Liberating Serpentine Goddesses on the Borderlands: Cherrie Moraga's Feminist Architecture in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*

Evrim ERSÖZ KOÇ[1]

Abstract *Research Paper*

Cherrie Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* takes place in a future dystopia in which the protagonist Medea is exiled from her homeland Aztlán due to her love affair with another woman. She lives with her girlfriend, son and mother in Phoenix—a wasteland populated by the people unwanted by the patriarchal authorities of Aztlán. In order to prevent her son's attempt to get back to Aztlán to live with the corrupted patriarchs and thereby to protect his purity, Medea kills her son and is sent to a prison psychiatric ward tormented by the memory of her infanticide. In this reinterpretation of Euripides' *Medea,* Moraga refers to several mythical, folkloric and literary female figures to touch upon the exclusion of the queer subject. Among them, there are female deities such as Cihuatateo and Coatlicue that have been recuperated as prominent cultural symbols to question the female consciousness in contemporary Chicana feminism. This paper examines how Moraga reappropriates and discerns these archetypal goddesses in the context of Chicana indigenous feminism.

Key Words: Cherrie Moraga, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, Chicana feminism

Sınır Bölgelerinde Yılan Tanrıçalarını Serbest Bırakmak: Cherrie Moraga'nın *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* Oyunundaki Feminist Yapı

Öz *Araştırma Makalesi*

Cherrie Moraga'nın *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* adlı tiyatro oyunu başkarakter Medea'nın başka bir kadınla olan aşk ilişkisi sebebiyle vatanı Aztlán'dan sürüldüğü bir gelecek distopyasında geçmektedir. Medea, kız arkadaşı, oğlu ve annesi ile birlikte Aztlán'ın ataerkil otoriteleri tarafından istenmeyen insanların oluşturduğu bir çorak arazi olan Phoenix'de yaşamaktadır. Oğlunun yozlaşmış ataerkil bireylerle yaşamak için Aztlán'a geri dönmesini önlemek ve böylelikle masumiyetini korumak için Medea oğlunu öldürür ve sürekli olarak çocuğunu öldürmenin hatırası ile işkence çektiği bir akıl hastanesi odasına hapsedilir. Euripides'in *Medea'*sının bu yeniden yorumlanmasında, Moraga eşcinsel öznelerin dışlanması konusunu irdelemek için bazı mitik, folklorik ve edebi kadın figürlerine değinir. Bu figürler arasında, çağdaş Chicana feminizmindeki kadın bilincinin sorgulamak için başlıca kültürel semboller olarak yeniden ortaya çıkarılan Cihuatateo ve Coatlicue bulunmaktadır. Bu çalışma Moraga'nın bu arketip tanrıçaları nasıl yeniden sahiplendiğini ve kavradığını Chicana yerli feminizmi bağlamında incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cherrie Moraga, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, Chicana feminizmi

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[1] Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, evrim.ersoz@deu.edu.tr
https://orcid.org/ 0000-0003-4172-506X

Introduction

> What l want is an accounting with all three cultures—white, Mexican, Indian. I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face, to staunch the bleeding with ashes, to fashion my own gods out of my entrails. And if going home is denied me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar and my own feminist architecture. (Anzaldúa, 1987: 22)

> Chicanos are an occupied nation within a nation, and women and women's sexuality are occupied within the Chicano nation. If women's bodies and those of men and women who transgress their gender roles have been historically regarded as territories to be conquered, they are also territories to be liberated. Feminism has taught us this. The nationalism I seek is one that decolonizes the brown female body as it decolonizes the brown and female earth. (Moraga, 1993: 150)

The word "Chicana" which is "the feminine form of 'Chicano'" refers to the "persons of Mexican descent living in the United States" (Mirandé and Enríquez, 1979: 10). Although "other terms such as "Mexican, "Mexican-American," "hispano," and "latino" are also in use," the word "Chicano" "is rapidly becoming the preferred term" (Mirandé and Enríquez, 1979: 10). After stating the diversity among Chicanas, Mirandé and Enríquez list the important common characteristics as follows: "The Chicana is a woman (1) of Mexican descent, (2) living in the United States, (3) culturally neither Mexican nor American but influenced by both societies, and (4) from a colonized minority" (Mirandé and Enríquez 1979: 12).

Chicana feminism emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s as a continuation of the Chicano movement (also known as el movimiento) which was inspired by "a radical climate of national political protests and insurgency such as the Black power movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement and the second wave of the women's movement" (Garcia, 1997: 2). Chicanas were dissatisfied with el movimiento since their Chicano brothers were ignorant of the inequalities along the gender lines (Moya, 2001: 447). Furthermore, Chicana feminists were aware of the fact that "most white feminist organizations disregarded or diminished the importance of the class- and race- based oppression also suffered by most Chicanas (Moya, 2001: 449). As a result, Chicana feminists dedicated themselves for using "their own experience as a ground for theorizing their multiple forms of oppression" (Moya, 2001: 449).[2]

Among significant contributors to Chicana feminism are Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga who together coedited *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Women of Color*. Both writers use their own experiences as Chicanas to give voice to their oppression as a result of racial and gender-based inequalities which is also

[2] For more information on Chicana feminism, also see Alarcon 1990; Arredondo, et al., eds. 2003; Cotera, 1977, Garcia, 1989.

evident in the epigraph of this article. Cherrie Moraga's play *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* takes place in a future dystopia in which the protagonist Medea is exiled from her homeland Aztlán due to her love affair with another woman. She lives with her girlfriend, son and mother in Phoenix—a wasteland populated by the people unwanted by the patriarchal authorities of Aztlán. In order to protect his son's purity by preventing his attempt to get back to Aztlán to live with the corrupted patriarchs, Medea kills her son and is sent to a prison psychiatric ward tormented by the memory of her infanticide. In this reinterpretation of Euripides' *Medea*, Moraga refers to several mythical, folkloric and literary female figures such as Cihuatateo, Coatlicue, The Hungry Woman, La Llorona, La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe to touch upon the exclusion of the queer subject. This paper examines Medea's call for the Aztec serpentine goddesses such as Cihuatateo and Coatlicue to liberate in herself to cope up with his traumatic borderland experience through Gloria Anzaldúa's analysis of the Chicana experience in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

1. Living in the Borderland, Longing for the Homeland

In order to understand Moraga's rumination on the exclusion of the queer subject in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*, one needs to have a background about the significance of the mythical place Aztlán in Chicana/o imagination. Aztlán which "is the mythical place of origin of the Aztec peoples" refers to "the name of the portion of Mexico that was lost to the United States through the Mexican American War of 1846" (Ventura, 2008: 102). "During the Chicano movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the idea of a historic- geographical Aztlán served as the most unifying force in the emerging cultural renaissance" (Lomeli, 2017: 2). Introducing the concept of "Plan Espirituel de Aztlán" (Spiritual Plan of Aztlán), participants of this movement "incorporated Aztec mythology in their works" (Ventura, 2008: 102). The motivation in this plan was to show that Chicanas/os "had a stronger claim to the land they inhabited" because "before America was divided into the United States and Mexico, America was a continent belonging to indigenous tribes, the direct ancestors of Chicanos and Chicanas" (Ventura, 2008: 102). The idea of this mythical homeland underlines how the Chicanas/os needed to achieve a sense of belonging: "Chicanos felt the need to belong somewhere, and Aztlán became the closest thing to a physical reference of origins, a real homeland under their feet, something they could claim as their own" (Lomeli, 2017: 2).

One of the Chicano theorist who incorporated the Chicana/o history with that of Aztecs is Gloria Anzaldúa who begins her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (which is a mixture of prose and poetry) with a claim of the Chicana/os' true homeland as Aztlán (Anzaldúa, 1987: 1): "This land was Mexican once,/was Indian always/and is./ and will be again" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3). Along with this reclaim of Aztlán, Anzaldúa eloquently explicates the experience of living in the border in Chicana/o history. She begins tracing this history with the original peopling of the American continent with "the first inhabitants who migrated across the Bering Straits

and walked south across the continent" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 4). "The oldest evidence of humankind in the U.S." dates back to 35000BC and Anzaldúa underlines the fact that those humans were "the Chicanos' ancient Indian ancestors who later occupied Aztlán, "the Edenic place of origin of the Azteca" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 4). After stating that The Aztecs left the Southwest in 1168 A.D., Anzaldúa refers to the Conquest of Mexico by Cortes and explicates the foundation of a new hybrid race in the sixteenth century. In this century, their Spanish, Indian and *mestizo* ancestors settled in U.S. Southwest once again so that was "a return to the place of origin, Aztlán, thus making Chicanos originally and secondarily indigenous to the Southwest" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 5). Referring to the Battle of Alamo "in which the Mexican forces vanquished the whites" and Mexican-American War which resulted in United States' acquisition of almost half of Mexican land in the nineteenth century, Anzaldúa explains the concept of living on the borders and yearning for a homeland in the Chicana/o experience (Anzaldúa, 1987: 6-7). Elucidiating the social and economic hardships for the Mexican-Americans living in the border areas in the twentieth century, Anzaldúa asserts that "we have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing *la migración de los pueblos mexicanos*, the return to odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 11).

This historical information on the Chicanas/os past is essential for understanding Moraga's feminist concern in which she portrays the exclusion of the queer subject in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea.* Moraga's dystopian play illuminates the title character Medea, who has been banished from her homeland due to her lesbian relation with Luna, in a constant longing for a return to her motherland. In the setting of the play which "takes place in the near future of a fictional past," Medea, together with her son Chac-Mool and her lover Luna, has been sent to exile following a civil war that has "'balkanized' the United States" (Moraga, 2000: 294). As a social outcast, Medea is subjected to live in a borderland which is clearly reminiscent of the U.S.–Mexican border which Anzaldúa analyzes as a border culture in which "the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3).

> Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them.* A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal". (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3)

In Moraga's fiction, the exile place is located at a border region in Phoenix, Arizona which separates Gringolandia (white Amerika) from Aztlán (Chicano country). In addition to a racial in-betweenness symbolized by the concept of a border, Moraga's fiction illuminates a gender-based conflict in which the queers

categorized as "them" are banished from a heteronormative patriarchal Aztlán. The border region in Phoenix, Arizona is "now a city-in-ruin, the dumping site of every kind of poison and person unwanted by its neighbors" (Moraga, 2000: 294). Just like the prohibited and forbidden inhabitants that Anzaldúa mentions in the above quotation, Phoenix in Moraga's play is populated by unwanted people. Although this information highlights that there are various groups representing *los atravesados* in Phoenix, through the experience of the main character, the play focuses on the experience of the queer people who are regarded as out of the confines of the normal. From Medea's mother Mama Sal, another character who is banished from Aztlán, the audience learns that the women, who fought in the revolutionary war in which Aztlán was born from its ashes, were only happy for a while because after the war the women were asked by the revolutionaries to put down their guns and pick up their babies and return to kitchen (Moraga, 2000: 306). Mama Sal keeps on explaining their banishment as the queers later in all the colored countries were thrown out (Moraga, 2000: 306-307). This is how "los homos became peregrines [pilgrims]" and she relates the queer to their nomad Aztec ancestors (Moraga, 2000: 307). In this way, "a thriving desert" was turned into "gypsy ghetto" and this border land desert which is called as Phoenix is named as "Tamoanchan" which means "We seek our home" by these queer gypsies (Moraga, 2000: 307). Mama Sal's explanations highlight their identification with their Aztec ancestors in pilgrimage and their constant yearning for a home/land.

This longing for the homeland is constantly cried out by Medea who feels like both an abandoned orphan in this wasteland and a betrayed woman (Moraga, 2000: 301). She utters "Men think women have no love of country, that the desire for nation is a male prerogative. So like gods, they pick and choose who is to be born and live and die in a land I bled for equal to any man. Aztlán, you betray me!" (Moraga, 2000: 301). As Lakey explains "After serving on the front lines of the winning Chicano revolution, Medea is first relegated (like all women) to a subjugated role as mother and housewife and then thrown into exile for falling in love with her girlfriend, Luna" (Lakey, 2015: 207). Ceaselessly, she hopes to return to Aztlán and waits for the day the patriarchs who sent them to exile would "change their mind say it was all a mistake" (Moraga, 2000: 320).

The criticism to the misogynist heteronormative patriarchy is most potent in the characterization of Jasón who appears as the representative of the patriarchs who banish the queers from Aztlan. Jasón, Medea's husband, sends a letter to Medea to ask for a divorce because he is getting married to a nineteen year old girl who "bled for him just as [Medea] did once" (Moraga, 2000: 301). As a man who expects the virgin girls to bleed for him, he wants a divorce and he wants the custody of his son. It is important that Jasón wants the custody not because he loves, cares and misses his son but solely for assuring his economic and political privileges in Aztlán because land rights in Aztlán are regulated according to Native blood quantum that Jasón lacks and Medea has. Chac-Mool is Jasón's "native claim" as Medea cries out to Jason "You can't hold onto a handful of dirt in Aztlán without him." You don't have

the blood quantum" (Moraga, 2000: 341). Perez emphasizes the accent mark in Jasón's name: "Medea's husband's name, Jasón, an Anglo-sounding name "Hispanicized" through the addition of an accent mark, is meant to reflect his European ancestry and his lack of any Native claim to power through direct bloodlines" (Perez, 2008: 100). "The laws regarding land rights in Aztlán will not allow the mostly-white Jasón to continue to hold Medea's lands, so he needs his son, with Medea's blood, to give validity to his claim." (Costa- Malcolm, 2013: 175). Oliver-Rotger explains Jasón's marriage to a young girl and his motivation to gain custody of his son as follows:

> In the dystopian Aztlán Moraga imagines, Chicano masculinity is enacted through a ritual of racial purification that involves the possession of the pure, virginal, heterosexual Indian woman. By marrying a young Apache and recovering his son, Jasón hopes to conceal his family's Spanish descent and his former affiliation with the Anglos. He thus secures his legitimacy as national poet in a society where the assertion of masculinity and power is deeply tied to the purity of one's Indian origins and race, always transmitted through lines of paternity. (Oliver-Rotger, 2003: 275-276)

In this sense, Jasón stands for all the power-hungry patriarchs who set the norm of womanhood as virgins bleeding for their husbands, caretakers for the babies and workers in the kitchen. If a woman does not fit in to the norms of this misogynist patriarchal structure, she is banished. Represented through Jasón's motivation for gaining the custody of his son, the patriarchs are evidently greedy power-holders instead of affectionate fathers in this play.

Medea who is already afflicted due to her longing for her motherland is devastated with Jasón's appeal for custody because she cannot imagine a life without her son. To convince Jasón not to separate her from her son, Medea wants to see him face to face and she even seduces him and makes love with him. However, the only thing Jasón offers to Medea is being a "ward" in Aztlán. Calling Medea a "slave," Jasón offers the option as "Whether you rot in this wasteland of counter-revolutionary degenerates or take up residence in my second bed" (Moraga, 2000: 339). Also he asks Medea to give up the boy because he needs a father. Medea is outraged because she does not want Chac-Mool to learn masculinity from his father: "My son needs no taste of the weakness you call manhood. He is still a boy, not a man and *you will not make him in your likeness!* The man I wish my son to be does not exist, must be invented. He will invent himself if he must, but he will not grow up to learn betrayal from your example" (Moraga, 2000: 339-340). Even though Medea does not want her son to see his father as an example for manhood, Jasón states that the courts that Medea regards as patriarchs stealing her country made their decisions in favor of Jasón (Moraga, 2000: 341).

From this point on, the play works on two tensions: whether Medea accepts to return to Aztlán as a ward to avoid being separated from her son and whether thirteen-year-old Chac-Mool who loves all the women he lives with in Phoenix accepts to live

with his father in Aztlán. Medea constantly emphasizes that her son is innocent and he is a boy instead of a man. Even though at first Chac-Mool is eager to accept his father's offer just to show the homophobic heteronormative patriarchal society members their faults, both Medea and through her the audience/readers can understand that Chac-Mool is changing. Chac-Mool openly says that he wants to be "initiated" and to get out of Phoenix because it is "not normal" (Moraga, 2000: 342-3). Chac-Mool's later statement as "When I leave here tomorrow, I'm walking out that door like a man" (Moraga, 2000: 351) further indicates his inevitable "downfall" into patriarchal masculinity. Before the offer, Chac-Mool is a warm-hearted innocent boy who wakes up in the middle of the night in his pijamas wishing for not manhood but for "full- grown innocence" through a flight to the moon (Moraga, 2000: 304). After Chac-Mool declares that he wants to be initiated and leave Phoenix like a man in search of the "normal" in Aztlán, Medea understands that he has changed and that she can smell this change that is the manhood he is wearing in his pijamas: "no baby smell. No boy. A man moving inside his body" (Moraga, 2000: 355).

Unable to prevent her son's venture into heteronormative patriarchy, Medea kills Chac-Mool poisoning him with herbs. It is so significant to understand that Medea's motivation for infanticide is different from that of Medea in Euripides' tragedy: "Like the Greek Medea, she would rather kill her offspring, not merely to exact revenge on Jasón and Aztlán, but to protect Chac-Mool from becoming brainwashed into thinking that males or heterosexuals are superior to females and homosexuals" (Quinn-Sánchez, 2015: 41). Medea's infanticide in Moraga's fiction is indeed a way to avert Chac-Mool's identification with "the patriarchal, homophobic society that teaches that masculinity and heterosexuality are superior, making herself and Luna inferior" (Quinn-Sánchez, 2015: 41). In the moment of murder, Medea is depicted as an affectionate mother who is chanting a lullaby and putting her little baby into sleep. She is holding Chac-Mool's body in pieta image reminiscent of Jesus and Mary in Christian iconography in which Jesus stands as the sacrificial element for humanity. After sacrificing her son, Medea goes insane and is put in a border prison hospital where she kills herself. Her suicide is depicted again in another pieta pose illuminating Chac-Mool's ghost taking her mother to the moon, to her home. In order to understand the notion of sacrifice, it is necessary to focus on the ritualistic and mythical dimension of the play in which Medea is associated with and related to the serpentine goddesses in Aztec mythology.

2. Serpentine Goddesses in *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea*

The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea is not written in a linear style: the scenes jump from one period of time to another showing Medea in Phoenix at her home, border motel or prison psychiatric hospital. These nonlinear temporal juxtapositions are intertwined with ritualistic scenes in which Medea is associated with mythical female characters. "Moraga evokes figures of Mexican, Aztec, and Western mythology to situate her character's plight in the particular context of Mexican/Chicano cultural narratives that have assimilated the history of the

dominated to that of the dominating" (Oliver-Rotger, 2003: 278-9). The mythological background is like a bombardment, in Costa-Malcolm's words "Moraga bombards her audience with mythological references that cross religions, cultures, and nations" (Costa-Malcolm, 2013: 172). From Western mythology, the play reinterprets Euripides' Medea; from Mexican folklore there are references to La Llorona, La Malinche, La Virgin de Guadelupe and from Aztec mythology, Moraga refers to the Hungry Woman, Cihuatateo and Coatlicue. This paper focuses on the representation of the mythical Aztec figures Coatlicue and Cihuatateos because Medea's relation with them is essential for understanding Moraga's feminist consciousness and her rage against the norms that legitimize heterosexuality and patriarchy.

Coatlicue is the Aztec goddess who is impregnated by a feather and her daughter Coyolxauhqui plans to kill Coatlicue in order to prevent the birth of the male child Huitzilopotchtli; however, Huitzilopotchtli emerges fully grown as a warrior and kills Coyolxauhqui (Franco, 2004: 208). Moraga uses this mythical story between the mother goddess Coatlicue, the sun god Huitzilopotchtli and the moon goddess Coyolxauhqui at the center of the mythological background of Medea's isolation from patriarchal society. The reference to Coatlicue is so dominant in Moraga's play that the whole setting is actually designed as an altar to her and in this two-act play, each act begins with the reenactment of the Coatlicue myth. The figure of Coatlicue with a "serpent skirt" and breast shield splayed with dismembered hands and hearts" is illuminated on stage (Moraga, 2000: 297).

The Coatlicue myth is enacted with the narration of the Cihuatateos who are according to the Aztec mythology warrior women who died in childbirth. There are four Cihuatateos who are "identified by the four directions and four primary pre-Columbian colors: East (Red), North (Black), West (White) and South (Blue) (Moraga, 2000: 293). The play provides very detailed information regarding their appearances: "The figures wear the faces of the dead in the form of skulls. Their hands are shaped into claws. Their breasts appear bare and their skirts are tied with the cord of a snake. They are barefoot, their ankles wrapped in shell rattles" (Moraga, 2000: 293). Performing "in the traditional style of Aztec danzantes" (Moraga, 2000: 293), Cihuatateos are the characters who contribute potently to the ritualistic aspect of the play. "As a collective voice, the Pre-Columbian Cihuatateo contextualize the main action by telling Aztec stories and legends about women whereby the struggle of Medea becomes one of many women's struggles" (Oliver-Rotger, 2003**:** 279).

The first act begins with the lights on the altar of Coatlicue who is the "Aztec Goddess of Creation and Destruction" and with "*Pre-Colombian Meso-American music*" (Moraga, 2000: 297). One Cihuatateo begins narrating the Coatlicue myth relating it with Medea's story:

> This is how all stories begin and end
> The innocence of an eagle feather
> Stuffed inside a mother's apron.
> The birdboy growing there

Taking shape.
The warrior son waiting in the wings
Taking flight.
So, too begins and ends this story
The birth of a male child
From the dark sea of Medea
At the dawning of an age. (Moraga, 2000: 297)

Obviously even from the very beginning of the play, Medea is identified with Coatlicue and there is a hint that the male child Chac-Mool will be associated with Huitzilopotchtli. Similarly, the second act opens with the same music and Cihuatateo's narration of the Coatlicue myth, but this time the myth is more detailed including the daughter Coyolxauhqui as well. As Cihuatateo narrates the story, Medea emerges as Coatlicue; Luna appears as Coyolxauhqui and Chac-Mool emerges as Huitzilopotchtli. The story begins with Coatlicue's impregnation with two delicate feathers and Coyolxauhqui's feeling of treason after she learns that her old mother beyond the age of fertility is pregnant to a boy (Moraga, 2000: 329). After Coyolxauhqui/Luna cries out "You betrayed me, Madre" (Moraga, 2000: 329), Huitzilopotchtli "is born with filero flying and chops off his sister's head" and says "I hold my sister's moonface bleeding between my hands…I exile her into darkness" and begins to watch the moon rise (Moraga, 2000: 330).

The parallelism between the characters of the play and the mythological characters in the Coatlicue myth is reinvigorated in the scene in which Medea poisons Chac-Mool. In the opening of this scene, the figure of Coatlicue is again illuminated and Medea appears in front of the statue with a cup in her hand" *then raising it in offering to the Diosa*" (Moraga, 2000: 353). Just after she offers the cup, she says, "Coatlicue, this is my holy sacrifice" (Moraga, 2000: 353). Then she kills her child with herbs just like a caring warmhearted mother putting her innocent baby into sleep, as mentioned earlier in this study. Later she puts Chac-Mool's dead body on top of a corn field which serves as an altar. According to Perez, the choice of using "corn" in the altar is meaningful because it is reminiscent of the sacrificial ritual done to honor the corn goddess in Mexico:

> The scene calls to mind a sacrificial ritual practiced by the Mexicas to honor the corn goddess, Chicomecoatl, who required a female sacrificient . . . Each year the Mexicas sacrificed a young woman, who was also decapitated and flayed, to make a blood offering to the corn goddess to ensure fertility, renewal, and sustenance. The young woman's sacrificial blood, and its life-giving and sustaining qualities, ensured the continuation of the people. Medea replicates this ritual through her sacrifice, but in offering her male child, she interrupts a traditional renewal. The offering, made in this way, represents a violation of the ancient ritual, yet one powerful enough to create something new. (Perez, 2008: 105)

In a play that criticizes the exclusionary attitudes of a patriarchal society, it is meaningful that a male figure is sacrificed instead of a female figure. Just after Medea places Chac-Mool's body on the corn altar, she furiously begins talking to the goddess Coatlicue:

> What crime do I commit now, Mamá?
> To choose the daughter over the son?
> You betrayed us, Madre Coatlicue.
> You anciana, you who birthed the God of War.
> …
> Nor did you hold back the sword
> That severed your daughter's head.
> Coyolxauhqui, diosa de la luna [goddess of the moon].
> Ahora [now], she is my god.
> La Luna, la hija rebelde [the rebel daughter].
> Te rechazo, Madre [I reject you, mother]. (Moraga, 2000: 356-357)

This scene is important because after sacrificing her son, Medea rejects Coatlicue for not protecting her daughter and for taking side of the son and reclaims her adoration of the rebel moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui. "By killing Chac-Mool, Medea metaphorically kills the god of war, Huitzilopochtli, thereby granting life and freedom to the goddess of the moon, and by extension to all women. With Huitziloppocthli's death, patriarchy cannot reign" (Quinn-Sanchez, 2015**:** 42). From this perspective, Moraga's reinterpretation of the myth concerning Coatlicue, Coyolxauhqui and Huitzilopochtli is indeed a metaphorical revolt against normative patriarchy and a celebration of matriarchy.

The celebration of matriarchy is also evident in the symbolic use of the image "serpent". In the theatrical outlook of the Cihuatateos, Moraga attaches their skirts with the cord of snake. Also Coatlicue means "Serpent Skirt" and she is depicted with "a human skull or serpent for a head, a necklace of human hearts, a skirt of twisted serpents and taloned feet" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 27). One should be careful with the symbolism associated with these goddesses since the serpent which can easily be regarded as a phallic symbol is associated with womanhood in pre-Columbian America: "The Olmecs associated womanhood with the Serpent's mouth which was guarded by rows of dangerous teeth, a sort of *vagina dentate*. They considered it the most sacred place on earth, a place of refuge, the creative womb from which all things were born and to which all things returned" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 34). Thus, the serpent with a mouth resembling to a vagina stands for femininity and matriarchy in pre-Columbian American mythology. For instance, Huitzilopocthli's leading power was represented with the image of an "eagle with a writhing serpent in its beak": the eagle symbolizing patriarchy and the serpent symbolizing matriarchy (Anzaldúa, 1987: 5). Anzaldúa explains this visual of an eagle with a serpent on its beak as "The symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the "higher" masculine powers indicates that the patriarchal order had already vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order in pre-Columbian

America (Anzaldúa, 1987: 5). The reign of Huitzilopochtli after Coatlicue shows how the patriarchal deities begin to dominate in this mythology. Anzaldúa laments that "the male-dominated Azteca-Mexica culture drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes and by substituting male deities in their place" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 27).

Anzaldua highlights the significance of the serpent goddess under the titles "entering into the serpent" and "Coatlicue state". She welcomes the serpentine goddess Coatlicue who is "one of the powerful images or archetypes that inhabits [her] psyche" into her Chicana feminist consciousness calling her "Come, little green snake. Let the wound caused by the serpent be cured by the serpent" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 46).

> I see the heat of anger or rebellion or hope split open that rock, releasing *la Coatlicue.* And someone in me takes matters into our own hands, and eventually, takes dominion over serpents-over my own body, my sexual activity, my soul, my mind, my weaknesses and strengths. Mine. Ours. Not the heterosexual white man's or the colored man's or the state's or the culture's or the religion's or the parents'—just ours, mine.
>
> And suddenly I feel everything rushing to a center, a nucleus. All the lost pieces of myself come flying from the deserts and the mountains and the valleys, magnetized toward that center. *Completa.*
>
> Something pulsates in my body, a luminous thin thing that grows thicker every day. Its presence never leaves me. I am never alone. That which abides: my vigilance, my thousand sleepless serpent eyes blinking in the night, forever open, And I am not afraid. (Anzaldúa, 1987: 51)

Clearly, entering into Coatlicue state is self-identification with the serpent skirt goddess for Anzaldúa. This identification is a rejection of dominant ideologies provided by the white man, colored man, culture, religion or parents. Rejecting these dominant ideological structures and letting herself dominated by the serpents, she feels whole and fearless. Moraga's Coatlicue state is similar in essence for enabling a feminist consciousness but there are several differences as well. Although the main character in Moraga's play also enters into Coatlicue state, through the end, she even rejects Coatlicue due to her later submission to a male deity. After identification with Coatlicue, Medea rejects her too for her symbolic obedience to patriarchy and begins worshipping the rebel moon goddess. In *The Last Generation*, Moraga explains how she reads the mythical configuration of the story concerning Coatlicue, Huitzilopochtli and Coyolxauhqui as follows:

> Here, mother and daughter are pitted against each other and daughter must kill male-defined motherhood in order to save the culture from misogyny, war, and greed. But el hijo comes to the defense of patriarchal motherhood, kills la mujer rebelde, and female power is eclipsed by the rising light of the Sun/Son. This machista myth is enacted every day of our lives, every day

> that the sun (Huitzilopotchli) rises up from the horizon and the moon (Coyolxauhqui) is obliterated by his light. (Moraga, 1993: 73)

Worshipping Coyolxauhqui instead of Coatlicue enables Medea to achieve a sense of belonging and a return to homeland. In the final scene of the play, Chac-Mool asks Medea to watch the moon and claims that he is taking her to "home". In the same way Medea sacrifices Chac-Mool, he is now sacrificing Medea using herbs affectionately. As the lights fail, only a shimmering moon and the figure of the four Cihuatateo dancing silently remain onstage (Moraga, 2000: 362). At the end of the play, Medea flies to the moon together with her son. Evidently Medea is sacrificed which is also suggested through the naming of the boy as "Chac-Mool": *Chac-mol* is the term assigned to a vessel that adorned the tops of temples. The figure, depicted in repose, balances in his lap a plate or bowl in which sacrifices to the gods were traditionally placed. In the play, the character Chac-Mool serves as both the vessel for an offering and the offering itself" (Perez, 2008:103). The ending is also meaningful for indicating an invention of an innocent manhood. As mentioned earlier in this paper, before his decision to go to Aztlán, Chac-Mool states that he wakes up in the middle of the night wishing to achieve "full-grown innocence" through a flight to the moon which functions as a foreshadowing in the plot. Although the play ends with the death of the mother and son, at a symbolic level their sacrificial deaths illuminate a hope for the initiation of an innocent manhood.

Conclusion

As prominent figures in Chicana feminism, both Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga criticize their present day exclusion with an attempt to find their indegineous voice through a connection with the Chicana mythical ancestral homeland called Aztlán. Moraga's *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* illuminates queer characters who are physically and socially banished by heteronormative patriarchs in Aztlán who confine the women within the traditional norms of patriarchal motherhood. The exclusionary attitudes towards the queer subjects are criticized by illuminating Medea's constant longing for her motherland. The feeling of homelessness rests at the center of Moraga's play which is also indicated in the epilogue from *Christa Wolf's Medea: A Modern Retelling*: "Where can I go? Is it possible to imagine a world, a time, where I would have a place? There's no one I could ask. That's the answer" (Moraga, 2000: 295). Indeed, Moraga's play is an attempt to find an answer to the question whether the Chicana queer can manage to develop a sense of belonging. Moraga finds the answer in retelling and recontextualizing old Aztec mythology depicting celebrated forms of matriarchy. Cihuatateo and Coatlicue whose womanhood are symbolized with the serpents are among those mythological figures that help Moraga to critique gender norms in a patriarchal and heteronormative society. Considering the ending of the play which suggests a final hopeful flight into home, digging information on the mythical stories of the serpentine goddesses, retelling their stories and combining their stories with

that of other Chicanas are the tactics Moraga uses in her Chicana feminist architecture.

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