***JAST*, 2018; 49: 5-35**

Submitted: 31.10.2017

Accepted: 25.10.2018

ORCID# 0000-0002-3076-0954

The New Mestiza Consciousness in Chicana Life Writing: Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*

Gizem Akçil

Abstract

Chicana feminist author Cherríe Moraga's life writing *Loving in the War Years* (1983) draws on the author's memories, personal and collective experiences, and identity struggles as a Chicana lesbian of mixed ancestry. As the daughter of an Anglo-American father and a Chicana mother, Moraga depicts her adoption of her Chicana lesbian identity and her rejection of oppression based on racism, sexism, heterosexism and classism through a combination of the English and Spanish languages and a variety of literary genres which includes self-referential stories, journal entries, poetry and essays. The narratives in Moraga's work represent what the Chicana feminist author Gloria Anzaldúa terms "the new mestiza consciousness" in her life writing *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (1987). Anzaldúa's concept of the new mestiza consciousness offers a re-interpretation of the racial term "mestizo/a" and articulates a state of existence beyond exclusive identity categories. The new mestiza consciousness is a survival strategy that is the outcome of the identity conflict of those living in the borderlands, in the places where diverse cultures and societies merge. The inhabitants of borderlands overcome the dilemma/the state of being in-between by rejecting the dualism in Western philosophy and adopting the new mestiza/border consciousness, which emphasizes the interweaving rather than separation of the multiple aspects of Chicana identity and the need to transcend socially constructed, rigid borders. This article will analyze Moraga's overcoming of silence and identity fragmentation that is the result of the multiplicity of oppressions she

has encountered at socio-cultural fronts in her struggle to embrace her Chicana lesbian identity in the light of a new mestiza perspective.

Keywords

Life writing, Chicana feminism, the new mestiza consciousness, Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*

Meksikalı Amerikalı Yazarların Yaşam Yazınlarında "Yeni Mestiza Bilinci:" Cherríe Moraga ve *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*

Öz

Meksikalı-Amerikalı feminist yazar Cherríe Moraga'nın *Loving in the War Years* (1983) adlı eseri yazarın anılarını, bireysel ve toplumsal tecrübelerini ve Meksikalı-Amerikalı karmaşık kökenli lezbiyen kimliğinin oluşturduğu kimlik çatışmalarını dile getirdiğinden yaşam yazını edebi türü altında incelenebilir. Anglosakson-Amerikalı bir baba ve Meksikalı-Amerikalı bir annenin kızı olan Moraga, özyaşam öyküleri, günlük, şiir ve denemelerden oluşan farklı edebi türleri İngilizce ve İspanyolca olarak bir araya getirerek ırkçılığa, cinsiyet ayrımcılığına, eşcinsel ayrımcılığına ve sınıfçılığa dayanan baskıları reddeder ve Meksikalı-Amerikalı lezbiyen kimliğini benimseyişini anlatır. Moraga'nın eserindeki anlatılar Meksikalı-Amerikalı feminist yazar Gloria Anzaldúa'nın *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) adlı yaşam yazınında açıkladığı "yeni mestiza bilinci" kavramını temsil eder. Anzaldúa'nın "yeni mestiza bilinci" kavramı "mestizo/a" terimini yeniden yorumlar ve dışlayıcı kimlik sınıflamalarının ötesinde bir varoluş halini dile getirir. "Yeni mestiza bilinci" farklı kültürlerin ve toplumların birleştiği sınırlarda yaşayanların kimlik karmaşasından doğan bir hayatta kalma stratejisidir. Sınırlardaki bireyler yaşadıkları ikilemi/arada olma durumunu Batı felsefesindeki düalizmi (ikiciliği) reddederek Meksikalı-Amerikalı kimliğinin farklı yönlerinin ayrımına değil kesiştiği noktaya ve toplum tarafından belirlenmiş katı sınırların aşılması gerektiğine vurgu yapan yeni mestiza/sınır bilincini benimseyerek aşarlar. Bu makale Moraga'nın Meksikalı-Amerikalı

lezbiyen kimliğini korumak için sessizliği ve sosyo-kültürel cephelerde karşılaştığı toplumsal baskıların oluşturduğu kimlik bölünmesinin üstesinden gelişini yeni mestiza bakış açısıyla inceleyecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Yaşam yazını, Meksikalı-Amerikalı feminizmi, yeni mestiza bilinci, Cherríe Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*

In her life writing *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983), Cherríe Moraga focuses on the overlapping dimensions of Chicana identity which is characterized by a comingling of a variety of cultures—Anglo American, Mexican and Native (indigenous) Mexican. This article will analyze Moraga's work in the light of "the new mestiza consciousness," a term coined by the Chicana feminist author Gloria Anzaldúa in her life writing *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). Both Moraga and Anzaldúa combine personal histories/experiences with the collective history/experience by conveying a Chicana feminist lesbian perspective and relating the personal to the political with the aim to create new venues for Chicana cultural expression. Moraga's and Anzaldúa's life writings explore the ways in which gender roles and socially constructed limitations on sexuality can be transcended. As Wilson Neate argues, Chicana literature, in general, is "a literature of resistance and oppositionality," which is "the product of a historically constructed border-consciousness" (i, Introduction).

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa argues that the geographical border between the United States and Mexico is not only a physical border, but also it functions as a metaphor for the in-between condition of mestizos/as who live amidst the clash of different societies and cultures, and refers to the social, cultural, racial, class, linguistic, sexual and gender borders or dualisms which define those who "go through the confines of 'the normal'" (25) as "the other." Borderlands emerge when numerous cultures face each other, and people from diverse social backgrounds inhabit the same precinct. Even though living in the borderlands necessitates occupying an uncomfortable territory of contradictions, it enables the inhabitant to discover a new way of life. According to Anzaldúa, the new mestiza consciousness refers to the border consciousness, which, as a survival strategy in the

borderlands, enables the mestizo/a to transcend cultural conflict and identity fragmentation by learning to be flexible and "developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (101).

Bringing together "all that is separate," "the new mestiza" forms an assembly which is "greater than the sum of its severed parts" (Anzaldúa 101-102). For Anzaldúa, this assembly is not a "balancing of opposing powers" but a new dynamic cultural space with an added "third element" which involves breaking the rigidity of paradigms and transcending boundaries by making oneself "vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking" (101-104) and rejecting any final answer. This article will examine the ways in which the new mestiza consciousness contributes to Cherríe Moraga's formation of her Chicana feminist, queer theory through the rejection of separations brought about by divisive socially constructed borders, the sources of oppression and violence. Thus, similar to Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* espouses the consciousness of the new mestiza which advocates not only a change in thought but also a change within the society by positioning the self within the indeterminate borderlands of the mestizo/a and queer.

1. Life Writing, Chicana Feminism and the New Mestiza Consciousness

Analyzing Cherríe Moraga's incorporation of memories and history into her work *Loving in the War Years* necessitates an overview of "life writing," an umbrella term which contains a variety of writing practices that comprise the many forms of auto/biography, memoir, diaries, journals, letters, and personal essays which are called by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson as "self-referential" writing (*Reading Autobiography* 4). Life writings do not comprise only factual details, since facts are filtered through the authors' subjective interpretations. Thus, the boundaries between life writing and fiction are always blurred, as life writers select, choose and re-shape the material they put into words. Similarly, writers of fictional works can be inspired by real life experiences and history to construct a "fictional" world out of facts. Smith and Watson argue that life writing and fiction "are distinguished by their relationship to and claims about a referential world" (10): "We might think of what fiction represents as '*a* world' and what life writing refers to as '*the* world'" (Smith and Watson 10). In spite of the fact

that life writing combines objective reality with subjective reality, as the remembering subject, limited by memory and historical moment, re-creates or re-imagines the past, life narratives create an authenticity effect through references to historical details, time periods, real places, people and instances in one's life whereas fictional works can refer to time, place, character and events both real and imaginary, yet as parts of an encompassing fiction.

Even though life writing takes the self as the focus of a literary work, the self that life writers reveal is not the actual/historical self of the author, but rather a version of that self created by the act of writing. In spite of the gaps between writing and facts, between the historical self of the author and the narrated subject, most readers engage in a suspension of disbelief in the process of reading life narratives. The French literary critic Philippe Lejeune describes this suspension of disbelief as an "autobiographical pact," which makes the readers assume that the author who produces the work and the protagonist who appears in it are completely the same (Smith and Watson 207). Contrary to Lejeune's definition of the "autobiographical pact," Smith and Watson explain, life writers first create "a narrating I," a narrating subject, which in turn constructs a "narrated I," a narrated subject, and therefore, produce a distance between their actual/historical selves and the selves narrated in literary works (71-76). In addition, the "narrating" and "narrated" subjects in life writings are mostly fractured and multiple, and affected by the ideological viewpoints or "the ideological Is" of the author (Smith and Watson 76-77).

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Judith Butler focuses on the formation of subjectivity, the "I" that gives an account of itself, by arguing that "there is no 'I' that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no 'I' that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning" (7). For Butler, the "narrating I," thus, does not speak as a separate, self-formed subject, but exists as an interpellated subject in relation to the Other(s) and to the social and moral norms: "The 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation—or a set of relations—to a set of norms" (8). Implicated in language and culture, the narrating subject is created by means of "the social temporality that exceeds its own capacity for narration" (8) and "autobiographical narrators" "come into the consciousness of who they

are, of what identifications and differences they are assigned, or what identities they might adopt through discourses that surround them" (Smith and Watson 39). Smith and Watson explain that "the concept of relationality" in life narratives implies that "one's story is bound up with that of another, and the boundaries of an 'I' are often shifting and permeable" (*Reading Autobiography* 86).

In accordance with Smith and Watson's explanation, as Chicana feminist lesbians, Moraga and Anzaldúa create a multiplicity of "narrating," "narrated" and "ideological Is" in relation to the socio-cultural and familial space they inhabit in their life writings. In *Loving in the War Years* and *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Moraga and Anzaldúa bring together poetry and prose, and through this merging, assume the voices of poets, essayists, academics and activists in order to reveal multiple socio-cultural positions. Davalos calls the hybrid mixture observed in Chicana life writing as "a trans-disciplinary method" which is "a major advancement of Chicana feminist thought" (153) that facilitates the authors' use of multiple narrating Is. By blurring the boundaries between genres, both Moraga and Anzaldúa expose "the limits of gender," since, as Shari Benstock notes, "genre itself raises questions about gender," for the "two terms are etymologically linked" (20). Furthermore, the erasure of the boundaries between genres and/or genders represents the consciousness of the new mestiza transcending borders of all kinds.

Before analyzing *Loving in the War Years*, it is necessary to explore the connection of Chicana feminism and queer theory to the concept of the new mestiza consciousness. Chicana feminism, a sub-branch of women-of-color feminism, is concerned with raising the consciousness of women as regards to the issues of racism, sexism, heterosexism and classism. The years between 1970 and 1980 represented a formative period in the development of Chicana feminist thought in the United States (Garcia 217). Chicana feminism or "Xicanisma" emerged as a response to the sexism Chicanas experienced within the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and to the racism they encountered within the mainstream women's movement which ignored differences between women on the basis of race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation (Moya 448). The term "Xicanisma" is coined by the Chicana author Ana Castillo in *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* (1994):

Xicanisma is an ever present consciousness of our

> interdependence specifically rooted in our culture and history. Although Xicanisma is a way to understand ourselves in the world, it may also help others who are not necessarily of Mexican background and/or women. It is yielding; never resistant to change, one based on wholeness not dualisms. Men are not our opposites, our opponents, our "other." (*Massacre of the Dreamers* 226)

Chicana feminist authors connect their own lives with the lives of all those who undergo similar experiences regardless of race, class, gender and sexual orientation. Saldivar-Hull describes Chicana feminism as "feminism on the border" which "addresses a multiplicity of experiences" (48) on which Chicana feminism is built and reinforced. Saldivar-Hull explains that "For Chicanas, *women of color* is a *political* designation that expresses our solidarity with Asian American, African American, and Native American women who share similarities in our histories" (46). As a unifying force, Chicana feminism not only embraces differences but also challenges heterosexist norms. Bonnie Zimmerman focuses on some of the central issues observed at the intersection between feminist and queer theories:

> [A] set of assumptions underlies virtually all lesbian criticism: that a woman's identity is not defined only by her relation to a male world and male literary tradition (a relationship brilliantly dissected by feminist critics), that powerful bonds between women are a crucial factor in women's lives, and that sexual and emotional identification of women profoundly affects her consciousness and thus her creativity. (34)

In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga regards her sexual choice as "the avenue through which [she has] learned the most about silence and oppression" (Moraga 44). Likewise, Anzaldúa regards her lesbianism as an integral part of her "new mestiza consciousness." McRuer explains that in Anzaldúa's work, "'the border' and 'queerness' stand as figures for the failure of easy separation. Rather than establishing two discrete identities, each attempt at separation actually produces (mestiza/queer) identities that do not fit in either location." (117) Thus, Anzaldúa's concept of the border—as a metaphor of the new mestiza consciousness—represents a place of uncertainty and obscurity where the mestiza eventually emerges out of a distorted/colonized (self)-image by re-interpreting the borderlands as the home of her own self.

In the section titled "La conciencia de la mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness" in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, the narrating I reflects on her position at the crossroads/the borderlands. In a poem which appears at the beginning of the section, she proclaims, "Because I, a *mestiza*, / continually walk out of one culture / and into another, / because I am in all cultures at the same time" (99). Occupying this homeland of contradictions and uncertainty causes "a clash of voices," and "mental and emotional states of perplexity" within the mestiza, who becomes "plagued by psychic restlessness" (Anzaldúa 100). Receiving "opposing messages," the mestiza lives within "a constant state of mental nepantilism, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways," as "commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack the commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack the commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture" (Anzaldúa 100). As the new mestiza learns "to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view," she discovers that "Rigidity means death," "Only by remaining flexible is she able stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically" (Anzaldúa 101). Thus, the new mestiza consciousness is the outcome of the mestiza's shift "from convergent thinking" to "divergent thinking" which moves "away from set patterns" "toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes" (Anzaldúa 101). It is at this point when the new mestiza learns to tolerate and live with the ambiguity that she moves out of the boundaries, "surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar" (Anzaldúa 104) and heals the split in her psyche. By becoming a bridge and refusing to be defined by borders or duality, she can "be on both shores at once" (Anzaldúa 100) without being trapped into a fixed, stable viewpoint. She is able to connect herself to every person regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and to the universe; as Anzaldúa explains,

> As a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister and potential lover. (As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer in me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, 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. (102-103)

Thus, for Anzaldúa, being a feminist and being queer are inseparable from her mestiza consciousness, as feminism and lesbianism unite her with all races, all cultures, all classes, all genders enabling her to occupy the liminal space which rejects separations. As a mestiza, as a feminist, as a queer, she breaks down "the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner," since "the answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in" (Anzaldúa 102) refusing the split. Questioning the definitions of light and dark, white and black, male and female, she "gives them new meanings" (Anzaldúa 103), and sees the light in the dark, the dark in the light, the male in the female and the female in the male. Thus, "The struggle of the mestiza is above all a feminist one" (106), one that unlearns the dichotomy between genders and races, and can "bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war" (Anzaldúa 103-106).

As will be analyzed in the ensuing section, in *Loving in the War Years*, like Anzaldúa, Moraga defines herself through the borderlands consciousness by rejecting the social, cultural, racial, class, linguistic, sexual and gender borders/separations in the light of her Chicana feminist lesbian standpoint. As a Chicana feminist lesbian, Moraga becomes a mediator healing the fragmentation of her identity with the aim to heal the rupture within the society. By bringing her lesbianism to the fore, Moraga occupies the queer borderland of the mestiza dismantling binary oppositions as well as white male definitions of sexuality, gender, and cultural identity—the source of prejudice, rape, violence and war—and returning to her Chicana roots.

2. Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*

In *Loving in the War Years*, Cherríe Moraga recounts her memories through poetry and prose on Chicana feminism and queer theory by describing her relations to her family and ambivalent socio-cultural position as the daughter of a Chicana mother and an Anglo American father in American society. Focusing on the link between her ethnicity and sexuality, she regards Chicana feminism and lesbianism as a way to understand and challenge oppression or the "Cultural Tyranny" (Anzaldúa 38). Re-claiming the cultural heritage of her Chicana mother and choosing her sexuality, Moraga's narrating I situates herself at the crossroads where the new mestiza stands. Throughout her life

writing, Moraga articulates her desire to build her womanhood on her love for the Chicanas and the love of herself as a Chicana by arguing that being a Chicana means making political the love of the women of her community (86).

The title poem "Loving in the War Years" which appears in the section "Like Family: Loving on the Run," is one of Moraga's "companion [or love] poems" that seek "for places of 'loving' offered Chicanas" (Gilmore 187). The narrating I addresses the poem to her lover and presents an analogy between "loving" and trying to survive "in the war years" (23). For the narrating I, "loving in the war years" calls for the risk of living without a "home" or becoming an outcast. She tells her lover that "We're all we have got. You and I / maintaining this war time morality / where being queer / and female / is as warrior / as we can get" (24). Thus, the poem's ending conveys the meaning of the title of Moraga's life writing, as Moraga pictures herself engaged in a symbolic war with a patriarchal, homophobic society in her struggle to pursue her lesbian desire and arrive at her own self definitions.

The subtitle "*lo que nunca pasó por sus labios [what never passed through her lips]*" signifies "how, during the war years, loving is silent yet present, spoken between interstices and gaps of words [or] language" (Cutter 204). As Cutter explains, the queer Chicana feminist always faces the risk of "having her voice/passion silenced" (204). Nonetheless, contrary to the meaning expressed in the subtitle, *Loving in the War Years* becomes an articulation of "what never passed" through her "lips," since the work gives voice to Moraga's repressed desire. Thus, the title represents what Gilmore calls "a war of territory" with the perpetuators of hegemonic cultural codes over "place," meaning and "identity" (187) which is observed not only in the poem but also throughout Moraga's life writing as a whole.

Moraga's articulation of her lesbianism is accompanied by a feeling of guilt and being fragmented, which is explored in a poem titled "The Voices of the Fallers" at the very beginning of *Loving in the War Years*. In the poem, "the narrating I" depicts the body of "the narrated I" falling down a cliff. Leslie Bow argues that "In the poem, the fall is both the punishment for the 'sin' of" sexual transgression "and the hope of redemption if 'falling/in love' is the only counter-action to violence" (10). The arrangement of the stanzas, reminiscent of the image of a falling leaf, visualizes "the fall" as follows:

I was born queer with the dream
of falling
the small sack of my body
dropping
off a ledge
suddenly. (xv)

At the instance of the fall, her body fragments into pieces that separate from the whole and plummet to the ground. The fragmentation and the separate pieces of the body stand for the bits and scraps of an identity which is at a point of disintegration. As the narrating I describes the fall, she wants the readers to listen to the sounds coming from her falling body echoing the oppression felt by it:

Listen.
can you hear my mouth crack
open the sound
of my lips bending
back against the force
of the fall? (xv)

Listen.
Put your ear deep
down
through the opening
of my throat and
listen.
…….

In the stanzas above, corporeality is tied to the psychological state of the narrating I: The voices coming from her "throat" mirror her response to the trauma of "the fall;" yet, it also signifies her emergence out of silence and her claiming of her female voice. Her falling represents a threshold on the way to a new selfhood. She shatters the boundaries

of her former self in the process of falling into pieces, which is depicted in the ensuing stanzas:

her shoulder first
tumbling
off
the cliff the legs

following
over
her head . . . (xvi)
…….

her body's
dead

silent

collision
with the sand. (xvii)

According to Yarbro-Bejarano, Moraga's poetry constantly "takes apart the entire female body, recognizing how it has been appropriated, and attempting to re-claim it" (5). Thus, Moraga's life writing illustrates Hélène Cixous's argument as regards to women's writing in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975): "By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions" (258). Cixous argues that confined within a phallocentric cultural order and discourse, women have been denied "breath and speech" (258), cut away from their bodies and true selves, and misrepresented by a male-dominated literary canon. By re-interpreting the myth of Medusa, who is looked upon as a female monster that turns those who look at her face into stone, Cixous rejects

patriarchal representations of women as she remarks that Medusa is not "deadly," on the contrary, "She's beautiful and she's laughing" (260). Medusa's laugh represents a subversive act of writing that marks "women's shattering entry into history, which has always been based on *her suppression*" (258). Cixous urges women to write and make their bodies heard to articulate "the resources of the unconscious" and "kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing" (258).

Like the laugh of Cixous's Medusa, in Moraga's "The Voices of the Fallers," the narrating I inscribes the censored body, the deadened body to give life to herself through speech and writing, and arrive at her own self-definitions; as Sidonie Smith observes, "If the body is the source of an identity that leads to oppression, the sexed body, the racialized body, then the body must be taken back and honored [in the process of] writing" (*Subjectivity, Identity and the Body* 177). "The Voices of the Fallers" confirms Smith's statement by invoking and re-interpreting the myth about Coyolxauhqui, the Moon Goddess, in Aztec mythology. In the myth, Coyolxauhqui's body is severed into pieces in the war against her brother, the War God and the Sun Huitzilopochtli. In *the Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (1993), Moraga conveys a brief account of the myth explaining that Coyolxauhqui had planned to kill her mother, the Earth Goddess Coatlicue, who was pregnant with Huitzilopochtli, to prevent his birth "rather than submit to a world where War would become God:"

> Huitzilopochtli is warned of this by a hummingbird and wows to defend his mother. At the moment of birth, he murders Coyolxauhqui, cutting off her head and completely dismembering her body. Breast splits from chest splits from hip splits from thigh from knee from arm and foot. Coyolxauhqui is banished to the darkness and becomes the moon, la diosa de la luna. (Moraga 73)

The myth suggests the emergence of a warrior culture, of patriarchy, and it complements the title of Moraga's life writing. For Moraga, being a queer Chicana feminist is like living in the war years, since it necessitates a constant struggle against the sexist and heterosexist norms of patriarchy represented by Huitzilopochtli in the myth. According to Moraga's interpretation of the mythical story, Coyolxauhqui—the daughter—desires to eliminate a male-defined motherhood to protect the society from wars, avarice, prejudice and misogyny. Yet, Huitzilopochtli "comes to the defense of patriarchal

motherhood, kills la mujer rebelde, and female power is eclipsed by the rising power of the Sun/Son" (*The Last Generation* 74).

The sections that follow the poem extend the poem's theme by focusing on Moraga's recollection of experiences related to her socio-cultural position as a Chicana feminist lesbian and situated within her family. In *Autobiographics*, Gilmore notes that through self-referential stories, journal entries, poems and essays, "Moraga explores how the autobiographical is embedded in the discourse of the *familia* [or family]" (186). For Moraga, "The familia forms a nexus" in which she desires to construct her ethnic and sexual identity, and "represents a highly charged and shifting place of loving and combat" (Gilmore 186). Moraga's concept of "familia" does not only refer to her own family or to the conventional understanding of families as units constructed only through blood ties but also to her community building with Chicanas or women of color in general. As a displaced Chicana, Moraga describes her quest for a home by representing "relationships and places that do and do not feel like home" (Gilmore 190). In her self-referential stories, Moraga's narrating I conveys her experiences and memories within the familia through "the voice of a literary persona" named "Cecilia," who represents her "alter ego" (Cloud 92). According to Christina Sharpe, Cecilia can be interpreted as a representation of "a coming-into-consciousness Cherríe" (247). Through Cecilia, Moraga depicts her identity as split into two: Cecilia stands for her former/younger self who is contrasted to her adult, transformed selfhood.

In "It Is You, My Sister, Who Must Be Protected," Cecilia conveys her memories regarding her Anglo father. At the beginning of the story, Cecilia articulates her lack of knowledge about her father and defines him as the "*queer I run from.* This white man in me" (2). The statement signifies Cecilia's desire to leave the identity mask she has worn as a result of her acculturation in Anglo values and her desire to re-adopt her Chicana heritage represented by her mother. In an interview with Rosemary Weatherston, Moraga explains she used the word "queer" not to mean that her father was homosexual but rather to describe him as a man who was far from conventional definitions of masculinity. She mentions that the adjective "queer" refers to "the vulnerable place" (64) in her father or his passivity, a character trait that she does not want to see in herself. Thus, she clarifies another meaning of the word "queer" when she points out "I was talking about how that's that queer

I run from—that person in me who is passive, or who's beaten down or who can't express herself fully" (64). As Paul Allatson notes, "Moraga's equations that 'Anglo' equals 'passivity,' that 'passivity' equals 'queerness,' and that this 'queerness' equals 'whiteness,' have the effect of disparaging her (not Chicano father) from a machista Chicano perspective" (183). To illustrate her father's passivity or inability to articulate his feelings, she reveals the story about her Anglo grandfather who abandoned his son (her father) and one day returned to visit him for only a few hours. When her father tells Cecilia the story, she asks him, "Were you angry with him, Dad? How did you feel?" (3). Cecilia's inquiry is suggestive of her father's lack of reaction or unresponsiveness. In spite of her sense of aloofness from her father's culture; she, nevertheless, seeks identification with him after her mother reveals his lack of sexual and emotional intimacy in their relationship. According to Allatson, focusing on her mother's statement, Cecilia depicts "the gulf between her father's 'Anglo' nature and her Chicana mother's unmet expectations of a 'real' man-husband-lover" (281-282). In response to her mother's revelation, for a moment, Cecilia imagines her father to be a homosexual man when she speculates that "but daddy does seem to love men. It's true. You know how he always gets so excited with any ol' new friend he makes at work. Like a kid" (5). Cecilia desires to find a connection to the father by hypothesizing that he and she may be sharing the common feature of being queer. Accompanying the yearning to identify with her father; more significantly, Cecilia recognizes her deep affection and love for her mother and desires to compensate the lack that her mother feels by imagining herself leaving her chair and touching her the way she wants to be touched. Thus, Cecilia substitutes "her father's body with her own" by "[interpolating] both her lesbianism and her body into the gender and sexual structures of her Borderlands family" (Allatson 283) and picturing herself as her mother's lover. Furthermore, her recognition of the intimate connection between her and her mother is marked by a desire to embrace her Chicana identity. Adams comments that throughout Moraga's work, the "mother-daughter bond" is an indispensible factor "[in her envisioning or] revisioning of Chicana identity" (Adams 139). By conveying her love for her mother, Cecilia emphasizes her connection to the mother's ethnicity/culture and desires to fill in the "emotional and sexual absence in her and her mother's lives" (Tatonetti 228-229).

In the ensuing poem "La Dulce Culpa [The Sweet Guilt]," the

narrating I creates a sense of safety and belonging through a strong identification with and love for her mother:

> What kind of lover have you made me, mother
> who drew me into bed with you at six/at sixteen
> oh, even at sixty-six you do still
> lifting up the blanket with one arm
> lining out the space for my body with the other
>
> as if our bodies still beat
> inside the same skin
> as if you never noticed
> when they cut me
> out
> from you. (8)

In the stanzas above, the body becomes the main bridge connecting the narrating I to the mother. She specifies her desire to gain access to her mother's legacy which becomes her means of apprehending the world: "Mamá / I use you like the belt pressed inside your grip / seething for contact / I take / what I know from you and / want to whip this world into shape" (9). "The belt" in the mother's hand represents her "disciplinarian will" and concern over the daughter's sexual "non-conformity;" yet, in the last stanza, the daughter expresses her desire to "overcome conflict" (Allatson 282) and establish dialogue with her mother: "I promise you / I *will* fight back / Strip the belt from your hands / and take you / into my arms" (10). Thus, the title of the poem suggests how the feeling of guilt emerging from disapproval and controversy are rhetorically transformed into intimacy or connection between the mother and the daughter.

Moraga's focus on the role of her mother in the shaping of her identity parallels Helene Cixous's and Julia Kristeva's views regarding the female subject's connection to the mother. Cixous argues that "a woman is never far from 'mother' . . . who stands up against separation" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 882). As Susan Sellers explains, Cixous puts emphasis on "how the inscription of the rhythms and articulations

of the mother's body which continue to influence the adult self provides a link to the pre-symbolic union between self and m/other, and so affects the subject's relationship to language . . . himself and the world" (Introduction, xxix). Likewise, Kristeva focuses on maternity as a bridge between the physical body and the symbolic order of language (Oliver 5). In *New Maladies of the Soul*, Kristeva differentiates between "the semiotic" or "the imaginary" and the "symbolic:" "By symbolic, I am referring to the discursive practice that adheres to the logical and grammatical rules of speaking. And by the imaginary, I mean the representation of identification strategies . . . that mobilize the image of the body . . . accompanied by a grasping of the mother's image" (Kristeva 103). "The semiotic" refers to "the sensory" experiences of the body which include "sound, melody, rhythm, color [and] odors;" whereas the symbolic comprises signification in language "manifested in linguistic signs" (Kristeva 104). For Kristeva, linguistic signs are related to "the semiotic" of maternal presence and physical embodiment transmitted onto and reflected by "the symbolic." In aligning the maternal with "the symbolic," Kristeva refigures Lacan's conception of linguistic order as maintained by paternal law. In the light of Kristeva's argument, Moraga's work engages in "the semiotic" since the narrating I articulates her attachment to her mother through images, colors, smells and sounds she identifies with her, and constructs her identity by embracing her mother's language and culture.

In accordance with Cixous's and Kristeva's theorizing of the subject's relationship with the maternal, Moraga's memories focus on a vision of her physical body as a bridge that connects her to her mother and Chicana heritage. In *Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson argue that "the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge because memory itself is embodied. And life narrative is a site of embodied knowledge (a textual surface on which a person's experience is inscribed) because autobiographical narrators are embodied subjects" (49). As Antonio Damasio explains, since "The ability to recover memories in fact depends on the material body," which "perceives and internalizes the images, sensations, and experiences of the external world," "Subjectivity is impossible unless the subject recognizes her location in the materiality of an ever-present body" (239). In *Loving in the War Years*, Moraga reflects on how her physical body and the color of her skin have shaped her social experiences and subjectivity. Smith and Watson note that in *Loving in the War Years*,

> . . . Moraga directs attention to the very materiality of her skin as the source of her political consciousness. In this way she joins skin to the body politic, observing different significations of "light" and "dark" in different communities. Taking her body as a narrative point of departure, she elaborates, through multiple modes of address, her complex cultural position as lesbian, biracial Chicana, and daughter of working-class parents. (*Reading Autobiography* 50)

In an essay titled "La Güera" which means "fair-skinned," Moraga describes how her skin color as a lighter-skinned Chicana provided her with the privileges that her Chicana mother and her fellow darker-skinned Chicanos/as lacked. As a Chicana of mixed ethnic heritage, she does not place herself within rigidly defined identity categories but rather admits her position at the intersection between Anglo American and Chicano/a cultures. In *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), an anthology that contributed to the emergence of third-wave-feminism with its focus on writings by women of color, Moraga describes her in-between position as a light-skinned Chicana as she ponders, "I think: *what is my responsibility to my roots: both white and brown, Spanish-speaking and English?* I am a woman with a foot in both worlds. I refuse the split. I feel the necessity of dialogue. Sometimes I feel it urgently" (29). Allatson describes Moraga's understanding of her socio-cultural position as "a transcultural conundrum" which indicates her struggle "to embody a cultural, racial and sexual bridge between Anglo and Chicano" while seeking "a return to a 'feminine' space of certainty" represented by her "Spanish-speaking," "brown" Chicana mother (272). Thus, in "La Güera," Moraga describes her journey toward coming into consciousness of who she is and developing the new mestiza consciousness by recognizing her ambivalent place amidst clashing cultural domains. She expresses her will to accept all parts of her identity including her ethnicity, which was paradoxically denied to her by her Chicana mother, who wanted to integrate her children into the Anglo American society in order to provide them with a better future. As Christine Cloud notes,

> Having been a victim of discrimination all her life because of her darker complexion, Moraga's mother refused to teach her and her siblings Spanish in hope that they would become less affiliated with their ethnicity. To that end, [she] also tried to convince her

> daughter to distance herself from the Chicano/a community and become Anglo. (87)

Moraga discloses her sense of guilt for subduing her Chicana identity to make her "whiteness" visible and criticizes the racist and classist outlook of a society that judges according to skin color and social class. Cloud explains how "'passing' in white society left this particular young *güera* feeling as if she were moving through life as a fake, a fraud hiding behind her light skin, feeling guilty for doing so" (87). Moraga realizes that in making use of her "light-skin privilege," she has ignored her attachment and intimate relation to her mother and Chicano/a culture. She perceives the impediment that internalized oppression and racial bias create in her attempts to restore her connection to the Chicano/a community.

In "Like a White Sheep I Followed," Moraga comments on how her lighter skin color has erected barriers between her and the Chicano/a community, which has at times rejected her due to her light skin privilege. At the beginning of the essay, she reveals her desire to look like her darker-skinned cousins:

> *I am having my face made up, especially my eyes, by a very beautiful Chicana. The make-up artist changes me entirely for only five dollars. I think this is a very low price for how deep and dark she makes me look.* When I was growing up, I looked forward to the ways when my skin would toast to match my cousins', their skin turning pure black in the creases. I could never quite catch up, but my skin did turn smooth like theirs, oily brown—like my mamá's, holding depth, density, the possibility of infinite provision. (87)

For Moraga, "having [her] face made up" and having the same skin color as her cousins, will make her look more like a Chicana. She remembers her efforts as a child to convince her classmates that she and Teresita were cousins. As she seeks a way back into her community, she faces the prejudice of her fellow darker skinned Chicanos/as, who think of her as someone different. She comments on her exclusion by explaining that "I feel at times I am trying to bulldoze my way back into a people who forced me to live them in the first place, who taught me to take my whiteness and run with it" (87). Throughout the essay, Moraga describes how her friendships at school broke up due to these racial

barriers or what Alvina A. Quintana calls "color consciousness" (120). Thus, within the Chicano/a community, Moraga "became an object of mistrust as well" (Cloud 88), which is observed in her Chicano friend Tavo's statement that "he didn't trust güeros," since "at anytime" she "can . . . use [her] light skin privilege" and "decide [she] is suddenly not Chicana" (89). Thus, the title of the essay, "Like a White Sheep I Followed," indicates the ways in which Moraga was made an outsider to her own community and was forced to detach herself from her Chicana roots.

In "For the Color of My Mother," a poem which pursues "La Güera," the narrating I re-claims her Chicana heritage which has been denied to her by describing herself as a woman "gone brown to the blood color" (52) of her mother and avoids defining herself only from a white male perspective. In the poem, the ensuing lines convey a unifying vision by presenting an image of "dark women" (53) connected by a common heritage:

as it should be,
dark women come to me
sitting in circles
I pass thru their hands
the head of my mother
painted in clay colors
touching each carved feature swollen eyes and mouth
they understand the explosion, the splitting
open contained within the fixed expression
they cradle her silence
nodding to me (53)

According to Yarbro-Bejarano, "the head" of the mother "signifies a possible 'bridge' among women of color. It's also exemplary of the symbolic chain in Moraga's work which links 'brownness' and the indigenous to the idea of home" (14). Moraga desires to be taken in the envisioned group of "dark women" who can comprehend the "silence" and provide shelter, since they have experienced the same eruption, the same violence and partition.

The narrating I's acknowledgement of "the brown" in her through her connection to her mother in "For the Color of My Mother" is reinforced by her description of her sex as "brown" in "My Brother's Sex was White. Mine, Brown," in which she relates her sexuality to her ethnic identity. In this brief account of her childhood and adolescent memories, she explores the gender roles within her family as she explains how the women in her family were supposed to wait on and provide servitude to the male members. Moraga describes her brother's coming into the house with his male friends "exhausted from an afternoon's basketball" and "demanding, 'Girls, bring us something to drink'" (82-83). Apart from "providing service" to her brother, she also remembers "making [her brother's] bed" each day, "cleaning his room" every week, "shining his shoes, ironing his shirts" and lending him the money she has earned "house-cleaning for twelve hours so he could blow it on one night with a girl" (84). Due to her subordination to her brother, Moraga feels betrayed by him like Coyolxauhqui, the Moon Goddess, who, according to the Aztec myth, was cut into pieces by her brother Huitzilopochtli, the God of War. She notes that unlike her brother, she does not have much desire to identify with the Anglo culture, as she ponders that if she chooses to pass as an Anglo, she will still be considered as secondary to the white men just because she is a woman. Thus, she discerns the reason why her brother did not feel the need to change, because he was "*Male in a man's world. Light-skinned in a white world*," thus, in her sister's words "He got the best of both worlds" (84). Moraga reveals that contrary to her brother, as a Chicana lesbian, she has faced inequity within both the Anglo and Chicano communities. In "Traitor Begets Traitor," she explains that in her culture male children, in general, are privileged within the families:

> Ask, for example any Chicana about her children and she is quick to tell you that she loves them all the same, but she doesn't. *The boys are different*. Sometimes I sense that she feels this way because . . . through her son she can get a small taste of male privilege. . . The daughter can never offer the mother such hope, straddled by the same forces that confine the mother. As a result, the daughter must constantly earn the mother's love, prove her fidelity to her. The son—he gets her love for free. (93-94)

In line with the argument above, Moraga conveys a memory regarding her mother's favoring of her brother over her. In a journal

entry dated "April 1980," she describes how her mother ended their conversation over the phone after she had received another call from her son. Recognizing her mother's discriminatory attitude, she comments, "*I am relieved when I hang up that I did not have the chance to say more. The graceful reminder. This man doesn't have to earn her love. My brother has always come first*" (94). Reflecting on the socially constructed gender gap between herself and her brother, Moraga concludes the essay by arguing that

> If I were to build my womanhood on this self-evident truth, it is the love of the Chicana, the love of myself as a Chicana I had to embrace, no white man. Maybe this ultimately was the cutting difference between my brother and me. To be a woman fully necessitated my claiming the race of my mother. My brother's sex was white. Mine, brown. (86)

Moraga's rediscovery of her "brownness" is portrayed as a social awakening in the story titled "Pesadilla," the Spanish word for "nightmare." The story opens with a brief account which describes Cecilia's thoughts on "color:"

> *There came the day Cecilia began to think about color.*
>
> *Not the color of trees or painted billboards or the magnificent spreads of color laid down upon the hundreds of Victorians that lined the streets of her hometown city. She began to think about skin color. And the thought took hold of her and would not give; would not let loose. So that every person—man, woman and child—had its particular grade of shade. And that fact meant all the difference in the world.* (30)

As the initial remark suggests, "'Pesadilla,' describes Cecilia's initiation into an American reality founded on color consciousness and social injustice" (Quintana 120). "Pesadilla," is a Gothic life narrative about two women, Cecilia, the narrated I, and an African American woman named Deborah. In the story, Cecilia and Deborah try to build a life of their own by moving in a new apartment in Brooklyn. Yet, their hope of living a peaceful life is destroyed when they realize that someone has broken into their house and drew "his parts" (32) on their newly painted walls during their absence. Along with the drawings, there is a curse written by the intruder who specifies that he is "black."

The narrating I describes Cecilia's and Deborah's encounter with the terrifying scene as follows:

> Entering the apartment, her heart pounding, Cecilia led the way down the long hallway—a dark labyrinth to the pesadilla that awaited them. At the end of it, she could see their bedroom, the light burning. A tornado had hit it! No, this was not the result of some faceless natural disaster. This was a live and breathing thing. An animal. An animal had broken in. And the women broke down. What kind of beast they cried would do this? (31-32)

The beginning of the story "dramatizes Moraga's critique of white supremacy and the dominant ideology that systematically destroys potential and promise, eliciting both the inner-city black man's angry reaction and Cecilia's and Deborah's cognition of their powerless status" (Quintana 120). After the incident, Cecilia begins to feel that there is always someone else "living amongst" them, "some white man somewhere" with "monosyllabic [names]: Tom, Dick, Jack" (34). Thus, the nightmare indicates the presence of white patriarchy under which they are at risk and insecure, and the intruder's insistence on "compulsory heterosexuality" reminds Cecilia of "the dangers of being with Deborah" (Sharpe 249) suggesting that Cecilia's and Deborah's free-will is impaired by external threats. Thus, the story depicts the destruction of Cecilia's and Deborah's "romantic naiveté" and "portrays Cecilia's rude awakening into the 'real' world of inequality and hatred" (Quintana 120-121).

Cecilia realizes how "like [the newly painted] apartment wall" which is marked by the intruder; "whiteness" is an "illusion of safety," for it constantly "attracts dirt" (Sharpe 249). She perceives that hiding behind her light skin is not the solution, since, like the wall, she is constantly inscribed by racism, sexism and heterosexism. In the midst of the nightmare, Cecilia witnesses Deborah's epileptic seizure, which makes Cecilia realize her lack of agency in the face of misfortunes that enter their lives as she ponders that "*her loving couldn't change a thing*" (35). Deborah's fit appears in the story as another "pesadilla" that coincides with/arises at the time of the intrusion of the black man (Sharpe 250).

During her fit, Deborah hallucinates that "[a] man is coming down

on her with the back of his hand. The hand enlarging as it [advances]—broad and blacker than she has ever seen it" (34). Deborah's vision appears as "the embodiment of both Deborah's and Cecilia's nightmares (one of the nightmares embodied within the narrative titled 'Nightmare')" (Sharpe 250). It is not only Deborah's mental picture but also Cecilia's, since it is the narrating I herself who visualizes and re-creates Deborah's hallucination in her mind; and "becomes struck by the blackness of the hand" (Sharpe 250). The black hand triggers Cecilia's awakening, as it stands for her recognition of color shattering her illusions. At the time of Deborah's attack, Cecilia senses that she has transformed into a different person after recognizing that she is not safe. As she searches for Deborah's pills, she begins to feel numbness in her chest, which makes her remember the first time she had the same feeling, the time when she saw her mother crying "elbows dug into the kitchen table, yellow, the photograph curled into her hand, yellow too, tears streaming down her cheeks" (35). The memory of her mother's tears mingling with her own reminds Cecilia of her primary identifications with culture, sex, ethnicity and family. Both the reminiscence of her mother's crying and the "pesadilla" she and Deborah go through, "function as a reminder of the heaviness of family, the 'inescapability' of a certain kind of desire, the 'inescapability' of raced, classed, gendered history, the 'inescapability' of betrayal" (Sharpe 250). Hence, the desire to construct family, the desire for love is always complicated by the weight of the inevitable.

After Deborah recovers from her attack and falls asleep, Cecilia begins to remember her times as a child with insomnia. She realizes that even in those times she was struggling against a fear which resided inside her:

> Getting up six and seven times a night, locking and re-locking the doors. Praying in whispers the same prayers over and over and over again, nodding into sleep, resisting. Resisting the pictures the dreams would bring. . . . Locking and re-locking the doors. Keeping the fearful out, while it wrestles inside without restraint. (36)

The fears of Cecilia's childhood, thus, are perpetuated within the context of the nightmarish quality of lives lived under the threat of racism, sexism and heterosexism during her adulthood. In such a world, fear is felt both from the inside and the outside. The narrating I closes the story by re-inscribing the intruder into the scene:

> *There is a man on the fire escape. He is crouched just below the window sill. I could barely catch the curve of his back descending, but I have seen the movement. I know it is the animal, returned.*
>
> *The figure suddenly rises to attack . . .*
>
> *DEBORAH!*
>
> *The dark woman looking in through the glass is as frightened as I am. She is weeping. I will not let her in.* (37)

In the excerpt above, the "man on the fire escape"—the intruder—represents the threatening presence of patriarchy, and the "dark woman" who looks "through the glass" functions as a symbol of Cecilia's recognition of her Chicana identity along with her identification with women of color as represented by Deborah whom Cecilia wants to protect in the story. Thus, Cecilia goes through a transformation of consciousness as a result of the incident. The nightmare and her subsequent awakening urge her to seek a way out of both external and internalized oppression.

The "Pesadilla" Cecilia goes through encourages the narrating I to decolonize her ethnic and sexual identity, and question the myths that denigrate Chicana womanhood. Challenging the patriarchal mythology of her culture, Moraga thinks of herself and her mother as modern day representatives of Malintzin Tenepal—an Aztec woman who worked as a translator to the Spanish colonizer Hernán Cortés and "bore his children" (Alarcón 59)—who is "slandered as La Chingada, [La Malinche] . . . or La Vendida," which means "sold out" "to the white race" (Moraga 91). Moraga argues that the Chicano and Mexican cultures have turned Malintzin into a stereotypical representation of "historical/sexual 'transgression'" to reinforce the "myth of the inherent unreliability of women" (92-93). In "A Long Line of Vendidas ['Sold-Outs']," Moraga explains,

> Malinche has sold out her indio people by acting as courtesan and translator for Cortéz, whose offspring symbolically represent the birth of the bastardized mestizo/mexicano people. My mother then is the modern-day Chicana Malinche marrying a white man, my father . . . . Finally, I—a half-breed Chicana—further betray my race by *choosing* my sexuality, which excludes all men, and therefore most dangerously, Chicano men. *I come from a long line of Vendidas*. (108)

Moraga comments on how her sexual identity opposes the social codes that require women to remain passive. In analyzing Malintzin's story, Moraga repudiates the notion that Malintzin, who used "the power of language" to go beyond her community's accepted limits (Alarcón 62) and gender roles, is accountable for the downfall of the Aztec civilization. She explains that when Cortés arrived in Mexico, the Aztec empire had already subdued most of the native populations. Their purpose was to sacrifice the victims of war to Huitzilopochtli. Consequently, most of the Native tribes cooperated with the Spaniards in order to overthrow the Aztecs. Hence, Alarcón notes that with their imperialist projects and exploitive politics the Aztecs "decreed their own self-destruction" (92).

Apart from Malintzin, in "Looking for the Insatiable Woman," Moraga focuses on the myth of la Llorona (the Weeping Woman), a female phantom who searches for her dead children, whom she killed by drowning them in a river in a "fit of jealous rage or pure retaliation" (142) against the man who betrayed her. Moraga re-interprets the mythical story as a symbol of the woman's attempt to eliminate patriarchal definitions of motherhood. The narrating I becomes acquainted with la Llorona while working as a waitress in a restaurant where she befriends a woman named Amber. Amber tells her a story about a lesbian named Jay for whom she has done prison support work. The story invokes the myth of la Llorona, as the narrating I learns that Jay has been in prison as "a child-killer," in other words, as "a contemporary La Llorona" (Moraga 143). Yet, as the story unfolds, it is revealed that Jay was not the only one who was guilty of the crime, since Jay's companion—the children's biological mother—was also involved in it. Even though they were both guilty for driving the kids toward the cliff in a fit of derangement and drunkenness, the biological mother was acquitted when she testified that Jay had forced her to do it while the pressure of the public has kept "the lesbian . . . behind bars" (Moraga 144). Moraga's poem, "the Voices of the Fallers," analyzed above, alludes to this story; the narrating I hears the voices of the falling children in her mind as she imagines the fall of her own body. Amber's story makes Moraga reflect on the legend of la Llorona whom she thinks of as a sister. For Moraga, the myth is suggestive of the fact that motherhood and womanhood have always been delineated by men. As a result, la Llorona's cry—like the cry of the "Hungry Woman," who is turned into the Earth by the spirits, for food in Aztec mythology (*The Hungry Woman: Myths and*

Legends of the Aztecs 23)—echoes the cry of all Chicana and Mexican women who search not for "dead children," but for their "lost selves," their "lost sexuality," "spirituality" and dignity (Moraga 147). Thus, in exploring the story of la Llorona, Moraga reveals how mythical stories are shaped by and shape women's experiences.

3. Conclusion

Revising the myths in Chicano culture, at the end of *Loving in the War* Years, in "LA VE P'ATRAS: *SHE WHO LOOKS BACK*," Moraga clarifies that her aim is to look back towards her Native ancestors and colored mothers to create a new future. At a conference she attends in New York City, she turns her body back away from the crowd while she is on the stage in order to visually illustrate her standpoint. Looking behind her, she conveys her belief in the power of recalling and learning from one's history which becomes a force in the present and future. Moraga's life writing enacts a return to the mestiza's legacy without hinging on nostalgia and escapism for which Moraga's ideas have been mistaken. In "the Return"—which appears in the last section "A Flor de Labios [A Flower of the Lips]"—Moraga ponders "how far back is Return? What radical action does Return require?" (204). She perceives that looking back enables one to recognize the errors, missteps and neglects in the past. In addition, she relates returning to the idea of ancestral home and strengthening her ties with Chicanas.

The title of the final chapter, "A Flower of the Lips," is taken from the poem "Canto Florido [the Song of Flowers]." In the poem, the narrating I indicates that her aim is to communicate what is not remembered or discerned lucidly: "I do not sing / what resides always / on the tip of the tongue / la ausencia [the absence] / contenida en la cuna [reserved in the cradle] / de cuerpo [of body]" (140). "The absence" in "the cradle" refers to the silences contained within the narrating I. For her, flowers are representations of words grasped from the moments of recollection. She describes the precipitation of memories into the form of words as petals that fall from her teeth, which marks the moment of articulation and overcoming silence.

Similar to Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Moraga's life writing presents a stylistic and thematic exploration of the new mestiza consciousness. By combining genres and languages, and articulating a Chicana feminist lesbian perspective, *Loving in the War Years* rejects the

socially constructed definitions of identity, culture, language, ethnicity, gender and sexuality on dualistic terms. To cross the restrictive borders/boundaries or divisions, Moraga questions the legitimacy of the forces that partitions her identity/self and re-identifies with her Chicana heritage through memories as well as the ancient narratives, history and traditions of her community.

The "Riverpoem," which appears in the section "Lo Que Nunca Pasó por Sus Labios," offers a vivid portrayal of the consciousness of the new mestiza explored throughout *Loving in the War Years*. In the poem, the narrating I imagines herself as "*a river cracking open*" (134). Before she becomes the river, she is just thin lines of water separated from each other. Yet, after she notices the point of unison which can bring together all those seemingly isolated parts, she decides to gather them to make the river flow. Her turning into a river represents her becoming a new mestiza as she embraces and brings the diverse aspects of her identity—Anglo, Chicana, feminist, lesbian—together.

In conclusion, *Loving in the War Years*, as an example of Chicana life writing placed within a shifting world of cultural transition, defies the idea of closure, since the new mestiza identity is a construct that is always in the process of becoming or moving forward. Thus, as Anzaldúa argues, the maintenance of a self depends on the deconstruction of paradigms. By revealing the process of transcending rigid dualisms and focusing on a diversity of experiences from a myriad of socio-cultural standpoints, Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* urges an active reader participation in the sharing of experiences. Within the borderlands, Moraga's narrating I discovers the power of life stories told to trigger transformation, recovery and to create the necessary tools for an effective social interaction.

Works Cited

Adams, Kate. "Northamerican Silences: History, Identity and Witness in the Poetry of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga and Leslie Mormon Silko." Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism, edited by Elaine Hedges and Shelly F. Fishkin, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 139.

Alarcón, Norma. "Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism." *Cultural Critique*, no. 13, the Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division, 1989, pp. 57-87, *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1354269.

Allatson, Paul. "'I May Create A Monster:' Cherríe Moraga's Transcultural Conundrum." *Literature and Racial Ambiguity*, edited by Teresa Hubel and Neil E. Brooks, 2002, pp. 183-283.

Anzaldúa, Gloria E. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 1999, pp. 25-106.

Bierhorst, John, editor. *The Hungry Woman: Myths and Legends of the Aztecs*. William Morrow, 1984, p. 23.

Benstock, Shari. "Authorizing the Autobiographical." *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, edited by Shari Benstock, University of North Carolina Press, 1988, p. 20.

Bow, Leslie. "Hole to Whole: Feminine Subversion and Subversion of the Feminine in Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years*." *Dispositio*, vol. 16, no. 41, 1991, pp. 1-12, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4149140.

Butler, Judith. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. Fordham University Press, 2005, pp. 7-8.

Castillo, Ana. *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma*. University of New Mexico Press, 1994, p. 226.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875-893, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3173239.

Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, edited by Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski, McGraw-Hill, 2005, pp. 258-260.

Cloud, Christine. "Cherríe Moraga's 'Loving in the War Years:' lo que nunca paso por sus labios: Auto-ethnography of the New Mestiza." *Confluencia*, vol. 26, no.1, 2010, pp. 84-97, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27923478.

Cutter, Martha J. *Lost and Found in Translation: Contemporary Ethnic American Writing and the Politics of Language Diversity*. University of North Carolina Press, 2005, p. 204.

Damasio, Antonio R. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. Putnam, 1993, p. 239.

Davalos, Karen Mary. "Sin Vergüenza: Chicana Feminist Theorizing." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2008, pp. 151-171, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/20459186.

Garcia, Alma M. "The Development of Chicana Feminist Discourse, 1970-1980." *Gender and Society*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1989, pp. 217-238, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/189983.

Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. Cornell University Press, 1994, pp. 186-190.

Kristeva, Julia. *New Maladies of Soul*. Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 103-104.

McRuer, Robert. *The Queer Renaissance: Contemporary American Literature and the Reinvention of Lesbian and Gay Identities*. New York University Press, 1997, p. 117.

Moraga, Cherríe L. *Loving in the War Years*. South End Press, 1983, pp. xv-147.

---. *The Last Generation*. South End Press, 1993, pp. 73-74.

Moraga, Cherríe and Gloria Anzaldúa, editors. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. 4th ed. , Suny Press, 2015, p. 29.

Moraga, Cherríe and Rosemary Weatherston. "An Interview with

Cherríe Moraga: Queer Reservations; or, Art, Identity, and Politics in the 1990s." *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders and Generations*, edited by Joseph Allen Boone, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000, p. 64.

Moya, Paula M. L. "Chicana Feminism and Postmodernist Theory." *Signs*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2001, pp. 441-483, *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3175449.

Neate, Wilson. Introduction. *Tolerating Ambiguity: Ethnicity and Community in Chicano/a Writing*. Peter Lang Inc, 1998, p. i.

Oliver, Kelly. Introduction. *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, edited by Kelly Oliver, Routledge, 1993, p. 5.

Quintana, Alvina E. *Home Girls: Chicana Literary Voices*. Temple University Press, 1996, pp. 120-121.

Saldívar-Hull, Sonia. *Feminism on the Border: Chicana Gender Politics and Literature*. University of California Press, 2000, pp. 46-48.

Sellers, Susan, editor. Introduction. *Helene Cixous: Reader*. Routledge, 1994, p. xxix.

Sharpe, Christina. "Learning to Live Without Black Familia: Cherríe Moraga's Nationalist Articulations." Tortilleras: Hispanic and U.S. Latina Lesbian Expression, edited by Lourdes Torres and Immaculada Pertusa, Temple University Press, 2003, pp. 247-250.

Smith, Sidonie. *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century*. Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 177.

Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. University of Minnesota Press, 2010, pp. 4-207.

Tatonetti, Lisa. "A Kind of Queer Balance: Cherríe Moraga's Aztlan." *MELUS*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2004, pp. 227-247, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4141827.

Torres, Lourdes. *Tortilleras: Hispanic and U.S. Latina Lesbian Expression*. Temple University Press, 2003, pp. 247-250.

Yarbro-Bejarano, Yvonne. *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherríe Moraga*. University of Texas Press, 2001, pp. 5-14.

Zimmerman, Bonnie. "What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism." *Sexual Practice/Textual Theory: Lesbian Cultural Criticism*, edited by Susan J. Wolfe and Julia Penelope, Blackwell, 1993, p. 34.