latinos*. 2004. Dir. Mary Guzmán. Lantham, MD: National Film Network. DVD.
- Miranda, Marie. 2012. "TransGenderInter." *Mujeres Talk: A MALCS Discussion Site*. <http://mujerestalk.malcs.org/2012/10/transgenderinter.html>.
- Moraga, Cherríe. 1993. *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry*. Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press.
- . 2011. *A Chicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000–2010*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Moraga, Cherríe, and Gloria E. Anzaldúa. eds. 1983. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.
- Namaste, Viviane. 2000. *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pérez, Emma. 2012. "Decolonial Border Queers: Case Studies of Chicana/o Lesbians, Gay Men, and Transgender Folks in El Paso/Juárez." In *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*, edited by Arturo Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. Garcia, 192-209. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1999. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas Into History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1991. "Sexuality and Discourse: Notes from a Chicana Survivor." In *Chicana Lesbians: Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*, edited by Carla Trujillo, 159-84. Berkeley, Calif.: Third Women Press.
- Ramos, Juanita. ed. 1987. *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians*. New York: Latina Lesbian History Project.
- Raymond, Janice. 1994. *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Reddy, Chandan. 2011. *Freedom With Violence: Race, Sexuality and the US State*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Rodriguez, Richard T. 2010. "The Locations of Chicano/a and Latino/a Studies." In *A Concise Companion to American Studies*, edited by John Carlos Rowe, 190-209. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- . 2009. *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Roque Ramirez, Horacio N. 2012. "Sharing Queer Authorities: Collaborating for Transgender Latina and Gay Latino Historical Meanings." In *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, edited by Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez 184-201. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2005. "A Living Archive of Desire: Teresita la Campesina and the Embodiment of Queer Latino Community Histories." In *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, edited by Antoinette M. Burton, 111-35. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Sandoval, Chela. 2000. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*. 2005. Dir. Tim O'Hara. San Francisco, CA: Frameline. DVD.
- Soto, Sandra K. 2010. *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The Demastery of Desire*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Stryker, Susan. 2004. "Transgender Studies: Queer Theory's Evil Twin." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 10, no. 2: 212-15.
- . 1998. "The Transgender Issue: An Introduction." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 4, no. 2: 145-58.
- Taylor-Garcia, Daphne. 2012. "Decolonizing Gender Performativity: A Thesis for Emancipation in Early Chicana Feminist Thought (1969–1979)." In *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands*, edited by Arturo Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J. Garcia, 107-126. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Trujillo, Carla. 1991. *Chicana Lesbians: The Girls Our Mothers Warned Us About*. Berkeley: Third Women Press.
- Valentine, David. 2007. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Warner, Michael, ed. 1993. *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Yabro-Bejarano, Yvonne. 2007. "Reflections on Thirty Years of Critical Practice in Chicana/o Cultural Studies." In *A Companion to Latino/a Studies*, edited by Juan Flores and Renato Rosaldo, 397-405. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing.
- . 2001. *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherríe Moraga*. Austin: University of Texas Press.