

BAR TASCO: Latina Immigrant Vendors' Mestiza Consciousness

Lorena Muñoz

Abstract: This paper is based on the stories of queer Latina immigrant street vendors, collected from 2004 through 2014, for my study on the production of Latinx Immigrant street vending landscapes in Los Angeles. I analytically entangle Bar Tasco [a Latinx immigrant gay bar in Los Angeles] in relation to the oral histories of Gisela and Yolanda—two queer Latina vendors in my study. I build on Anzaldúa's (1987) framework of *mestizo consciousness* by elucidating how the vendor's space and place are entangled with the collisions of social worlds, which crash in violent ways and produce new ways of adapting, producing and knowing/understanding the world we live in. Anzaldúa reads the collisions of social worlds as possibilities of agency and awareness of multiple oppressions that can be converted towards *mestiza consciousness*. By extrapolating the material and nonmaterial processes that temporally collide between bodies, ideologies, emotions and state forces, I analyze how Latina immigrant street vendors' bodies are in constant collisions with social worlds that often produce wounds, pain and ruptures from *habitus*.

Key Words: Anzaldúa, collisions, entanglements, ethnography, informal economy, *mestiza consciousness*, place, queer Latina immigrants, space, street vending, transformative agency

Gisela, a Mexican immigrant, carries a heavy bucket of bright, colorful roses into Bar Tasco both enthusiastically and with familiarity.¹ For Gisela, Bar Tasco, a Latinx immigrant gay bar in Los Angeles, is a place that allows her to fluidly and uncompromisingly perform her queer,² immigrant, femme, and informal labor identities while negotiating and navigating the multiple social worlds that collide in ways that produce embodied transformative agency, what Gloria Anzaldúa calls *mestiza consciousness*. These collisions hold possibilities for transformations of the self through, within Anzaldúa's concept, a temporally mediated awareness. However, Anzaldúa does

not theorize *where* and *how* transformations materialize spatially. This paper expands Anzaldúa's concept of mestiza consciousness by elucidating the role of space in creating the conditions for its emergence. Important in this analysis is the physical space where the vendors' social worlds collide. As such, it is at Bar Tasco where bodies, ideologies, materialities, and state forces temporally collide, and for some vendors, a transformative mestiza consciousness forms through wounds, awareness, and awakenings.

Latina and Chicana queer feminist epistemologies have historically complicated how we understand the subjective production and multiplicity of brown bodies' identities, understanding them as more than simply responding to cultural differences. Juana María Rodríguez suggests that identities are "continuously engaged in unpacking the stream of 'paradoxes and contradictions' that inform the subjects' relationship to other subjects and discourses that surround them" (2006, 3). That is, queer brown bodies are spatially and temporally disciplined by US white supremacist ideologies, and are further disciplined and wounded within and across heteronormative Latinx communities. Thus, the production of identities is always incomplete, becoming, through the continuous "unpacking" when multiple worlds collide. Norma Alarcón terms "subjects-in-process" the self that navigates in and out of multiple, conflicting temporal spaces that discipline, restrict, and encode subjectivities of brown bodies (1994, 136). With respect to knowledge-production, it is through daily experiences of multiple collisions of ideologies, materialities, and fictions in space that gives way to mestiza consciousness. I build on these epistemologies through a framework I name "methodology of collisions," which elucidates the manifold ways in which violence, wounds, and ruptures of the "self" shape and inform the world- makings of Latinx immigrants in the barrios of Los Angeles.

This paper is based on ten years of fieldwork in Central Los Angeles between 2004 and 2014. During this time I collected more than forty-five oral histories of Latina immigrant street vendors and conducted countless hours of participant observation. I focus this paper on the oral histories of two queer Latina immigrant street vendors, Gisela and Yolanda, whose experiences are representative of the livelihoods of many of the vendors I came to know. By focusing on only two participants, I am able to closely examine the process of awakenings and compare their different spatial dimensions. Over a period of four years, I conducted multiple interviews with them, but above all, I immersed myself in their lives: accompanying them while working, hanging out in their homes, attending family parties, helping with college class assignments, and inserting myself into their friend circles, and in turn getting to know their families and lovers. As a Latina immigrant queer femme, I was immersed myself in Bar Tasco as a customer on “ladies night” over those four years, observing the material and physical space of and interactions taking place at the bar, on the dance floor, and in the bathroom, and I even participated in online spaces.

Anzaldúa: A Collision of Social Worlds

A collision is a crash among assemblages of evolving, incomplete, and heterogeneous processes that produces change. I read collisions as the possibilities for the transformative enactment of agency. In her illustrious *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa outlines the ontology of mestiza consciousness as a way of understanding everyday collisions of social worlds that result in constant violent ruptures and produce awakenings of the self toward a “new” consciousness. Anzaldúa conceptualizes the Mestiza “self” as a collision among Indian, Spanish, and Anglo ideologies. Mestiza consciousness involves a process of interrogating the self to know what is socially and culturally inherited, imposed, and acquired. Only once the mestiza subject unpacks

what has collided can she consciously extricate herself from processes of oppression. Anzaldúa radically frames the moment of rupture, pain, and wound as an opportunity to document the struggle. It is precisely at this moment that transformation begins: the deconstruction, construction, and reinterpretation of symbols. What remains is the self constructed by molding the soul and the conception one has of the “I.” According to Anzaldúa, whatever the “I” is, it is what it should be.

For Anzaldúa, consciousness is a phenomenal experience and a temporal state of awareness and perception, involving an awakening as well as a transformation of knowledge. It is through a conscious awakening that produces the possibilities for resistance by way of understanding the “self” in the process of being. Additionally, the “self” is “multiple” and always colliding with the traditional Mexican and Anglo worlds and in-between, causing constant ruptures in habitus. Anzaldúa writes, “The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision” (1987, 100). The choques, or collisions, produce ruptures resulting in wounds and subsequently “*la mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations” (1987, 101). It is through the awareness of wounds caused by everyday collisions of multiple social worlds that Anzaldúa calls the “moment” of oppression. It is at this moment of awareness that new ways of knowing, understanding, and negotiating arise towards a consciousness of multiple oppressions. Anzaldúa adds, “She [la mestiza] can be jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, and often painful, emotional event which inverts and resolves the ambivalence. I’m not sure exactly how. The work takes place underground—subconsciously” (1987, 101–102). Put another way, painful events can be transformative; it is precisely within the intense pain resulting from choques, or collisions, where energy can be reworked towards a new consciousness. Anzaldúa’s “self” that collides with conflicting social worlds is

entangled and relational, not separate from the “self.” The wounds produced through collisions, are then also entangled, relational, and continue to collide. There are infinite possibilities of collisions that can rupture and wound; however, wounds and pain caused by collisions also enact infinite possibilities for transformation by enacting agency as mestiza consciousness. Notably, Anzaldúa is “not sure exactly how [mestiza consciousness happens]. . . . The work takes place underground-subconsciously.” In understanding the processes of social worlds colliding, it is equally important to understand the temporality of the moments of awakenings of *la mestiza* and *where* these transformations happen as social-spatial processes.

Where and how multiple social worlds collide are inherently spatial, as spaces and places shape where and how social worlds become untangled, legible, and engrained with possibilities for awareness. As a concept, place is created through a process in which various social and cultural phenomena interlink the everyday life experiences performed in the space while simultaneously constructing specific experiences, practices, histories, and memories that fluidly traverse boundaries (Massey 1997; Penrose and Jackson 1993). Furthermore, place is more than a mere physical manifestation (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1995; Rose 1993). Rather, space is temporally produced, particularly in the case of border crossing spaces where geopolitical borders and social imaginaries are more than fixed sites, but are also temporally entangled with metaphors, locations, and ideological fictions that materially produce identities (Brady 2003, 50–51). Moreover, processes such as childhood memories and dreams along with personal, cultural and nationalistic symbols are integral in giving form to these spaces.

“Place” facilitates links and networks among immigrants that inform daily life experiences such as access to formal and informal employment opportunities

(Massey and Jess 1995). An immigrant's "sense of place" is partially constructed by the experiences, histories, memories, and dreams carried through their journey, settlement, and migration process. It is here where a spatial concept of collisions is necessary to further understand how Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness spatially materializes beyond the subconsciousness to better understand not only how transformations occur, but also which social worlds collide. Anzaldúa does not elaborate on how and where these awakenings happen, leaving us with an ephemeral, incomplete understanding of temporal changes. What do these transformative processes look like? How do transformations materialize external to the self? I answer these questions by understanding mestiza consciousness as a spatial-temporal process. That is, by exploring the spaces where multiple social worlds collide in not only as wounded embodiments, but how these embodiments are processes that are entangled with physical space, where transformations of the self occurs, thus illustrating the multiple wounds of temporal oppressions that inform ephemeral transformations into everyday material processes.

It is not to say that all collisions result in wounds, or that all wounds result in transformative consciousness; however, collisions present infinite possibilities for change. Collisions vary in intensity; incomplete elements continuously collide at different forces, setting up different intensities of wounds and pain that are almost always unconscious but become conscious at a moment of awareness. These microcollisions open up possibilities over time and space to rupture, allowing conscious transformative processes that are the enactment of agency and can produce new ways of seeing and understanding the world. As new and old wounds are entangled with memory, nostalgia, and desire, transformations occur when old and new wounds result in conscious awakenings for other ways of being. Wounds can be physical and nonphysical, and furthermore, bodies produce meanings from wounds and pain emerging

from ruptures from the normative. As Anzaldúa has claimed, the everyday life of *la mestiza* is always in production and transforming by constantly colliding with phenomena causing painful and emotional processes that “happen” often through unconscious registers.

For Gisela and Yolanda, Bar Tasco is where these collisions are sited, awakenings occur, and transformations begin. It is a physical place where awareness of oppression makes possible “creative motions” toward a borderland consciousness, one that brings us closer to the end of violence, war, and oppression; it is a borderland physical space. In the US, Latina lesbians create “in-between” spaces to express their sexuality; outside of this borderland space, these migrants hide their lesbian existence out of not being accepted. Latina immigrant lesbians build borderland spaces by interweaving new families, queer networks, and lives both apart and within their families across borders.

For Anzaldúa, the border is where “an exoneration, a seeing through the fictions of white supremacy, a seeing of ourselves in our true guises and not as the false racial personality that has given us and what we have given ourselves. I seek our woman’s face, our true features” (1987, 89). That is, the border is a space where *la mestiza* can recognize and become aware of the oppression of the self that is bestowed upon and defined not only by US white supremacist ideologies of immigrant bodies, but also by oppressive conservative ideologies about immigrant sexualities within heteronormative Latinx immigrant communities. It is in Bar Tasco where both Gisela and Yolanda actively engage with their “chosen families” (Alarcón 1988; Lapovsky and Davis 1993). As Katie Acosta (2013) argues, temporal spaces are where queer Latinas negotiate family in relation to culturally disciplining social structures shaped by compulsive heterosexuality. In turn, these spaces are sites of lived experiences that produce knowledge

challenging the silences and invisibilities of complex identities of queer Latina immigrants. As Patricia Zavella (2011) contends, the dependence on social networks is not uncommon among lesbian communities due to their invisibility. In what follows, I turn to the stories of Gisela and Yolanda, two key Latina immigrant vendors in my study, and the moments of collision leading to their enactment of transformative agency that opened up possibilities of different ways of knowing and being.

Gisela

Gisela gets ready for work in her small room in the two-bedroom apartment she shares with a family of five. In a dense area in Central Los Angeles zoned for business, residential, and industrial use, the neighborhood is comprised of small local Latino immigrant businesses: *carnicerías*, *botánicas*, Mexican restaurants, storefront churches, mechanic shops, street vendors, and multifamily housing. A makeshift wood closet divides the room in half, separating her space from the space she shares with Lisette and Emilia, ages seven and nine. Álvaro and María, the girls' parents, live in the second bedroom, while Jorge, María's father, occupies the living room couch. They all immigrated at different times to Los Angeles from their shared hometown Jalisco. Jorge arrived first before sending for his daughter and her family. Already knowing them from Jalisco, Gisela came with them when she was only four years old.

That night in her bedroom, Gisela talked to me while she applied makeup and straightened her long brown hair. After ten minutes of careful deliberation, she settled on a tight skirt with a shimmery, fitted tank top, and to cover her more revealing outfit underneath, she draped a long black sweater over her shoulders. She is a flower vendor and sells flowers at night outside of clubs, restaurants, and concerts on the West Side of Los Angeles. María, who has

been a street vendor for more than a decade in Los Angeles, first encouraged Gisela to help her sell during the day. After Gisela tried selling during the day, she decided to go to community college and tried cleaning houses part time. At the time of the interview, Gisela was in her first year of community college, but her part time job did not work out.

Lorena: How long did you work cleaning houses?

Gisela: [laughs] long enough! Well, I had four houses I would clean during the week. Have you ever cleaned houses before? [I shake my head.] Well it's not for everybody, and not for me. The rich ladies made me feel like I am nothing, like I have no value. Rich ladies are crazy. You would think that having money would make them happy and not so stingy, but no. . . I worked at a house near UCLA. The house was huge, and they already had a live-in sirvienta [maid], so I went once a week to help her with deep cleaning. I was hired to work four hours for \$10 an hour [she laughs]...I know what you are saying, \$10 is not bad, but I was never finished in four hours, so I had to stay eight to ten hours to finish and still got \$40. So I decided to quit and try to look for a job in a garment shop.

Lorena: Did you find a job?

Gisela: Well, I did not even look because I went out that night and met Sandra.

Lorena: So what happened when you met Sandra?

Gisela: I will tell you about it, but not here.

I wondered if the lack of privacy had put a stop to our interview. Gisela told me not to worry, that she would continue her story on our way to her job selling

flowers outside clubs. Excited to accompany her while she sold flowers, I helped to carry the buckets of flowers and put them in my car. That evening Gisela and her flowers did not have to ride public transportation. As we left, Jorge offered to take us in his car, but Gisela thanked him and went outside. Jorge told me that he offers to take her almost every day but she always refuses. “I feel responsible for her,” said he said, adding, “She is the only daughter of my cousin who died last year, pobre Gisela.” In the car, wondering why Gisela does not accept Jorge’s help, I asked her, “¿Qué onda con Jorge? [what is the deal with Jorge?]” Gisela laughed, “do you know where we are selling today?” Believing we were going to West Hollywood with its restaurants, clubs, valets, and paparazzi, or somewhere in the vicinity, and contrary to the map Gisela drew for me of where she sells flowers in her apartment and in front of Jorge and María, Gisela directed us to a gay immigrant Latino club far away from the glitz and glamour of West Los Angeles.

Bar Tasco

Situated between a panadería and a Mexican restaurant in a strip mall, we arrived at Bar Tasco around nine o’clock. From the outside, the bar looks like an old neighborhood bar with a narrow front. The small sign above the door is barely visible from the parking lot. I tell Gisela that I have probably passed this bar so many times, never noticing it. She quips, “Well that’s probably the point.”

Bar Tasco is a Latinx immigrant gay bar with mostly male customers, except on Thursdays, when it is “ladies’ night.” We happen to visit on that day of the week. As we entered the bar, Gisela greets Rocco, the butch Latina security guard at the door. The bar is like any old neighborhood bar with a long wood bar on the right side, a small stage at the end of the bar, low colored lights everywhere, and loud Mexican music playing in surround-sound. I hear only Spanish spoken in the bar. This night the bar is about

a quarter full, and most of the clients, as the bartender confirms, are Latinas. Both femmes and butch Latinas are dancing on the dance floor to a Mexican eighties and nineties pop songs. The songs take me back to my youth in Mexico, and I realize I share generational Mexican pop cultural knowledge with the clientele. Gisela introduces me to her friends sitting at a table next to the stage. Placing one of her buckets behind the bar, she takes a seat adjacent to me and tells me she has to wait a couple hours before she starts selling. While she waited, she hangs out with her friends and waits for Sandra, whom I suspect is Gisela's girlfriend, but the music is too loud and the environment too festive and celebratory to maintain a conversation. Later that night a woman hugs Gisela from the back. Gisela introduced her as her partner, Sandra. A self-described butch, Sandra is tall, dark, wears a slick ponytail, and is dressed in slacks and a button-down shirt. As Sandra sits down, it is obvious that she knows the rest of the Latinas sitting at the table very well. In this moment, it suddenly becomes clear to me that I am in a space catering to (in)visible queer Latina immigrants.

Bar Tasco is a queer Latino immigrant space where "brown" bodies are entangled physically: bodies dance, hug, laugh, talking, flirt, and make out in dark corners. At the same time, these bodies are entangled with nonphysical processes related to immigrant journeys, immigration status, and the production of "home" across borders, all informing the becoming of sexual and gendered identities of queer Latina immigrant vendors. Working-class queer immigrant vendors like Gisela build community through their friends and networks who frequent these bars. She is visible in this space both as a vendor and as a femme Latina and to her chosen family. Not only do they sell inside and outside the bars, they are also patrons during ladies' night. By frequenting these particular bars on ladies night, Gisela builds a queer community outside her kin family life. The bar is a key physical space

where she constructs, affirms, and negotiates her chosen queer family. A space temporarily produced as a site of knowledge production where multiple economic, social, and regional identities, life experiences, and desires are negotiated in relation to border crossings, conservative ideologies of Latinx sexualities that often restrict and shape the invisibility of queer Latina immigrants in Los Angeles.

Yolanda

The night I went to Bar Tasco, I met Yolanda, Gisela's friend and chosen family. Yolanda is a Latina immigrant street vendor from Guatemala. She is short, round, browned skinned. Sporting a military hairstyle, that night she wore jeans, a button-down shirt with a white undershirt underneath, and a thick, bold, gold chain with a cross. She said she considers herself a "buchota" (big butch). At time twenty-two years old, Yolanda arrived in Los Angeles when she was twelve years old with her mother and cousins. She made the long journey from Guatemala through Mexico, and it took three attempts to cross the border successfully and settle in Los Angeles. She said the memory of her border crossing is fuzzy, that all she remembers was that it was hard and she felt unsafe all of the time. She did not hesitate to tell me about her hatred for Tijuana, but says nothing more. She reunited with an aunt and with her mother in Los Angeles and with help from her cousins they started vending shortly upon their arrival. Street vending has been part of her life since she came to the United States. Her mother married here and she has three half-siblings, all born in Los Angeles. Yolanda stated that she is glad that her siblings will have many more opportunities than will ever have, she being undocumented and they being citizens. When she is not in school, Yolanda helps her mother sell traditional food from Guatemala. She told me that she does not truly enjoy street vending but loves the time she spends with her mother. As they are very close, Yolanda still lives at home with her siblings, her stepfather, and her mother. They live in

a three-bedroom apartment in Central Los Angeles in a dense Korean-Latino neighborhood made up of tightly packed multifamily dwellings, so packed the sidewalks are lined with cars, leaving no empty spaces for parking. Her apartment is on the first floor with a small private fenced yard in the front. They have lived there for 10 years.

At her suggestion, our first interview takes place in her room so we could have privacy. As I enter her apartment, her mother and stepfather greet me with enthusiasm. The facial resemblance between Yolanda and her mother is striking. They introduce me to Yolanda's siblings, Elsa, Lisa, and Ana, all under the age of 10. Yolanda comes out to greet me in the same style of dress she wore at Bar Tasco. Yolanda gave me a tour of their spacious apartment: "The girls share a room, that is my mom's room, and this one is the boy's room, my room." With a masculine touch, her room is decorated in dark colors. On top of her bureau lies a picture of a feminine woman hugging her. Yolanda explained, "that's my recent ex: Maggie. Yeah, she is a white girl, she is crazy . . . still love her though." I asked her right away if her family knows she is gay. Laughing, she told me, "What do you think?" She affirmed, saying that she has been out since high school, and her mom has been very supportive and has always been welcoming to the girlfriends she brings home. Her stepfather, in contrast, does not encourage her sexuality but is indifferent. In the interviews that followed I tried to understand her mother's supportive relationship with her.

Yolanda and I had hung out on several occasions and I accompanied her and her mother while working, but it was not until the third and final interview that Yolanda told me the story, in fragments, of her experience in Tijuana. While her mother worked in Tijuana, Yolanda was raped, sexually violated, and terrorized by the boyfriend of the woman who took care of her. She was repeatedly assaulted, but does not remember how many times. Fearing what

her mother would do—possibly going back to Guatemala—she did not tell her mother. Although Yolanda secretly wanted to return, she was aware of the sacrifices her family, especially her mother, had already endured to reach the “promised land” of Los Angeles. Yolanda said she does not remember how she finally told her mother, two days after arriving in Los Angeles. She told her, and her mother never again left her sight.

Yolanda revealed that she and her mother never talk about it. She fears that her mother feels guilty over what happened to her in Tijuana, that sexual violence is the reason she is gay. She admits that she also believed that until she found her chosen family at Bar Tasco. Yolanda says of the friends she made in Bar Tasco, “Me salvaron la vida [they saved my life].” When I asked her to explain, she responded:

I had very dark times in High School. I tried to end it one time . . . well more than once . . . unsuccessfully [she laughs]. I am still here ain't I? [During high school] I was so confused and had horrible fights with my stepdad. These bitches [friends] helped me, well we help each other . . . we are some crazy bitches but we got our back. . . . Oh, and my mom, shout out to my mom!

Yolanda admitted her mother is overprotective, but is a really “cool mom.” She does not blame her mother; rather, for a long time she blamed herself, saying, “It took me a long time to stop blaming myself about what happened. I had horrible nightmares, but I guess it made me stronger. . . . like they say, pain makes you strong.” Turning to her chosen family at Bar Tasco, Yolanda reminisced about her first love, who later broke her heart, and a moment of transformation:

You know my ex came from El Salvador when she was nine. She hates Mexicans; that is why she did not really like to go to Bar Tasco—too many

Mexicans [laughs loudly]—but that was our hangout. She got it bad in Mexico, worse than me, that is fucked up! . . . At first, I never talked about that part of my life, but when we met Betina, also at Tasco—damn, Tasco is where its at [laughs]—so Betina is also from El Salvador and one day while hanging out she told us what happened to her . . . that same day my ex and I started talking about it and I felt like something changed, not sure what, but something did.

For Yolanda, sharing the painful wounds produced by her violent migration journey created possibilities of knowledge production of the self as she discussed how it was the enduring of pain that has indelibly shaped who she is today.

Unfortunately, Yolanda's violent, painful migration experience is not uncommon among women and children making the journey from Latin America to the United States. There are no accurate estimates of how many undocumented immigrants successfully cross the border into the United States. Nor are there estimates of how many women and children are victims of sexual assault and abuse suffered during their migration journey. Unofficial reports estimate as many as 80 percent of women traveling alone or with other women are sexually assaulted during their migration journey. Sexual violence has become part of the process of migrating to the United States. There are accounts of Guatemalan women migrants resorting to taking and giving their teenage daughters birth control as a prevention method against unwanted pregnancies resulting from rape.³ Moreover, recent studies have argued that rape is one outcome of militarization along the U.S.-Mexico Border and that Latinx often encounter painful journeys in the violation of bodies not only at the hands of the state, but also because of the state apparatus that shapes the everyday realities of bodies during migration journeys (Falcón 2001; Nazario 2006; Zavella 2011). Made up of unfamiliar encounters, the long, arduous journey through dirt roads, trains, and dark hills becomes entangled

with wounds and painful markings that also produce infinite possibilities for transformation and the shaping of the self.

Yolanda's and her ex-girlfriend's complex migration stories allude to their negative sentiments toward "Mexicans" that is more than a result of simple ethnic differences. There are multiple, complex layers of historical experiences that have shaped their experiences in the processes of migration and settlement. Their stories echo larger narratives regarding ethnic and national conflicts among immigrants from El Salvador and Mexico. To elaborate, immigrants from El Salvador who migrated to the US through a step-migration process oftentimes encountered difficulties in crossing the southern border of Mexico, where many immigrants suffered atrocities at the hands of Mexican officials and civilians (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001; Menjivar 2000). Additionally, the settlement processes in Los Angeles can be a point of conflict among Central Americans and Mexicans, since the Latino immigrants who settled in the Los Angeles metropolitan area before the 1980s were predominantly Mexican. Hence, the context of reception for Central American immigrants was, in a way, shaped by the existing, longstanding generations of Mexicans living in Southern California (Menjivar 2000; Munoz 2010).

For Yolanda, wounds produced by collisions further produced meanings and affects. Yolanda's navigation of her incomplete fluid sexual identities is entangled with her violent migration journey, the context of reception in Los Angeles, her mother's guilt, and being out, in addition to the vexed relationship between sexual abuse and homosexuality. Bar Tasco is where Yolanda was able to negotiate her incomplete sexual identities through entanglements and friendships that exposed her to divergent ways of being. It was her chosen family that she met at Bar Tasco that "saved her life." Although she had been out as queer since high school and her family,

particularly her mother, and high school friends were always supportive, she still attempted suicide twice during high school. I read in Yolanda's oral history that it was not until she was able to process her wounds rooted in her migration journey in relation to her incomplete sexual identities that she was able to envision other possibilities for ways of knowing and being. Related to the wounds occurring during migration journeys, I want to be clear that I am not drawing equivalences between rape and other wounds produced by isolation, undesirability, and poverty, nor are all experiences of rape inherently equivalent. Rather, these wounds are subjective to the individual bodies that move across borders. However, the collision of these multiple complex experiences produces wounds, acting as transformative forces and producing new ways of adapting and understanding the world. In this way, collisions are assemblages of entangled possibilities of productive agency.

Making Familia

The day after meeting with Yolanda, I had a second official interview with Gisela at a coffee shop near her college. She immediately told me that her family back home, including the family she lives with in Los Angeles, does not know she is gay. Gisela was raised in Los Angeles, speaking Spanish at home but English outside the home. She told me Sandra is not her first relationship with a woman, as she had a girlfriend in high school, but neither of their families suspected they were a couple. Jorge's family is evangelical; although they respected her withdrawing from the church, they hold negative feelings about homosexuality.

Gisela: It's like I have multiple personalities.

Lorena: How so?

Gisela: I am one person at home, I am myself with Sandra, and I am myself but a college student also when I go to class. Like I am Latina, but also

just a student you know? . . . But once I graduate I can hopefully get a job somewhere—but who knows since you know I don't have papers [before the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals]—then I can move in with Sandra.

I asked Gisela if moving in with Sandra would cause problems with her family. It certainly would, but she could no longer live as though they were in hiding. We agreed that I would meet her again for a second interview in a few weeks. Unfortunately, her cell phone was disconnected and we lost contact. One year later, I decided to visit Gisela in her apartment to see how she was doing. As I made my way to her doorstep, Jorge opened the door, informing me that she no longer lives there. At the address Jorge gave me, I had to go to her apartment twice before I was able to find her. She was living in a studio apartment not far from where she used to live. She greeted me with a smile and let me in. She was writing a paper and asked me to help her with it after the interview.

Gisela showed me around her third-floor studio apartment in a multifamily building, which she shares with Sandra. At 450 square feet, it is cozy, bright, and sunny, with two long windows next to the small kitchen and decorated in yellow tones with olive green wallpaper. Although the apartment is not updated, country cottage charm exudes from every corner of the one-room living space. The walls are adorned with photos of Gisela and Sandra. Near the bed I spot a faded wedding picture of a couple, which turns out to be Gisela's parents on their wedding day in Mexico. I asked her about her mom, and Gisela revealed that she died when she was only two years old, and her father asked Jorge to bring her to Los Angeles and raise her so she could have better opportunities. Gisela's eyes welled with tears as she wondered if her parents are disappointed in her. Pain, wounds, and longing exude from her facial expressions. Exasperated, she says, "It is hard, you know?"

She said that about a week after I went to the bar with her, she told María she had a girlfriend. María reacted in anger and fear that her own daughters would find out Gisela is gay. Gisela left that night and never came back. However, she regularly meets with Jorge, who is sympathetic and thinks of her as his own daughter. Jorge helped her get on her feet and bought her second-hand furniture to outfit her apartment. Although they stay in touch, María is clear that unless Gisela comes back to the church, she can no longer be part of their family. With tears in her eyes, Gisela said, “I am happy, really. I love Sandra and we have a good life, but I feel really alone sometimes . . . caught between all kinds of worlds, and I have to make a decision about which world I want to live in.”

Gisela admitted she often cries herself to sleep, knowing her family would love her only under the condition that she were straight. I asked Gisela how she came out and how she knew she had to tell María. Gisela responded, “I was in pain then. I knew telling María would be painful, but I have hope it will pass, and they will accept me again, I mean . . . they are my family. I was four years old when they brought me here—can you imagine?” Gisela said that she missed them, but her friends are her family. It was Sandra and her friends and her now chosen family at Bar Tasco that made her realize it was time to tell María. Just like Yolanda, Gisela carves spaces for creating “family” from her friends and lovers outside her kin-family, a process Moraga (1986) calls “making familia from scratch,” a renegotiation of sociosymbolic meanings of heteronormative family structures. Gisela’s kin family structure is already complicated by her immigration journey that separated her from her father and her informal adoption by her father’s second cousin. Family separation is nothing new to the immigrant experience (Chaudry 2011; Dreby 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, and Louie 2002). Yet the rejection of her immediate family, which is already nonnormative, is shaped

and policed by María's evangelical conservative ideologies about sexuality and gender. As Jorge's family was the only family she knew from the time she was a small child until she started selling flowers and met her chosen family in Bar Tasco, Gisela questions her own understanding of who is family. Bar Tasco is where Gisela acquires and renegotiates the meaning of familia.

Conclusion

Gisela's social worlds temporally crash in violent ways and produce new ways of adapting, producing, and knowing, understanding, and navigating her everyday life. Evangelism in Gisela's family is entangled with heteronormative ideologies and cultural norms that constantly police Gisela's queer identities. However, it is the space of Bar Tasco where Gisela and Yolanda rework their wounds from everyday collisions and negotiate their fluid queer identities. Gisela has endured so much pain: being shipped to the United States at the age of four to live with a family that, at the time, were strangers to her; the world she knew as a small child suddenly dissolved and a new world was constructed far from home; the death of the father she never saw again; finding love in invisible spaces; creating her chosen family and community she shares with Latinas with migration journeys of their own. It was in the table next to the dark stage at Bar Tasco where she discussed and planned sharing with María that she is lesbian and in love with Sandra. Gisela is aware, awake, and conscious of the different worlds that she actively negotiates. Bar Tasco is where she ephemerally materializes through her relationship with Sandra and the choices she enacts as part of her awakening. Although Gisela's transformative agency is never complete, it is nevertheless always in production. When Gisela states, "I opened one door [coming out, moving in with Sandra] and set myself free; I know I will figure this one out somehow," she is consciously aware that she will also figure out how to navigate her undocumented status and future employment, along with acceptance or nonacceptance into her family.

For Yolanda, Bar Tasco is a space she frequents for support and engagement with other queer immigrants who also perform divergent sexuality expressions. Yolanda's oral history demonstrates that possibilities for different ways of knowing and being did not open for her until she was able to understand the wounds caused by her migration journey in relation to her incomplete sexual identities. Yolanda's wounds shape her transformative agency as she found a space of community and family at Bar Tasco, helping her process the feelings and emotions that led to her attempted suicide. In sum, collisions offer possibilities for the enactment of agency through the awareness of multiple oppressions, like what Anzaldúa calls a new mestiza consciousness. Both Yolanda's and Gisela's collisions of social worlds produce physical and non-physical wounds between ideologies, emotions, and state forces, and in turn, allow for their "brown" bodies in the space of Bar Tasco to enact a new mestiza consciousness.

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Notes

¹ To protect the confidentiality of participants in this study, all names of people and places, including Bar Tasco and its geographical location, have been changed. All interviews in this paper were conducted and translated by the author.

² A note on terminology: "Latinx" is used to inclusively reference Latinos of multiple genders. Although I am clear that "queer," "gay," and "lesbian" are not interchangeable and that they have their own genealogies, they are used throughout the paper in accordance with the way the participants discuss their own sexual identities.

³ See Ryan Gorman, “The Women Who Know They’re Going to Be Raped: Female Illegal Immigrants Taking Birth Control before They Try to Cross US border,” UK Mail Online, April 25, 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2612793/The-women-know-theyre-going-raped-Female-immigrants-sneaking-US-taking-birth-control-avoid-unwanted-pregnancies.html>. Also see Eleanor Goldberg, “80% of Central American women, girls are raped crossing into the U.S.” The Huffington Post, September 8, 2014. <http://www.huffingtongpost.com/2014/09/12/central-america-migrants-rape-n-5806972.html>.

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