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Research Article

(Re)Imagining Home Across Borders: The Construction of Selfhood in Sandra Cisneros's "Women Hollering Creek"

Sınırlar Ötesinde Yuva Düşlemek: Sandra Cisneros'un "Çığırtkan Kadınlar" Öyküsündeki Bireyselleşme Yolculuğu

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ÖZ
1980'lerden itibaren Latin Amerika kökenli Amerikalı kadın yazarların ortaya koyduğu kuramsal ve yazınsal metinler geleneksel feminist okumalara alternatif bir bakış açısı sağlamıştır. Bu bağlamda Sandra Cisneros, "Sınır Edebiyatı" ve "Sınır Çalışmaları" alanlarında belki de en önemli ve öncül isimlerden birisi olarak kabul görür. Bu makale, ilk olarak "Sınır Çalışmaları" alanında öne çıkan isimleri ve alanın kuramsal çerçevesini ana hatlarıyla ortaya koyduktan sonra Cisneros'un "Woman Hollering Creek" başlıklı kısa öyküsünün yakın bir okumasını yapar. Öykü, alışılagelmiş "Birinci Dünya ve Üçüncü Dünya" çerçevesinde, ikili karşıtlığı üzerinden yapılan okumalara yapıbozucu bir yöntem ile yaklaşarak, alışılagelmiş tematik ve biçemsel birçok sınıra da meydan okur. Ayrıca bu öykü, Meksika popüler kültüründe yaygın olan fotoroman ve pembe-dizi türlerinin başarılı bir parodisini yaparak, öykünün başkarakteri olan Cleafílas isimli Meksikalı göçmen bir kadının Amerika'daki kimlik ve ses arayışını ataerkil düzenin dayattığı kısıtlı bir cinsiyetçi söylemden kurtararak yeni bir bireysellik formülünü okuyucuya sunmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, makale, öyküde kullanılan anlatı stratejilerinin analizini yaparken, öykünün birbirleriyle etkileşim halinde olan tematik içeriği ve biçemsel özelliklerini ayrıntılarıyla inceler.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Sandra Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek", sınır çalışmaları, *fotoroman, pembe-dizi*

ABSTRACT
Since the 1980s, the literary and theoretical output of American women writers of Latin-American heritage has offered an alternative reading of feminist literary tradition. Sandra Cisneros is probably one of the foremost figures within the American context of "Border Literature" and "Borders Studies" proper. This article firstly outlines the parameters, theorems and prominent figures of Border Studies, and then examines Cisneros' short story "Woman Hollering Creek" which deconstructs the dualistic mode of thinking in terms of first world vs. third world dichotomy, and defies various thematic and structural borders. The story is also a parody of the Mexican popular genres of *telenovella* (soap opera) and *fotonovella* (photo novel), and offers a new form of identity formation through the female protagonist's quest for finding her own voice and subjectivity outside the prescribed gender roles attuned to the patriarchal discourse proposed in the aforementioned popular genres. Hence, this article offers a close reading of the story's narrative strategies on a linguistic and semantic level as they inform its thematic concerns.
Keywords: Sandra Cisneros, "Woman Hollering Creek", border studies, *telenovella, fotonovella*

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Since the 1980s, the literary and theoretical output of American women writers with Latin-American roots offered an alternative reading of feminist literary tradition. Sandra Cisneros is probably one of the foremost figures within the American context of "Border Literature" and "Borders Studies". This article first outlines the parameters, theorems and prominent figures of Border Studies, and then examines Cisneros' titular short story of her *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* collection, which deconstructs the dualistic mode of thinking in terms of "first world vs. third world" dichotomy, and defies various thematic and structural borders. Hence, Cisneros's range of ideological commitment extends—or better yet deconstructs spatial, temporal and national borders. This creates a form of *transfronteriza* feminism, to use Sonia Saldívar-Hull's term, which merges Chicana feminist theories with social and cultural praxes in multiple Chicana and Mexicana locations. In that sense, Cisneros' "Women Hollering Creek" employs the tale of a young Mexican woman, Cleófilas, who initially experiences her home in a small town in Mexico through a rather tedious patriarchal context profoundly shaped by the normative gender roles attuned to Mexican culture proper. In that sense, the story is also a parody of the Mexican popular genres of *telenovella* (soap opera) and *fotonovella* (photo novel) as it offers a new form of identity formation through the female protagonist's quest for finding her own voice and subjectivity outside the prescribed gender roles dictated in the aforementioned popular genres. However, the ensuing quest by newlywed Cleófilas on the American side of the border in Texas traces how she gradually acquires the consciousness that will mark her in the end as a speaking subject. With her counter-migration from the U.S. to Mexico, she finally leaves behind the institution of a corrupt marriage and false American dreams. Hence, the article offers a close reading of the story's narrative strategies on a linguistic and semantic level as they inform its thematic concerns.

> "Where the transmission of "national" traditions was once the major theme of world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of world literature."
>
> (Bhabha, 1992, p. 146)

> "Creative acts are forms of political activism employing definite aesthetic strategies for resisting dominant cultural norms and are not merely aesthetic exercises. We build culture as we inscribe in these various forms."
>
> (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxiv)

In the aftermath of the wind of change that swept the entire globe from the revolutionary 1960s to the surge of Global Capitalism by the early 1990s, the concept of *la frontera* and the phenomenon of *atravesando-fronteras* have garnered immense critical attention in theorizing decentered, dislocated, liminal and hybrid subjectivities. These two organizing tropes, namely *the border* and *border-crossings*, have been currently in vogue, especially, for those skeptical scholars who have spotlit the "Universal" understanding of "Western" culture and identity no longer as innate, unitary, and hermetically sealed sites, but rather as dynamic, relational and contrapuntal ensembles. Creating a matrix of dissenting histories, competing voices, disparate languages, clashing subjectivities and discrete cultures, the meaning of "culture" and "identity" have now extended to encompass an ongoing process of amalgamation to defy the EITHER/OR syndrome ruggedly engrafted in Western culture, philosophy and *realpolitik*.

On the other hand, and far from such conceptual and discursive "abstractions," the international geopolitical border with its tangible ramifications deeply rooted in the material world marks the jurisdictional fringes of the nation-state, while it functions to fixate the national-subject through its own organizing symbols and holistic rubrics such as a common national history, mythos, culture, language, lineage, literature, religion, map, flag, anthem, to name the most obvious. Inevitably, this palpable border itself has become the locus of an essentializing mindset which monolithically puts forth, at its best, an equivocal "including-while-excluding" stance towards the subjects of other(ized) ethnicities who reside within the penetralia of the nation-state, and yet, whose ethnic markers and idiosyncratic cultural codes do not

immediately correspond to the national (or nationalistic) project; hence, drawing further cognitive *fronteras* which cannot be traced readily on a topographical map.

Nevertheless, the current theoretical purview avers that with the ex-colonial masses of the so-called "Third World" (ranging, say, from a noted Harvard professor to thousands of anonymous *indocumentados*) having pullulated in the "First World" metropolis, the phenomenon of border-crossing is now endemic to any Western locality where subordinated masses of poor, immigrant, ethnic, queer, or disabled groups collide with the hegemonic core culture, which has hitherto been understood to comprise white, heterosexual, bourgeois, and healthy citizen-subjects. Thus, such migratory movements, either literally or figuratively, have paved the way, in Fredric Jameson's words, for "the emergence of an *internal* Third World and of internal Third World voices" (Jameson, 1990, p. 49), which has further perplexed the very concept of *frontera* and anything germane to the "national" proper.

In the case of the United States of America, the presence of the internal third world voices becomes even more problematic when viewed from the perspective of "multiculturalism" which fancies the Cha-cha, Salsa, tortillas, or the lovely Salma Hayek, but never allows Spanish for bilingual education. Given the history of discriminatory and expansionist policies inherent in the foundational principles of the American "nation," for Mexican-origin communities living in the U.S.-Southwest (alternately called *Chicanos*[1]), the concept of the border has been politically charged with a nasty history of uneven power relations since the Treaty Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and the Gadsden Purchase (1853).[2] The history of America's southern border—unlike its northern Canadian counterpart, much of it drawn on water!—is after all, an ongoing history of *de facto* and/or *de jure* violent encounters. As such, this paradigmatic experience of border phenomenon has come to combine the very materiality of historical, geographical, economic, and coercive configurations with their residual socio-cultural and psychological effects for more than seventeen

1 The politically charged term 'Chicano' has been in use from the U.S. Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s onward. Yet, since not all members of the Mexican-descent people in the U.S. feel associated to that era any longer, the term 'Mexican-American' is used interchangeably with 'Chicano' (Candelaria, 1986, p. xv). In order to avoid loss-of-focus by the awkward usage of the masculine and feminine forms of the term (Chican*os/as*) wherever it appears throughout this article, the masculine 'Chican*os*' is used to denote all Mexican-Americans appropos to Spanish grammar. The feminine form of the tern 'Chican*as*' is opted for whenever the stress should specifically be laid on women of Mexican origin born in the U.S., or raised there since infancy, who exhibit a firm socio-political awareness of her ethnic status.

2 See Del Castillo (1990).

decades. In an interview with Bill Moyers, the renowned Carlos Fuentes expounds the uniqueness of this border: "It's the only border between the industrialized world and the emerging, developing, nonindustrialized world. […] We're conscious in Mexico, that Latin America begins with the border—not only Mexico, but the whole of Latin America" (Fuentes, 1985, p. 506).

It is from this tangible border of cement, barbed-wires and chain-link fences, constantly policed and monitored with high-tech "alien" detection equipment, border-patrols and civilian vigilantes that a novel legitimate field of scholarly discipline called the "Border Studies" emerged in the early-1980s. The principal impetus for the new discipline came from the "boom" in Latin American literature that has become "the principal player on the scene of world culture, and has had an unavoidable and inescapable influence, not merely on other Third World cultures as such, but on First World literature and culture as well" (Jameson, 1990, pp. 48-49). Eventually, for over the last five decades the field of Border Studies, with its own recognizable canon of writers, academics and a panoply of organizational categories and interpretative frameworks, has extended the concept of *la frontera* and the phenomenon of *atravesando-fronteras* to a variety of identity paradigms such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and political/regional/religious allegiances – each intricately remapped as a symbolic border(ed)land which some people adhere to, or are forced to adhere to, and others cross over as a recurrent part of their most mundane affairs.

Incorporated with poststructural, postmodern, and postcolonial approaches to diasporic, dislocated, nomadic, or hybrid subjectivities, Border Studies is mainly directed to uncover that complicated intersectionality where the paradigms of ethnicity/"race," class, gender, and sexuality of the subaltern groups crisscross, ultimately de-centering not only the hegemonic master narratives imposed from above by the dominant "System," but also those essentializing doctrines endemic to their own micro communities. As such, this new critical framework evaluates borderland identities and experiential realities as enmeshed in multiple forms of systematic subjugations along multiple axes of power relations currently at play – and not solely on a sterile politics of exclusion which mandates dichotomous impasses such as the West *vs.* the rest, White *vs.* black, Colonizer *vs.* colonized, Male *vs.* female, Material *vs.* spiritual, Straight *vs.* queer, and the like. Taking their primal cue from the geographic space of the U.S.-Mexican border as a paradigmatic border phenomenon, border scholars, or scholars on the border, have retrospectively as well as prospectively

dealt with the issues of displacement, liminality, and (cultural) hybridity in an effort to shed light on a broader range of issues pertinent to the concept of border.

Thus situated, beyond its literal meaning which involves a single-dimensional line drawn at will from point-A to point-B to divide an otherwise naturally seamless territory into two separate countries, the U.S.-Mexican border acquires a multi-dimensional character. It functions as a complex metaphor for a crossroads of cultural syncretism, dismantling arbitrary barriers hitherto ossified to polarize nations, cultures, religions, histories and languages, etc. It is at this locality that the border concurrently displays the characteristics of a *by-product* of a far-reaching historical series of violent encounters, and also of an ongoing *producer* of various tactical praxes of adaptability and/or creativity whereby almost all marginalized subjectivities insure their existence and find various means of expression. The U.S.-Mexican border thus becomes a synecdoche for *thresholds*, *interstices*, or *liminal zones*, to adopt some of Homi Bhabha's lexicon. As Bhabha asserts: "These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood […] that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 1-2).

Nevertheless, the porosity of the border takes on a different meaning for Chicanos as uttered by Inocencio Manslavo, a character in Fuentes' novel *The Old Gringo* (1985), when Inocencio says: "They're right when they say this isn't a border. It's a scar" (p. 185). Gloria Anzaldúa further elaborates on this insight, claiming in her own border-defying *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), that the U.S.-Mexican border is "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture" (p. 3). In Anzaldúa's figuration, the lifeblood of Chicanos which flows from this *herida abierta,* this open wound, to beget "a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (p. 3) is also the ever-evolving byproduct and the prolific producer of a hybrid subjectivity and consciousness as defined by the highly critical notion of *mestizaje*.[3]

3 The concept of *mestizaje* has at least a half-millennium history in the continental *Américas*. Referring most literally to the genetic mixture of the Mexic-Amerindian peoples (the Aztec and the Maya) and the Spanish conquistadors of the New World, the term attained linguistic vogue in the 19th-century with the onset of the indigenous *Creole* independence movements to depose the Spanish colonial rule. (Saldaña-Portillo, 2001, pp. 402-23) From this point onward, the concepts of 'hybridity' and *mestizaje* as theories on miscegenation are used interchangeably; for, *mestizaje* (like 'creolization') typifies a particular form of hybridity.

Theoretical and artistic manifestations of *mestizaje* evaluate the notion not only as a traumatic vision of genetic alloy—locked up within particular spatiotemporal confines of history—but also as a dynamic stimulus for alternative cultural, moral, political, and artistic praxes vis-à-vis "Institutionalized" structures immersed in hegemonic discourses. At the most basic level, such tactical adoption of *mestizaje* occurs through the fluid juxtaposition of the socio-cultural structures of the white dominant American culture with the idiosyncratic traits of Latin American culture to promote what might be called a dialectical *Américano* ethos. This mundane strategy of cultural hybridity within an oppressive milieu, in turn, brings forth a subversive border-blurring, or border-crossing, sensibility. It constitutes a new amalgam of human expression, promoting "new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power," (Bhabha, 1994, p. 119) as well as an everyday praxis which contests "the logical order of the discourse of authority" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 120). *Mestizaje* as such becomes the "new site of power," as Bhabha would call it, hosting subjectivities previously silenced by dominant paradigms, and stimulating them now to talk-back, or move-against, through the pores within the borderlines between polarized cultures.

In his seminal article "Representing the Colonized" (1988), Edward Said claims that "exile, immigration and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can provide us with new narrative forms or […] with *other* ways of telling" (p. 225). The other ways of telling that disrupt the static understanding of the border which Said refers to are arguably manifested in the recent phenomenon of *Border Writing*, or *Border Literature*. Within the American context, border writing encompasses those creative as well as theoretical texts attesting to the experiences of forced exile or willful immigration of various peoples from Latin American countries whose identities are constantly shaped by the linkages between external and/or internal journeys through metaphorical as well as literal terrains across geographical spaces and different sets of cultural codes within an intricate matrix of Latin American, WASP, and indigenous traditions.[4] Although the material specificity of border writing finds its taproot in the topographical realm of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands, its mental frame can be extended to encompass a wider variety of social, psychological, cultural, political, and economic realms.

However, because the early Chicano artistic and theoretical position from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s was mainly a resolute reaction to the "internal

4 For an extensive background, see Hicks (1991).

colonization" of Mexican-Americans, the major concerns of the intellectuals, artists and political activists of the Chicano Power Movement era were limited only to the issues of "racial" identity and economic exploitation to the detriment of other vectors of subjectivity such as gender and sexuality.[5] After the inevitable decline of that turbulent decade of ethnocentric models, it was the border writing by the trailblazing women writers of Mexican descent and other U.S. Latinas from the early 1980s onwards that has broadened the scope of contemporary border culture, border consciousness, and border literature to ultimately provide a new understanding of what it means to be an "American" and the "American" literary canon.[6]

The creative and theoretical works produced by these women have been particularly preoccupied with the hierarchical differences not only between the dominant culture and its others, but also those that are endemic to their own patriarchal communities. By refusing to distinguish between various forms of oppression, border writing by Chicanas and other U.S. Latinas provides fruitful examples of alternative modes of subjectivity and representation marked by the crisscrossing identity vectors of ethnicity/"race," nationality, class, gender, sexuality, language and religion, to name the most obvious. It is a stark reality that these women of mettlesome spirit have historically been triple-burdened under **(1)** the

5 This rigorous stance is clearly put forth in the two prefatory articles to the 6th and 7th issues of the journal *Cultural Critique* (1987), both co-authored by Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd. In their introduction to the 7th issue, the critics define "minority discourse" as "the product of damage, of damage more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant culture" (p. 7). JanMohamed and Lloyd go on to claim that

> […] the collective nature of *all* minority discourse necessarily derives from the fact that minority individuals are always treated and forced to experience themselves generically. Coerced into a negative, generic subject position, the oppressed individual responds by transforming that position into a positive, collective one. (p. 10)

The critics conclude their assessment that "[t]he minority's attempt to negate the prior hegemonic negation of itself is one of its most fundamental forms of affirmation" (p. 10).

6 While celebrating their hybridity (as well as establishing an identity beyond the homogenizing dictates of the "Hispanic" moniker) with their adoption of the self-reflexive appellation *mestiza*, Chicanas have also embraced the panethnic coinage "Latina," in an effort to share a multiplicity of experiences from the Latin-Caribbean countries such as Puerto Rico, Perú, Nicaragua, Columbia, Chile, Salvador, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Cuba, and Costa Rica. From the early 1980s onward, these women have adopted the generic term "woman of color" in forming a sisterhood with U.S.-ethnic women from other fronts against First World Fenimism. From the mid-1980s onward, yet another moniker, "U.S. third world feminist," has also been ascribed by Chicanas in a twofold effort: for one, to stress the remarkable differences among U.S.-ethnic women, avoiding the tokenization of the "woman-of-color" etiquette, and also to situate themselves in a wider global context. (Flores & Yúdice, 1990, pp. 57-84).

ruthless competitiveness of the capitalist System, **(2)** the objectifying gaze of the logocentric Euro-American intelligentsia, preaching from the ivory towers of the "Academia," and **(3)** the surveillance of their own phallocentric communities, afflicted historically with an acute disorder of insecurity. It is on this conjunctural grounds that Chicana historian Emma Pérez's insight on the "diasporic subjectivity," particularly, of Latinas is of vital significance in that Pérez offers diasporic subjectivity as an "oppositional and transformative identity that allowed these women to weave through the power of cultures, to infuse, and be infused, to create and re-create newness" (Pérez, 1999, p. 81). Hence, the correlation between the polymorphous Latina subjectivity and its historical marginalization in multiple grounds is, in effect, what has forged contemporary border writing into a prolific textual site that resists the hegemonic discourses "from within but against the grain" (Spivak, 1987, p. 205).

This long-term exertion with multiple barriers has also catered U.S. Latinas the re-cognition of the arbitrary nature of categorical binaries, thus, the necessity to theorize their own Janus-faced paradigms in formulating their own hybrid aesthetics. This pluralistic awareness has been multifariously termed as the *new mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 1987), *multiple voicings* (Alarcón, 1990), *differential consciousness* (Sandoval, 1991), *conscientización* (Castillo, 1994), and *decolonial imaginary* (Pérez, 1999). The common denominator behind this bulk of deconstructive terminology, hence, evokes an astute aptitude—girdled with the tactical masquerades of a nomadic-trickster prevalent in almost all cultures—to occupy multiple locations and subjectivities in constant flux, while simultaneously maintaining a "tangible" core around which orbits a constellation of power structures in the realm of real life contexts.[7] The Chicana neologies mentioned above thus provide a chameleonic skill, or the power of diasporic mobility, to foster "a new subjectivity, a political revision that denies any one ideology as the final answer"

7 In his "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity" (1993), Satya P. Mohanty offers an innovative approach to theorizing 'cultural identity' which is attuned to the way U.S. Latinas have theorized their own subjectivity. Mohanty's method of assessing the concept of identity defies the two "accepted" approaches to identity from either the *essentialist* lens, which reflects "the identity common to members of a social group" as "stable and more or less unchanging, since it is based on the experiences they share" (p. 42); or the *postmodern* lens, which considers identities as "constructed rather than self-evidently deduced from experience, since […] experience cannot be a source of objective knowledge" (p. 42). On the other hand, the "realist," or "cognitivist," method which Mohanty offers focuses on "the relationship among personal experience, social meanings, and cultural identities" (*ibid.*). Mohanty asserts that such a newly articulated "cultural and political identity is 'real'" (70) in that identity categories such as ethnicity/"race", class, gender, and sexuality function "individually" without confining the speaker to only one of these identity paradigms.

(Sandoval, 1991, p. 14). That is the very reason the critical, artistic, and theoretical methodologies of these "world-travellers"[8] across different worlds and words of meaning have been instrumental in debunking conventional boundaries. Thus, due to their triple-burdened status within their own culture along with the white dominant culture looming as a backdrop to their lives, the "feminine" form of writing that Chicanas embrace does not spotlight one type of oppression and downplay another. Nor does it opt for theory in an effort to shun political praxis, or vice versa. As Anzaldúa (2002) incisively asserts: "The act of writing is the act of making soul, alchemy. It is the quest for the self, for the center of the self, which we women of color have come to think of as 'other' – the dark, the feminine. Didn't we start writing to reconcile this other within us?" (p. 187).

Akin to a castaway's gaze fastened upon the horizon, Chicanas and U.S. Latinas have constantly re-scanned their own history, folklore, and mythology in an attempt to write against the grain of History and "His" story. However, their critical perspectives by no means entail a rigorous denial of a series of ethnocentric binaries that have all the way glorified their own heritage and political legitimacy over an Anglo ethos. Conversely, as historical pariahs they have striven to re-navigate through the tough tempest of history, not only as a stimulus to their creativity, or simply a mnemonic affair, but also as a potentially transformative act.[9] It is on this basis that Ana Castillo's model, presented in her *Massacre of the Dreamers* (1994), serves as an alternate feminist prodigy, called a *Xicanista*, who might create an analytic approach to juxtapose **1)** her past with the present ["As Mexic Amerindians we must, to find a clue as to who we are from whom we descend, become akin to archeologists" (p. 6)], **2)** theory with sociocultural and sociopolitical praxes ["we can rescue Xicanisma from the suffocating atmosphere of conference rooms […] and carry it out to our work place, social gatherings, kitchens, bedrooms, and society in general" (p. 11)], and **3)** her inherited indigenous beliefs with personal instinctive motivations ["It is our task

8 As Argentinian feminist María Lugones puts it, "travelling to someone's 'world' is a way of identifying with them because [it is] by travelling to their world [that] we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have travelled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other. Knowing other […] 'worlds' is a part of knowing them, and knowing them is a part of loving them" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

9 As Ramón Saldívar, in his *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference* (1990), claims:

> […] for Chicano narrative, *history* is the subtext that we must recover because history itself is the subtext of discourse. History cannot be conceived as mere "background" or "context" for this literature; rather, history turns out to be the decisive determinant of the form and content of the literature. (p. 5)

as Xicanistas to not only reclaim our indigenismo—but also to reinsert the forsaken feminine into our consciousness" (p. 12)].

In offering alternative aesthetic visions towards far-reaching horizons, the corpus of Chicana and U.S. Latina writing, hence, debunks the subordinate positions imposed on them both by the exclusionary strategies of the white System *and* the ethnocentric dictates of a distinctively patriarchal Latino identity. Thus, against the "divide-and-rule" strategies of the dominant culture, the goal of border writing by U.S. Latinas has indeed been to establish a mutual contact zone for *all* Latinos as a counter-discursive locus of struggle against the coalition forces of white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy. After all, as the present article shall explore, the alternative narrative strategies, thematic concerns and critical stances of Latinas are intrinsically rooted in the very primordial nature of Latino "racial" fiber (or *mestizaje*) itself, which has all the way been epitomized by hybrid subjectivities, liminal socio-cultural locations, polyglot perspectives, and a dynamic interplay of polyphonic narratives. Therefore, by employing such dialogic sensibilities as their textual stratagems, border writing by U.S. Latinas has signaled a move toward *mestizaje* on a cross-cultural/racial/ethnic/national level which has originally spawned, invigorated and defined them not iconographically slashed as Latinos**/**as but re-configured as Latin@s *en masse*.[10]

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The internationally esteemed Sandra Cisneros needs no introduction. From her first novella, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), through her story collection, *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) to her epic novel, *Caramelo* (2002), and to her latest fable, *Have You Seen Marie?* (2012) Cisneros has become the voice of working-class Latinas and an early beacon for Chicanas who have started to dominate the U.S. Latino literary and academic communities from the 1980s, the so-called "Decade of the Hispanic" onward. Her three collections of poetry, *Bad Boys* (1980), and especially, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* (1987) and *Loose Woman* (1994), have also blown a fresh breath into the poetic world of Latin@s. Not unlike her public persona the potentially defiant women Cisneros portrays in her oeuvre are meant to surmount the ideological and material and forces such as poverty and male-supremacy that entrap them in their own subaltern ethnic milieu within the

10 See Erlick (2000).

heart of the First World.[11] Cisneros gives voice to those Latinas who, in the actual material world of the *barrios* and also in their male-dominated written and oral literatures, have been rendered voiceless, self-abnegating and male-dependent. Cisneros' concern to create such characters is that the plights those audacious women, who eventually develop various survival strategies against the traditional role of the humble and submissive Chicana, offer possible outlets for all U.S. Latinas.

There are currently volumes of critical analysis published on Cisneros' award-winning *The House on Mango Street*, where the author delves into the coming-of-age story of a girl named Esperanza in a fictive Chicago *barrio* in the late 1960s. Within the span of a single year, the young Chicana gradually realizes that she is meant to engage in the creative act of writing to discover her autonomous subjectivity and to rebuild a genuine connection to her own culture as she intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and sexually crosses various borders during this rite-of-passage period from innocence to knowledge. In the end Esperanza, whose name doubly connotes "hope" but also "waiting," is equipped with Anzaldúa's notion of the "new mestiza consciousness," in that she is ready to embark on her next quest for self-autonomy, now, outside the *barrio*. However, when Esperanza finally declares, "They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out" (Cisneros, 1991, p. 110), she does prove to bear the potential, or the "hope" for that matter, to become an organic intellectual in the Gramscian sense with the responsibility of working for the common good of her people. Her ultimate will to return to her community marks her utmost commitment to creating new liberating spaces not only for herself but also for the entire Latino community — especially, for the *barrio* women.

However, Cisneros does not limit herself only to the exploration of U.S. Latinas who are immobilized within American *barrios* by poverty, socio-cultural and linguistic barriers, conventional role expectations, and domestic violence. She also is engaged to those "Third World" women, who live on the other side of the U.S-Mexico divide. Hence, Cisneros's range of ideological commitment extends, or better yet

11 The shiny purple color with which Cisneros painted, or "Mexicanized," her 1903 Victorian house in the historic King William district in San Antonio, Texas, created a two-year standoff with city authorities that received the attention of national media. In the 1997 the city's Historic Design and Review Commission charged that the color was historically unfitting for the district, but Cisneros argued to the contrary: "The issue is bigger than my house. The issue is about historical inclusion […] Purple is historic to us. It only goes back a thousand years or so to the pyramids […] of the Aztecs" (McCracken, 2000, pp. 3-12). In the end, Cisneros won the case.

deconstructs, spatial, temporal *and* national borders, creating a form of *transfronteriza* feminism which "engages Chicana feminist theories with social and cultural productions in multiple Chicana and Mexicana locations" (Saldívar-Hull, 1991, p. 252). In that sense, the title story of her collection, *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, recounts the tale of a young Mexican woman, Cleófilas, who initially experiences her home in a small town in Mexico through a rather tedious patriarchal context, constantly occupied with "the chores never ended, six good-for-nothing brothers, and one old man's complaints" (Cisneros, 2004, p. 43).

"Women Hollering Creek" opens, in flashback, on a liminal position for Cleófilas as she reminisces about her initial crossing of the border from Mexico to start a new "American" life in Seguín, a rural town in Texas, with her would-be husband, a Juan Pedro. As she is about to cross over "her father's threshold, over several miles of dirt road and several miles of paved, over one border and beyond to a town *en el otro lado*—on the other side" (Cisneros, 2004, p. 43), the protagonist is also on the brink of crossing various borders to come in linguistic, psychological, and spiritual realms in her ensuing quest to become an autonomous subject. Cisneros' main concern in this story is to open up new spaces of critique against the age-old mechanisms of patriarchal rule and their modern mass media tentacles, working hand in hand with the capitalist system that shackle women on both sides of the border divide. Thus, Cisneros turns to and revises the legends of three female icons from Mexican, and by extension Chicano folklore, whom Gloria Anzaldúa, in her own revisionist project, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), has embraced as "Our Mothers" (p. 31).

By doing so, Cisneros also participates in the plight of those early Chicana feminists, who have from the mid-1970s onward scrutinized the deleterious effects of the "*machismo* vs. *marianismo*" mindset which is based on these archetypal figures. In her "*Marianismo*: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America" (1973), Evelyn Stevens notes that the term *marianismo* derives from the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe and is defined as "the cult of feminine spiritual superiority which teaches that women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men" (p. 91). But in order for such a binary to function flawlessly it needs its negative — an archenemy.

And one finds that archenemy figure of *mujer mala*, "bad woman," in one of the most proverbial legends in both Mexico and the U.S. Southwest; that is, the tale of the *La Llorona*, dating back far into the pre-Columbian pantheon of the Mexic-

Amerindian lore. As in most legends, llorona has myriad variants. One popular version extends her back to a murky time. The Mayas believed that llorona is the spirit of a woman who died during her first accouchement, who is then transformed into this respected, albeit malicious night-wraith. In another version she is an Indian peasant girl who, in a moment of frenzy, butchers her illegitimate children from a Spanish aristocrat when he leaves them to marry some other lady of his own social-standing. In yet another variant, she again kills her own kids, this time, by drowning them in a nearby river to elope with another man. Almost all variants of the story conclude in the consequent suicide of the nameless tragic mother who is then eternally cursed to seek her children. Still today, the restless spirit of llorona, dressed in a shroud-like white gown, is believed to stalk by the woods, deserted crossroads, and especially riverbanks as the personification of sheer terror with her cries into the night; and to appear before men in these spots as an attractive lady to scare them to death – hence the name, "crying woman" or the "wailing woman." Like the Lilith figure of the Semitic folklore, she is also blamed for the unfortunate deaths of little kids, especially those who have drowned.[12] Even more, this wailing woman figure has been erroneously conflated with an actual figure from the history of the fall of the Aztecs.

Both history and legend testify against a Nahua girl named *Malintzín Tenépal* (derogatorily known as *La Malinche*) who translated the language and customs of the Aztecs for Hernán Cortés, the Conquistador, accompanied him during his campaign, and bore him a child – Martín, the first mestizo. Malintzín, as Norma Alarcón notes, "comes to be known as *la lengua*, literally meaning the tongue" (Alarcón, 1989, p. 59). In that way, she has in many accounts gained infamy, becoming the scapegoat for the fall of the Aztecs. Thus, she has ambiguously assumed the role of the mother of a new bastardized nation as well as the figure of *la chingada* – loosely translated as "the-screwed-one" (Paz, 1985, pp. 75-77). As such, this *bête noire* has been codified as the quintessential trope for treason and genocide, for the children of her great-grandchildren, *mestizos*, are still facing the threat of assimilation and culturcide. It is against this symbolic figure of "bad woman" that Indohispano folklore and ecclesiastical system impose the legendary figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe as the antonym to the llorona-malinche dyad.

Legend has it that *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is the brown-colored incarnate of Virgin Mary who providentially appeared on December 9, 1531, at Mount Tepeyác in the

12 See Perez (2008).

outskirts of Mexico City. Apart from her divine apparition and power of healing, the brown Virgin is the "master symbol" upon whom Mexican-Catholicism was founded. (Wolf, 1958, p. 34) Often eclipsing Jesus Christ himself, she is revered in the entire Latin America as the "Queen of Hispanidad" (Lafaye, 1976, p. 230). In addition to her divine dimension, Lady Guadalupe also operates on a more "worldly" level. She is the epitome of the feminine virtues that are lauded by the normative Latinos, including spiritual and physical purity, self-negation for the good of domestic/communal spheres, consolation to the downtrodden, commitment to children, and most crucially, subservience to patriarchy. Reinforcing an ethos of humility and submission, the assets of the brown Madonna have been prerequisite for the femininity *par excellence* in the polarized world of Latin America. Yet, such a Manichaean exegesis of this *rara avis* as the paragon of womanhood, hence, the negative coding of the llorona-malinche dyad as a *vendida*, a traitress, figure in both oral and written literary traditions shall be a springboard for Chicana feminists, in that the normative Latino cultures have held the "Guadalupe *vs.* malinche/llorona" binary like the sword of Damocles over the souls and bodies of women. It is not surprising that to Anzaldúa these female archetypes have been limiting: "*Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long-suffering people" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 31).

In *Borderlands* Anzaldúa, akin to an archaeologist, or an etymologist, excavates an alternative genealogy for these topoi in an effort to reveal the artificial division already inherent in their *man*-made ontology. In so doing, she draws on the ways these female icons have been set apart from each other throughout history to serve a single agenda; that is, the domestication of women. As such, Anzaldúa expands the history of how the matriarchal order, or at any rate gender equality, in ancient Mesoamerican societies and religious cosmology had initially been marred with the arrival of the caste-based, patriarchal, and imperialist Aztec hegemony, and later eradicated with the unilateral doctrines of the Catholic Church in the post-conquest Hispanic period. In her quest to give a new face to these essentially imbricated topoi, Anzaldúa extends the origins of Lady Guadalupe and her true nature to a time long before the Aztec domination (1325), the Spanish conquest (1521) and the Anglo annexation of Mexican lands (1848).

Throughout her revisionist genealogy, Anzaldúa hinges upon Lady Guadalupe's Aztec name, *Coatlalopeuh*, to connect her to the earliest fertility deity called *Coatlicue*

('Serpent-Skirt'). Anzaldúa elucidates that when the patrilinear Aztecs took control over Mesoamerica, they "drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes and by substituting male deities in their place, thus splitting the female Self and the female deities" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 27). Stripped of her destructive powers and rendered docile, Coatlicue could survive only through her harmless aspect, *Tonantzín*, the "good" mother. To Anzaldúa, Coatlicue is thus a genealogical model of wholeness; an icon of sheer power of creation as well as destruction, and a stimulus for excessive sexual drive prior to that patriarchal takeover hence the forced split between the genders. In recovering Lady Guadalupe's primordial linkage to Coatlicue through Tonantzín, Anzaldúa envisions the brown Madonna as the *mestiza* proper, "a synthesis of the old world and new, of the religion and culture of the two races in our psyche, the conquerors and the conquered" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 30).[13]

* * *

In her preface to *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), Anzaldúa states that borderlands "are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other […] It's not a comfortable territory to live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred, anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape" (*n. pag*). But along with this haunting portrayal comes a potentially liberating aspect; to Anzaldúa, "certain 'faculties' […] in every border resident, colored or non-colored – and dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened. There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized" (*n. pag*). The borderland is thus a place where its dwellers have the potential to unlearn and reinterpret history using new symbols, shaping new cultural myths of their own.

13 In her iconoclastic experiential essay, "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess" (1996), which might surely be regarded as a blasphemy by many orthodox Chicanos, Cisneros recounts that for many years she became frustrated whenever she saw the image of the Virgin for the ethos of silence and submission she has reinforced: "What a culture of denial. […] She was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable. Did boys have to aspire to be Jesus?" (p. 48) Akin to Anzaldúa, Cisneros thus traces the archaic roots of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the mischievous Nahua deities Coatlicue and Tlazolteotl. As she re-chisels her modern day Virgin model out of the traditional icon, Cisneros asserts that her own version of Lady Guadalupe is a "sex goddess, a goddess who makes me feel good about my sexual power, my sexual energy, who reminds me I must […] speak from the vulva … speak the most basic, honest truth, and write from my panocha [*vagina*]" (p. 49). In reinserting "sex" into the asexualized image of the Virgin, Cisneros firstly transforms her from an unattainable personification of ideal(ized) femininity to an unruly figure of freedom that legitimizes Chicana womanhood with all its "illicit" nuances. Secondly, the author foregrounds the link between the body and the (literary) voice in a maneuver reminiscent of one of the leading figures of French feminism, Hélène Cixous, to draw attention on how the woman's sexual discovery and exploration of her body constitutes an indispensable step in her creative production throughout which the body and text are intricately linked.

Akin to Anzaldúa, Cisneros undertakes her own project of creating new myths and unlocking alternative spaces for self-autonomy throughout the trajectory of her story "Woman Hollering Creek." The geographical location of the protagonist's new home in Texas, a borderland onto itself, will be the ground zero for Cleafílas in developing a new self-awareness. However, the specific geo-cultural peculiarities of the borderland alone will not suffice the young protagonist in her lonely quest to unlearn the passive role instilled in her by the prolonged exposure to and internalization of the "good woman *vs.* bad woman" binary. There lurks yet another equally insidious apparatus that has (mis)shapen Cleafílas' consciousness since "she was old enough to lean against the window" (p. 44). That is the mass media devices of romance books, women's magazines, movies, TV commercials, and especially *telenovelas* (soap operas) and *fotonovelas* (photo novels) that she and thousands of Mexicanas like her have cannibalized a lifetime.

It is at this juncture Cisneros' splendor as an artist strikes anyone who is familiar particularly with the popular genre of *telenovela* (or its print counterpart *fotonovela*) in that the author opts for a chronologically non-linear, and fragmented narrative enveloped in the form of a series of episodic vignettes (separated on the printed page with a crooked line resembling a creek) with no smooth transitions from one setting or topic to another. Hence, the content of the story is directly informed by its form, and vica versa: "Cleofilas thought her life would have to be like that, like a *telenovela*, only now the episodes got sadder and sadder. And there were no commercials in between for comic relief" (pp. 52-53). In adopting a narrative thread that mimics the Mexican *telenovela* in form, Cisneros' critique against such modern incarnations of the age-old brainwashing devices becomes more salient. She creates her own revisionist and subversive *telenovela*, or *fotonovela*, to present her subject matter. Cornelia Butler Flora (1980) defines the *fotonovela* as "a logical marriage of technological advance and traditional stories of romance […], making mass culture of folk culture" (p. 524). Loretta Carrillo and Thomas Lyson (1983) further suggest that "working class women in Mexico and Central and South America are the main audience for the *fotonovela* […] a semi-literate, lower-class audience" (p. 59). Not surprisingly, the passive codes of behavior advocated for women in the *telenovelas* and *fotonovelas*, manifest themselves in overlooking and even reinforcing the concept of *machismo* — the national phenomenon of the overly exaggerated display of male virility.

"In the town where she grew up, there isn't very much to do" (Cisneros, 2004, p. 44). This statement opens the second episode of Cleafílas' life back in Mexico where she was born and raised. Amongst a few possible alternatives, one outlet for girls like Cleafílas is to go "to the girlfriend's house to watch the latest *telenovela* episode and try to copy the way women comb their hair, wear their makeup" (p. 44). It is through this commercialized world of *telenovelas* that the protagonists' consciousness is programmed towards her appreciation of what satisfaction, love or "passion" (p. 44) in life should have been:

> "But passion in its purest crystalline essence. The kind the books and songs and *telenovelas* describe when one finds, finally, the great love of one's life, and does whatever one can, must do, at whatever cost. [. . .] to put up with all kinds of hardships of the heart, separation and betrayal, and loving, always loving no matter what, because *that* is the most important thing. [. . .] You or no one. Because to suffer for love is good. The pain all sweet somehow. In the end." (Cisneros, 2004, pp. 44-45)

While Cleafílas believes deeply in the ideals of passion and love propagated in the *telenovela*, the cultural hegemony of this mass media device reinforces another important division; that is, the binary of Third World *vs.* First World. The message is clear: fulfillment of your dreams is more likely to come about if your prince charming takes you to the other side to live "happily ever after" (p. 47). The international transmission of the "American Dream" towards material achievement is what probably motivated Don Serafín, who proves to be a caring and loving father—"*I am your father, I will never abandon you*" (p. 43)—to give Juan Pedro permission to marry Cleafílas in the first place. It is the mere fact that Juan Pedro comes from across the border that has allowed him to take Cleafílas, who presumes that he "has a very important position in Seguín with, with . . . a beer company. [. . .] Or was it tires?" (p. 45)

From Cleafílas' distorted perspective America is the golden land of opportunity where "She would get to wear outfits like the women on the *tele*, like Lucía Méndez. And have a lovely house, [. . .] new pickup [. . .] new home [. . .] new furniture" (p. 45). Even the name of that rural town in the north is soothing for her:

> "*Seguín*. She had liked the sound of it. Far away and lovely. Not like *Monclova*, *Coahuila*. Ugly."
> "*Seguín, Tejas*. A nice sterling to it. The tinkle of money." (p. 45)

The next episode of Cleafílas' story commences *en route* their new home in Seguín as the newlyweds have to crossover one final physical border — a bridge, beneath which runs a lovely creek called *La Gritona*. Translated as "Woman Hollering" of the title, this perimeter also marks the domestic limits of Cleafílas' ensuing life. It marks the crossings of culture, language, gender, marriage, enslavement, and freedom that take place in the story. The name of the creek is a cryptic one, though: "a name no one from these parts questioned, little less understood. [...] who knows, the townspeople shrugged, because it was of no concern to their lives how this trickle of water received its curious name" (p. 46). The fact that the name of the creek is just accepted as it is and not put into question by anyone, is analogous to the way people readily accept conventions, and here, particularly patriarchy. Giving the insidious message that just as the creek has always been named like that and always will be, so have men always been in rule and always will be. And since they have no power, women will always be hollering for motives that are deemed trivial.

Cleofilas, however, is fascinated to find out the true etymology of the creek's enigmatic name, and why women have been hollering as such. But through the lens of what she has harnessed from the experience of the two neighboring widows, Cleofilas comes to accept that women's holler is of "anger or pain" (p. 46), personified by these ladies with quite symbolic names: *Soledad* ('solitude'), whose "husband had either died, or run away with an ice-house floozie, or simply gone out for cigarettes one afternoon and never came back" (p. 46), and the elderly *Dolores* ('pain'), whose "two sons had died in the last war and one husband who died shortly after from grief" (p. 47). Especially, *la señora* Dolores is an apt Guadalupe model with her chapel-like house that "smelled too much incense and candles from the altars that burned continuously in memory of two sons" (p. 47). In the face of such loss and suffering Dolores becomes the patriarchal emblem of fortitude in the Pazian sense through humility and acceptance. Moreover, Dolores' garden, famous for its "roses whose sad scent reminded Cleófilas of the dead" (p. 47), is a direct reference to the roses in Virgin of Guadalupe's divine appearance story, where her divinity is ultimately recognized by the Mexican clergy through the miraculous roses (unique only to Castile in Spain) presented to them by the peasant Juan Diego on behalf of Lady Guadalupe.

As a woman with no English, Cleófilas mostly spends time in her home situated betwixt Soledad and Dolores – a confined space governed by patriarchal power and stereotypical gender roles. On the other hand, even the architectural organization of

the public space is restricting: "the towns here are built so that you have to depend on husbands. Or you stay home. Or you drive if you're rich enough to own, allowed to drive, your own car" (pp. 50-51). At least, back in her Mexican home town, Cleófilas had the luxury of a feminine form of comradeship with girlfriends, aunts and godmothers. Here, the lack of self-autonomy also extends to social gatherings at the ice-house, the heart of Seguin's social world, where women only play the role of passive sidekicks to their men. This is exactly as it should be in patriarchy: the men attempt to solve the problems of the world while the women accompany them only in silence and admiration.

Soon enough the propaganda of the American Dream packaged in *telenovelas*, concerning the division of the First World *vs.* Third World in terms of upward social mobility, proves to be false. Pondering within the house they "rented" (p. 46) and not owned, and with "all the bills […] and dept with the truck payments" (p. 53), Cleófilas recalls her native "town of gossips. The town of dust and despair. Which she has traded for this town of gossips […] and nothing, nothing, nothing of interest" (p. 50). She is even bereft of the only outlet she has once cherished; she is now "without a television set, without the *telenovelas*" (p. 52). A linguistic breakdown of the way Cisneros episodically portrays Cleófilas' previous life in Mexico and her life in America, further sheds a light on the superiority of the First World over the Third World, "a dichotomy that is often supported with the presumption which suggests that 'gender' matters are better over here (in the overdeveloped US) than over there (in an underdeveloped Mexico)" (Saldívar-Hull, 199, p. 252). The sentences, for instance, in various episodes where Cleófilas reflects her Mexican home are lyrical, longer and laden with a genuine feeling of affection, while her sentiments in the U.S. are rendered in short and broken sentences with a cold sense of detachment. A rather striking and eerie instance occurs when the third-person omniscient voice narrates Cleófilas' feelings of entrapment with no way out in sight:

> "There is no place to go. Unless one counts the neighbor ladies. Soledad on one side, Dolores on the other. Or the creek. […] La llorona calling to her. She is sure of it. Cleófilas sets the baby's Donald Duck blanket on the grass. Listens. The day sky turning to night. The baby pulling up fistfuls of grass and laughing. La llorona. Wonders if something as quiet as this drives a woman to the darkness under the trees." (Cisneros, 2004, p. 51)

The creek with its haunting sound ultimately becomes, as in the traditional *llorona* tale, the emblem of escape only through suicide in a world void of other options, since going back to her father's house is "[…] a disgrace. What would neighbors say? Coming home like that with one baby on her hip and one in the oven. Where is your husband?" (p. 50)

So in the true fashion of a *telenovela*, Cleófilas endures her "American" life for three years; and the very first time Cleófilas meets the harsh reality of domestic violence, the first of many to follow, it is much different from the notion noble suffering for love and passion presented in her favorite *telenovela* titled *The Rich Also Cry*: "it left her speechless, motionless, numb. She had done nothing but to reach up to the heat on her mouth and stare at the blood on her hand as if even then she didn't understand. She could think nothing to say, said nothing" (p. 48). Here, Cleófilas does exactly what she has long been conditioned to do: "Just stroked the dark curls of the man who wept and would weep like a child, his tears of repentance and shame, this time and each" (p. 48). Such "romanticization" of the family, or the idolization of the saintly woman for that matter, directly corresponds again to Octavio Paz's view that "thanks to suffering and her ability to endure it without protest, she transcends her condition and acquires the same attributes as men" (Paz, 1985, p. 39). However, Helena Viramontes, in her testimonial account "Nopalitos" (1989) spills the beans about the view of family as a pathological incubator of various social traumas:

> "Family ties are fierce. Especially for mujeres. We are raised to care for. We are raised to stick together, for the family unit is our source of safety. Outside our home there lies a dominant culture that is foreign to us, isolates us, and labels us as alien. But what may be seen as nurturing, close unit, may also become suffocating, manipulative, and sadly victimizing." (Viramontes, 1989, p. 35)

Similarly, Cleófilas' abnegation becomes a continuous process of suppression and denigration of her position and her own value through servility, reaching to an irrational state of deifying her husband. Her attitude becomes more a philosophical position in life than a mere personal choice: "Cleófilas thinks, This is the man I have waited my whole life for. […] She has to remind herself why she loves […] this man, this father, this rival, this lord, this husband till kingdom come" (p. 49). Hence, in a different episode, Cleófilas chooses to deny even the visible proofs that this alcoholic

and abusive husband is also an unfaithful one: "A doubt. Slender as hair. A Washed cup set back on the shelf wrong-side-up. Her lipstick, and body talc, and hairbrush all arranged in the bathroom a different way. No. Her imagination. The house the same as always. Nothing" (p. 50).

Due to the fact that Cleófilas is isolated from any alternative means to break this vicious cycle of domestic abuse, she is likely to be one of those "grisly news in the pages of the dailies" (p. 52) about women murdered by an "ex-husband, her husband, her lover, her father, her brother, her uncle, her friend, her co-worker" (p. 50). However, the watershed moment in her obscure path occurs when she once again crosses the bordering creek; this time, from the private to the public space of a hospital for a regular control of her unborn baby. Upon her encounter with this new breed of Chicanas does Cleófilas with "black-and-blue marks all over" (p. 54), start to envision different possibilities for herself, three-year old son, and for her baby in her womb.

Hence, the omniscient third-person narrator sidesteps in the next episode to give voice to these two Chicanas, again with symbolic names, *Graciela* ('grace'), who is Cleófilas' doctor (or the sonogram nurse) at the local hospital, and Graciela's companion, *Felice* ('felicity'). They are in fact the only women in the story to have a voice of their own. The penultimate episode thus consists entirely of Graciela's speech on the phone with Felice, setting in motion a dubious plan to send Cleófilas back to Mexico. From the speech the reader learns that Graciela and Felice are experienced in saving "brides from across the border" (p. 54) via their two-*woman* operation, echoing the accomplishments of the historic Underground Railroad.

Consequently, the resolution and the climactic moment of the story occurs in the last episode of Cleófilas' story in America which takes place in Felice's truck *en route* their destination in San Antonio, where Cleófilas is going to take the bus to Mexico. As they drove over the bridge beneath which runs the creek *La Gritona*,

> "[…] the driver opened her mouth and let out a yell as loud as any mariachi. Which startled not only Cleófilas, but Juan Pedrito as well.
> *Pues*, look how cute. I scared you two, right? Sorry. Should have warned you. Everytime I cross the bridge I do that. Because the name, you know. Woman Hollering. *Pues*, I holler. She said this in a Spanish pocked with English and laughed. Did you ever notice, Felice continued, how nothing

> around here is named after a woman? Really. Unless she's the Virgin. I guess you're only famous if you're a virgin. She was laughing again.
> That's why I like the name of that *arroyo*. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, right?" (p. 55)

It is through Felice does Cleófilas finally "notice" that a set of possibilities are available on the borderlands — a space of fluidity where meaning is not fixed but multiple, always open to recreation and reinterpretation. Felice already occupies this new space previously inaccessible to Cleófilas, a space of freedom where a woman can take care of herself and gain control over her life:

> "Everything about this woman, this Felice, amazed Cleófilas. The fact that she drove a pickup. A pickup, mind you, but when Cleófilas asked if it was her husband's, she said she didn't have a husband. The pickup was hers. She herself had chosen it. She herself was paying for it." (p. 55)

With her laughter and yell like that of Tarzan, Felice transforms the silent cries of the traditional weeping woman to the victorious holler of an accomplished one. It is through Felice's yell rather than wail does Cleófilas reinterpret the myth of *La Llorona*, now as a symbol of power and rebellion, not submission. Therefore, with her will to cross the river one last time, Cleófilas chooses life in lieu of remaining eternally trapped on its banks like the ghostly llorona. So startled by this woman's agency in breaking the tradition of silence and her unrestrained female prowess, Cleófilas does not even realize that she has begun laughing: "Then Felice began laughing again, but it wasn't Felice laughing. It was gurgling out of her own throat, a long ribbon of laughter like water" (p. 56). On the brink of her newly gained sense of independence, Cleofilas finally rejects the role of passive victim whose central motive has long been to suffer for love and passion.

In revising traditional Mexican folklore via the medium of her quasi-*fotonovela*, Cisneros pays homage to the figures of *La Llorona*, *La Malinche*, and *Coatlicue*. The hospital employee, Graciela, in translating and transmitting the story of Cleófilas, who "doesn't even speak English" (p. 54), assumes the role of *la lengua*, the tongue, ultimately leading Cleófilas to deliverance. Patriarchy is surely going to stigmatize Graciela as a traitress, a modern day *Malinche*. Yet, it is through Graciela and Felice's comradeship Cleófilas will embark her new quest, now as a speaking subject.

Therefore, Cleófilas's counter-migration from the First World to the Third World does not mark a retroactive relocation or romanticizing an idealized past. Instead, the possibility of transgression remains within her as she remembers her journey as a path towards consciousness. The transnational home-space in this story turns from a site of confinement and oppression to a source of creative potential. Upon returning to her native land, Cleófilas "would say to her father and brothers" (p. 56) of the tale of these two real women she has met, and of the sour reality of the American Dream *en el otro lado*, on the other side.

As such Cleófilas becomes the modern day incarnate of *Coatlicue*, the goddess of duality, the goddess of destruction and creation. Once "dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened" in Cleófilas, she is now bent on demystifying both the patriarchal regime of control and the manmade ontology of the First World vs. Third World divide in terms of success, material achievement and upward social mobility. Cleófilas is also an agent of creation, both literally and symbolically. Her newly acquired "faculties" supply her with the means of articulating and transmitting her *testimonial* account through her own agency as the creator of stories. She becomes a "world-traveler" and a "word-traveler" as Maria Lugones would put it. Moreover, with her unborn girl in her womb she is about to bestow a new life, whom "she'll have to name […] after us" (p. 55), predicted Graciela back in the hospital.

Hence, Graciela and Felice, who address each other as "*comadre*" (p. 55), symbolically become the baby's co-mothers since in Spanish *comadres* literally means the mother and godmother to a child. Their reverberation will play a huge role in the destiny of the child yet to be born. The hybrid, "mestiza consciousness" instilled in the this child will signal, to conclude with the wisdom Anzaldúa provides, "a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave—*la mestiza* creates a new consciousness […] a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet" (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 80-81).

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